

European Science Foundation

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MO Forum Evaluation of publicly funded research

**Quality assurance, scientific and strategic evaluation:
the high risks and high stakes of confusion**

Rémi Barré, CNAM, Paris

The hypothesis

- **More transparency and more competition**
- **Cheap, quick, objective evaluations needed**
- **Bibliometric indicators for *would be* scientific evaluation**
- **Quality assurance for *would be* strategic evaluations**
- **State of confusion: high risks and high stakes for publicly funded research**

Presentation

- **A. Coherence between methodology and type of question addressed as basis for legitimacy and accuracy of an evaluation**
- **B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions : a case for concern**
- **C. Unveiling the whole picture: a disturbing hypothesis**

A. Coherence between methodology and type of question addressed

- **1. Two different evaluation logics: Peer review (PR) and quality assurance (QA)**

Evaluation	Peer review	Quality assurance
deals with	ends: substance / sense / significance	means: form / processes
Issue addressed	validity - relevance	Efficiency, compliance
logic	deliberation of independent peers	measure distance to standard
reference	judgment of peers	best practice, standard
basis for legitimacy	reputation of peers, independence of committee	completeness of checklist accreditation of evaluating agency
question answered	what relevance ?	what compliance with best practice ?

A. Coherence between methodology and type of question addressed

- **2. Peer review (PR) evaluation logic can address two distinct issues**

Scientific production

- scientific peers at the center
- issue: what is the quality of the science produced ?

This is scientific (peer review) evaluation

Strategy

- 'strategy' peers at the center
- issue: what is the relevance of the strategy ?

This is strategic (peer review) evaluation

- In both cases: deliberation of peers, judgment in substance, input of information and data to support the work of the peers (bibliometric, statistical....)

A. Coherence between methodology and type of question addressed

- **3. *Three types of evaluation***
- **Quality assurance (QA)**
- **Peer Review – Science (PR-Sc)**
- **Peer Review – Strategy (PR-Strat)**
- **Do not answer same questions, not same methodologies and not same source of legitimacy**
- **Methodological rigour and coherence is the basis for legitimacy of evaluation**
- **Necessary coherence between methodology / questions answered / recommendations made**
- **The distinction between peer review logic and quality assurance logic is essential.**

B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions: a case for concern

- **PROs and Funding agencies**
- **Central components of public research systems**
- **Key actors of public research policies**
- **Times of both raising of expectations and criticism regarding science**
- **Both their efficiency and the validity of their strategy are major issues**

B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions: a case for concern

1. *The Quality Assurance (QA) evaluation of institutions*

the rise of QA evaluation

- the Bologna process; basically for universities
- enhancement and accountability (students...)
- the “Standards and guidelines for quality Assurance in the European higher Education Area” (2005)
- by ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance)
- For the so-called “external QA”: creation of a “European Quality Assurance Agencies Register” (EQAR) (2007) – for evaluation agencies accreditation (11 countries)
- To get closer to good practices for management, human resources management, strategy making, communication....

B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions: a case for concern

1. *The Quality Assurance (QA) evaluation of institutions*

QA evaluation methodology

- **The Four stage model : independent agency, self-evaluation, site visit by experts, public report**
- **self evaluation: to answer a list of questions each having a “reference or good practice” indicated**

characteristics of QA evaluation

not expensive for the evaluation agency (groundwork done by evaluated entity)

non controversial (descriptive and dealing with means and not ends)

no need for very high level people

not time consuming for experts (evaluators)

possibility to make on regular basis ‘industrialisation’

B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions: a case for concern

2. Strategic evaluation

The essence of strategic evaluation

- **Strategy** : what choice of what to do / not to do (activities, operational objectives), mix of activities; principles for resources allocation; skills, management, organisation, alliances
- **Strategic evaluation**:
 - **internal coherence**: consistency (reinforcement, fit) between the activities (operational objectives) and between the activities and the basic choices
 - **external coherence**: consistency between strategy (objectives) and mission, taking into account the SWOT

Applied mostly to programmes (EU programmes, FP), but also to funding agencies and PROs

Issue: what mission, organisation, purpose, struc evol ?

B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions: a case for concern

2. Strategic evaluation

strategic evaluation methodology

- Panel
- Support team
- Experts

- deliberation of independent and responsible panel fed by information and data from support team, plus expertise it had required, plus hearings
- specific questions, one year; 6 meetings

characteristics of strategic evaluation

- Ad-hoc operations, time consuming for high level people, rather costly, addresses possibly controversial issues

B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions: a case for concern

3. *The worrying case of France: an example of methodological confusion*

AERES

- **2006 Law**
- **Characterisation of the way AERES evaluated research institutions:**
 - **its recommendations are apparently strategic evaluation type (priorities, trade-offs among activities, objectives to aim at...)**
 - **BUT the methodology is apparently based on quality assurance type of evaluation (visiting committee not performing as peer review group, all information based on the 'auto-evaluation' report...)**

Conjecture: AERES addresses strategic evaluation questions through a quality assurance based methodology, simpler, quicker, cheaper

B. Strategic evaluation of research institutions: a case for concern

3. *The worrying case of France: an example of methodological confusion*

- **This possible methodological confusion is the way AERES has found to fulfill its mandate, given by the 2006 law on research**

Hypothesis : it would mean the recommendations made by AERES through its evaluations of research institutions lack legitimacy and accuracy

Three problems :

- **inadequate advice for government and management of institutions: risk of arbitrary signals**
- **no real strategic evaluation,**
- **no real QA evaluation**

C. Unveiling the whole picture: a disturbing situation

1. To resolve the evaluation bottleneck

- **Evaluation is at the center of new public management practices**
- **Scientific and strategic evaluation are in particular demand,**
- **BUT peer review type of evaluation, both are lengthy, costly, time consuming for high level people, non mechanistic, hence disputable;**
- **There is clearly an evaluation bottleneck**
- **The evaluation bottleneck threatens the move towards new public management norms**

C. Unveiling the whole picture: a disturbing situation

1. To resolve the evaluation bottleneck

- **Two ways for reducing the costs of peer review and make them quick, 'objective', cheap:**
 - **for scientific evaluation: bibliometric indicators based methodology**
 - **for strategic evaluation: quality assurance based methodology**
- **Both can be 'industrialised', quantitative or quasi-quantitative thus simili 'objective', not needing peers deliberation (even is scientists can be put in the process to fake peer review)**
- **they are quick, 'objective' and cheap**
- **Has the evaluation bottleneck found a solution ?**

C. Unveiling the whole picture: a disturbing situation

2. *Those two alternative ways cannot answer the questions addressed to them*

replace scientific peer review by a substitute in the form of bibliometric indicators (supposed to convey the already done peer reviews of the journal referees)

- mechanistic way largely recognised as inaccurate [no time to elaborate]

replace strategic evaluation by a (slightly modified) QA based methodology not fit to address issues of substance (see A above)

Such ways to proceed lead to evaluations clearly neither legitimate nor accurate

- More accountability in this case means corrupting evaluation methodologies
- thus sending inaccurate signals to the research system for its decisions, orientations, priorities...
- This is disturbing indeed
- An exceedingly high price for pretending more accountability and more competition

Conclusion

- **Evidence of twisting peer review evaluation methodologies – both scientific and strategic - to make them quick, ‘objective’ and cheap**
- **Hypothesis of methodological ‘bricolage’ to get out of the evaluation bottleneck generated by the NPM generalisation**
- **Hypothesis of inaccuracy and illegitimacy of the decision-making framework of public research**
- **For European public funded research – its institutions and researchers : high risks and high stakes**
- **Are there not initiatives to take at European level to investigate this ?**

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- **Thank you for your attention**