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How Wageningen University and Research Centre managed to influence researchers publishing behaviour towards more quality, impact and visibility

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Abstract

Wageningen University and Research Center (WUR) is one of the most prestigious research institutions in the world in life sciences and improved significantly in several rankings over the last years. One of the 'drivers' of this success story is a comprehensive quality management exercise based on Research information from an integrated CRI system, that managed to influence researchers publishing behaviour towards more quality, impact and visibility.

So first WUR's highly efficient research quality management exercise is introduced, that was established some years ago and enrolls in 4 phases: (1) define quality criteria (2) measure quality criteria (3) interpret quality criteria (4) act accordingly. Comprehensive bibliometric figures from the last 10 years show, that the approach had the intended effect.

Furthermore the paper portrays the very inspiring strategy WUR applied to ensure acceptance and use of the system in favour of data quality and -quantity; the approach is based on an institution-wide network of CRIS 'super-users', who - after being educated and certified in context of a train-the-trainer exercise - in their organisational context act as evangelists, encourage colleagues to use the system and educate others.

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1. Introduction

In the race for fame and funding it's on the researchers to make an institution succeed. Someone has to row this boat and if Oxford or Cambridge wins depends on the scullers. This is why institutions strive to "attract the best minds from all over the world"¹ by creating inspiring work-conditions. But it's not all about wellness; researchers often are supposed to perform in line with the strategic goals of an institution, among them very often excellence and visibility in research.

Because excellence in research to a large extent still means excellence of publications produced, a lot of emphasis is put on trying to 'optimise' the researchers publishing behaviour towards what can be defined as quality, impact and visibility of their publications. To achieve this many instruments of torture were produced, like an assessment-based stick and carrot approach, that rewards 'right' behaviour with money - "most powerful tool for managers is funding"² - and sanctions the 'wrong' one. But steering researchers like that turned out a hard thing to do and many of an assessment exercise did not obviously succeed. A 2014 investigation of the impact of the Danish national Assessment exercise on publishing behaviour at Aalborg University came to the conclusion:

However, we do not have evidence supporting the assumption underlying the implementation of the Bibliometric Research Indicator, namely an increase in publications in prestigious journals.²

This paper lines out, with what strategies and tools Wageningen University and Research Center succeeded in influencing its researchers publishing practice.

2. Research Quality Management at Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR)

2.1. Wageningen's rise in rankings

Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) is one of the most prestigious research institutions in the world in life sciences and after improving heavily over the last 10 years today holds top-ranks f.e. in Times Higher Education, THE-Life sciences, QS World University Rankings for Agriculture & Forestry and Environmental Sciences (table1).

Table 1. WUR's ranks between 2011 and 2016

Year	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
THE	47	73	77	70	75	144
THE-life sciences	16	18	22	22	17	
QS-Agriculture & Forestry	1	3	2	2		
QS-Environmental Sciences	4	7	8	10		

2.2. Research Quality Management as a 4-phase circuit

One of the drivers of this success story is a comprehensive quality management exercise for research output, that is based on research information from an integrated CRI system. Doing so WUR acts inspired by advanced quality management concepts, that unfold a 'feedback' circuit, like it is sketched in figure 1.

Stripped down to the very core, this regulatory QM process comprises 4 phases roughly. 1st step always is to agree on a definition of quality and a set of specific, measurable and achievable quality criteria. Needless to say, that those quality criteria should be in line with the institution's strategic objectives. In a 2nd step quality of things is measured based on the agreed criteria; precondition for a proper measurement are on the one hand business processes ensuring that the relevant data is delivered in required quality and an integrated IT infrastructure on the other. In a 3rd step results are interpreted by putting them into relation to reference figures (like targets, benchmarks, resources invested etc.) in order to check, if the institution is on target or not. Last step is to react on the findings by making educated management decisions. Results of next assessment then show, if management decisions had the

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