

Research evaluation matters

Barriers and incentives towards responsible research evaluations
at Danish Universities

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An investigation of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour toward value-driven research assessment among leaders of Danish universities



Aim:

Uncover barriers and incentives to responsible research evaluation practice

Overview

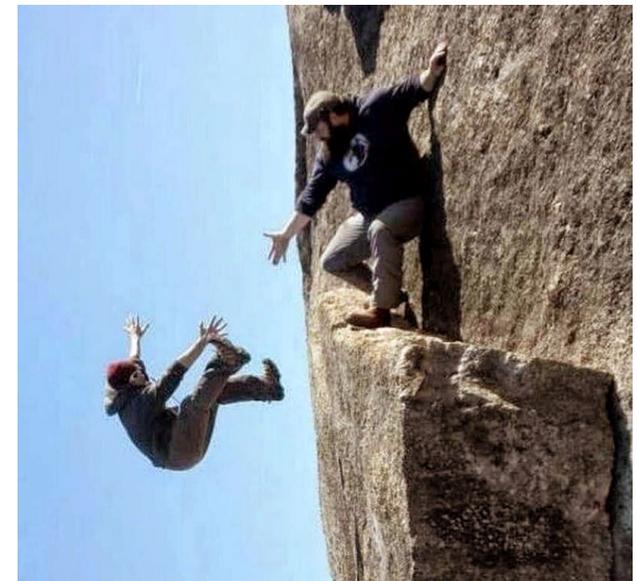
- Background
- Method & Results
- Implications



Background

Observations we did at Danish institutions:

- Many metrics-based research assessments
- Growing demand for bibliometric reports

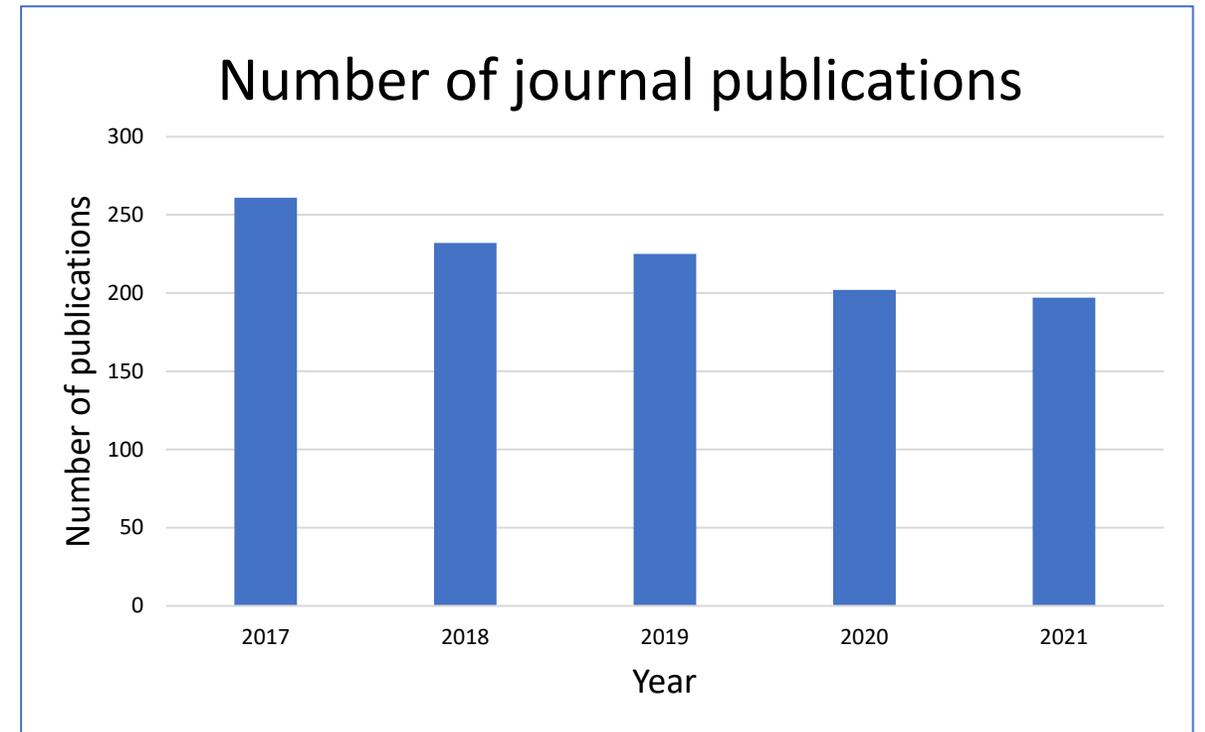
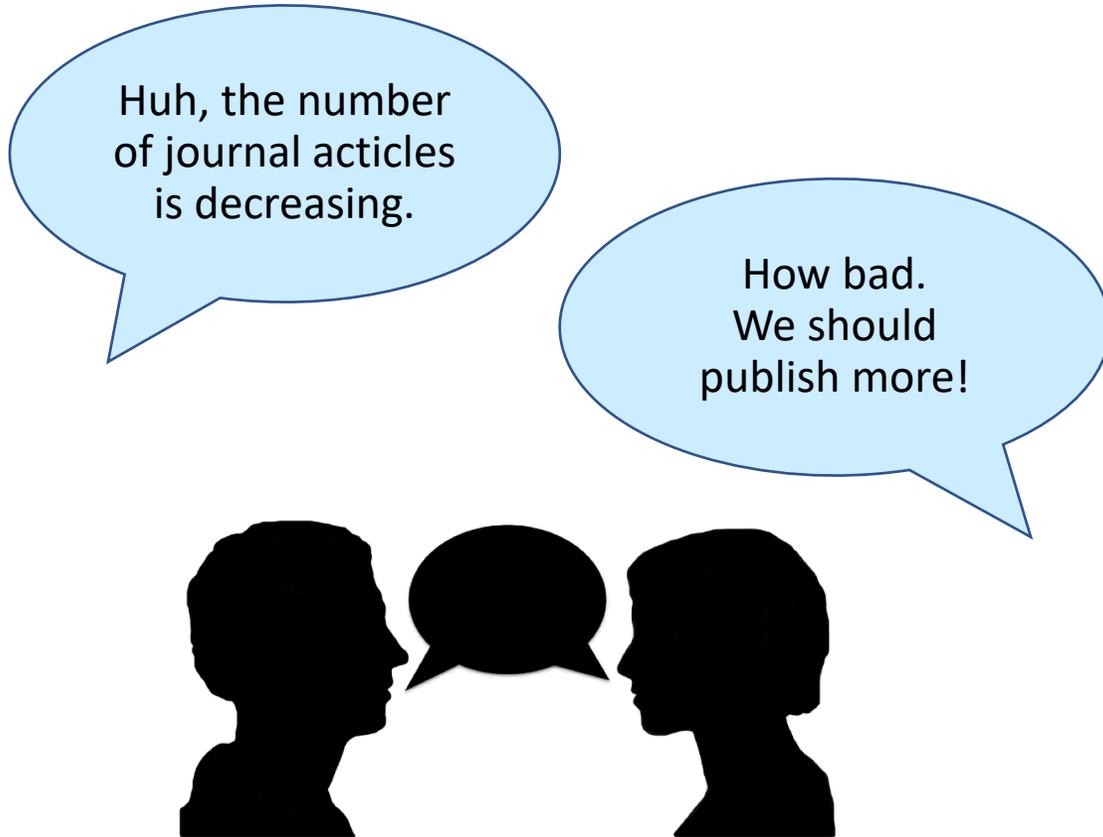


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Rising awareness of need for responsible research evaluation surfacing on international agendas:

- European Commission ‘Towards 2030’ universities vision statement:
 - “*move beyond existing ranking systems*”
 - “*avoid overly-simplistic ways of measuring research performance*”
 - “*adopt alternative mechanisms of research evaluation*”

What may happen? Metrics become the goal



What we did

Personal interviews with 10 deans and department heads from among Danish universities

- 30-45 minutes, conducted online
- Stratified recruitment (University size, managerial level, main discipline)
- Inductive coding

Interview in two parts:

- 1) Current evaluation practices at the faculty/department
- 2) Perceptions and opinions towards SCOPE

– *and SCOPE is...*

The SCOPE framework

Five steps for conducting value-driven research evaluations:

- **S** – **START** with what you value about the entity being evaluated;
- **C** – Consider the **CONTEXT** in which the evaluation takes place;
- **O** – Explore all **OPTIONS** for evaluating, both quantitative and qualitative;
- **P** – **PROBE** your approach for unintended consequences;
- **E** – **EVALUATE** your evaluation.



Behind SCOPE



The International Network of Research Management Societies:
Research Evaluation Group (REG)

<https://inorms.net/research-evaluation-group/>



Results

1. HE leaders are experienced, but research assessments are initiated **reactively and driven by metrics**.
2. There is a **genuine interest** in learning more about responsible research evaluations, and attitudes towards supporting frameworks such as SCOPE are positive.
3. But there are barriers; Barriers to meaningful and responsible evaluations include perceived **external pressure** (stakeholders) and a general **inertia** in established monitoring and evaluation systems.

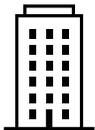
Background characteristics of interviewees

University type

Full range university
(multi/broad):

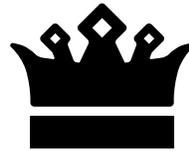


Specialised university
(mono/single):



Managerial level

Dean:



Head of department:



Main discipline

Humanities & social science:



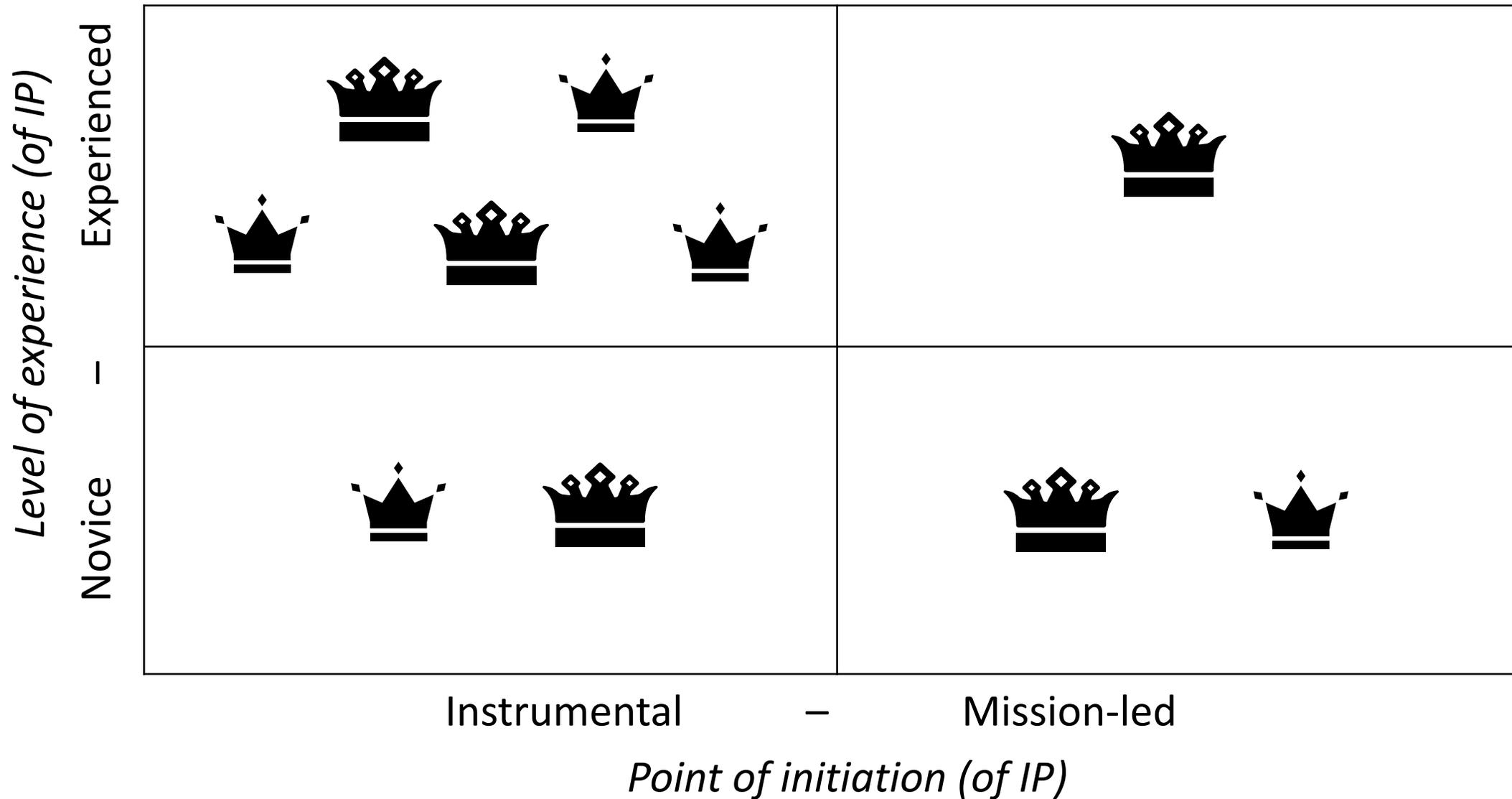
Natural & technical sciences:



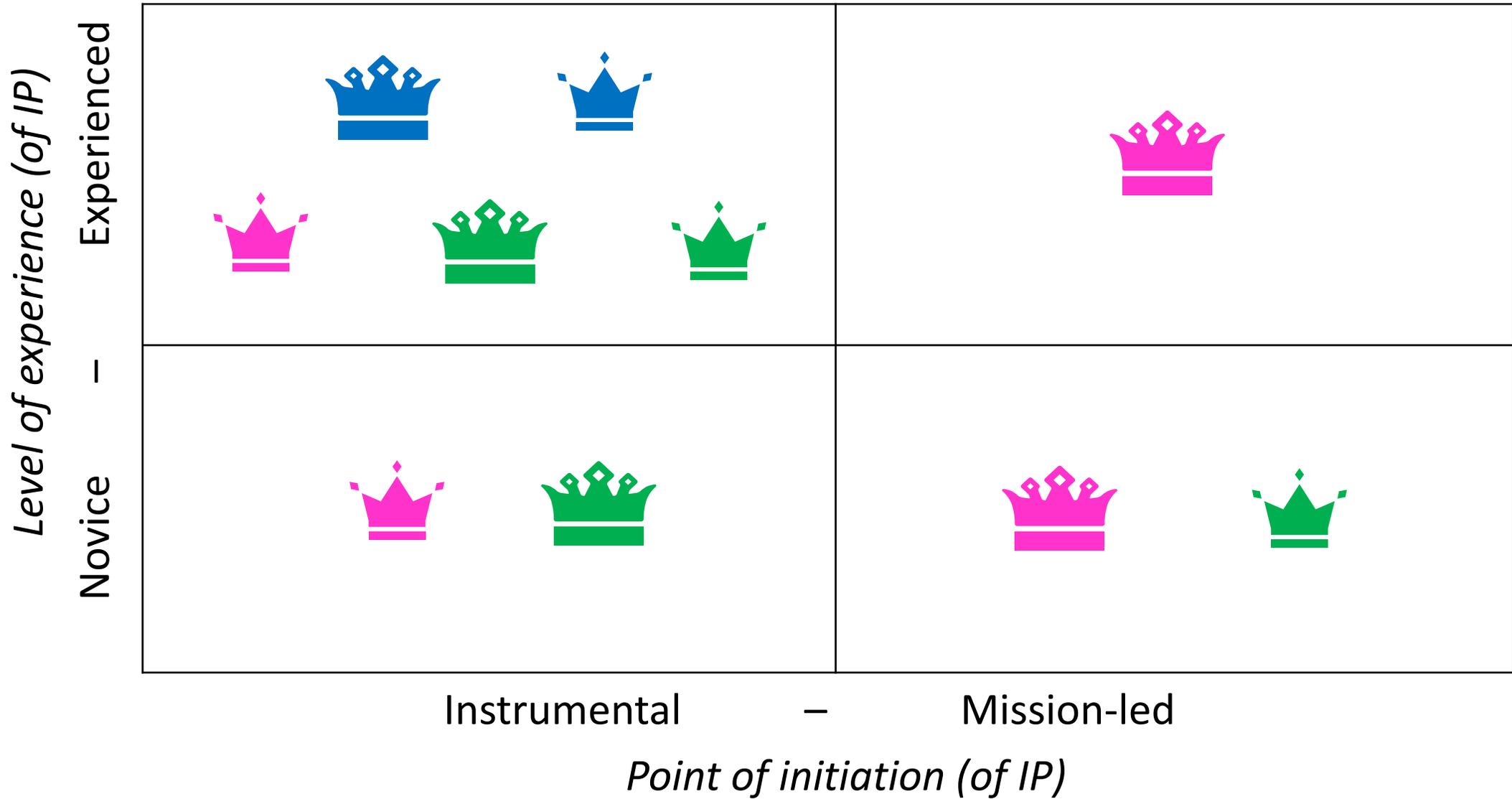
Health sciences:



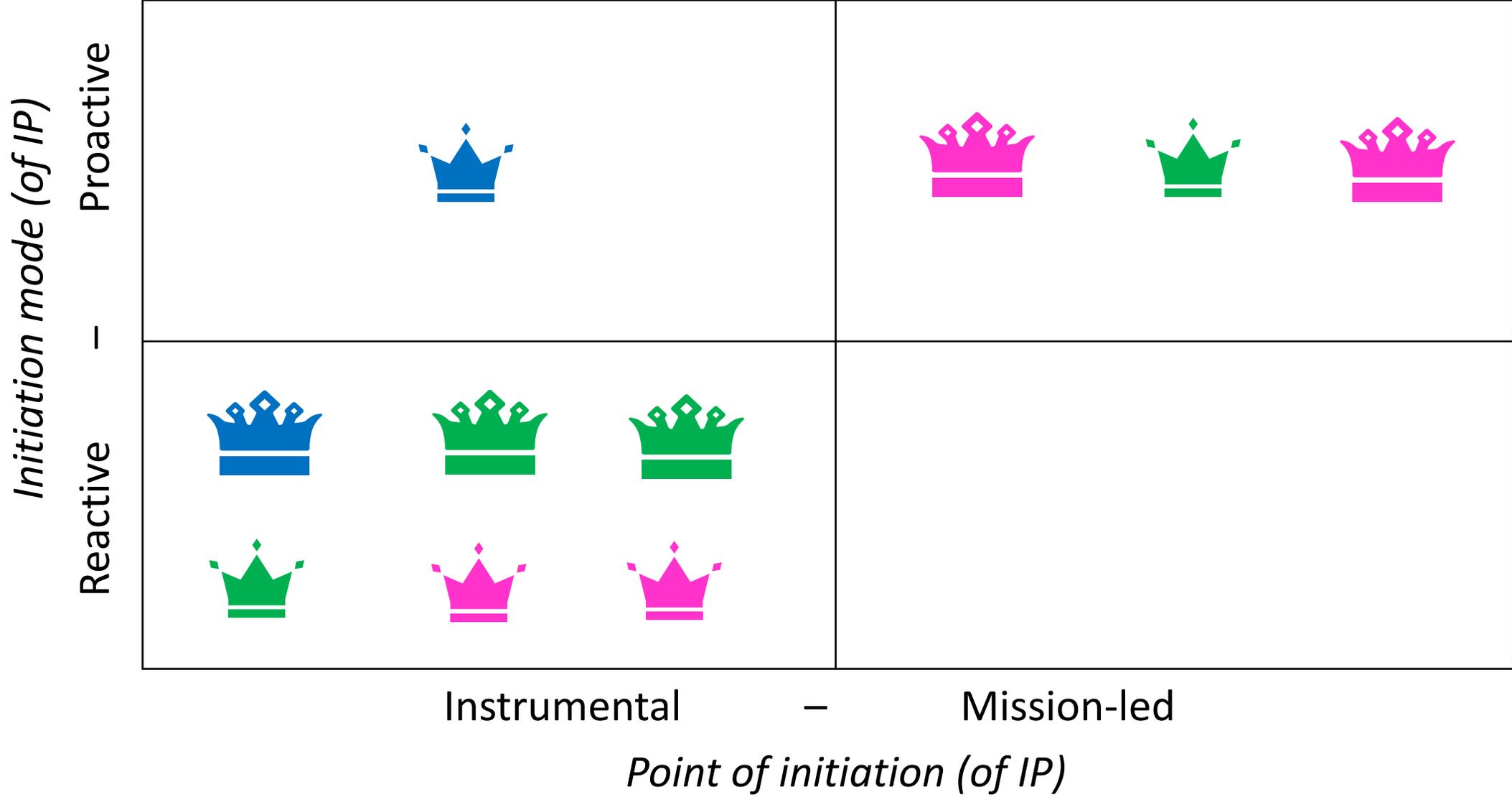
Starting point for evaluation and experience



Starting point for evaluation and experience

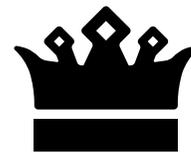
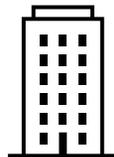
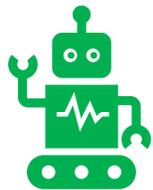


Starting point for evaluation and mode of initiation



In more depth: Knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour

- Interview persons' evaluation experience
- Definition of values
- Evaluation types

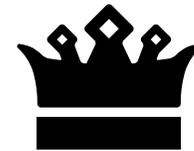
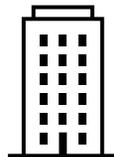


Interview persons' evaluation experience

Repeat design
from previous
evaluations

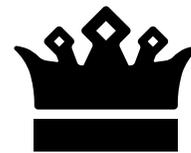
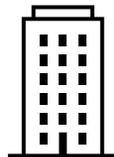
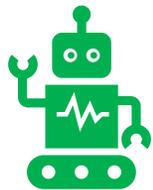
Experience from
serving on
international
expert panels
abroad

Learning by
doing



Interview persons' evaluation experience

- Have not heard of SCOPE and do not mention other frameworks, guides etc., for example DORA.
- Do not refer to training or use of evaluation experts.
- Do not mention the international discussion about responsible research evaluation.

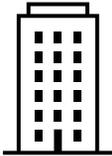


Definition of values

Adopt external stakeholders' and funders' values.

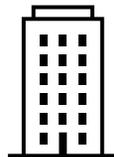
Let traditional metrics define values, i.e., example with decreasing number of publications.

Define own values.



Definition of values

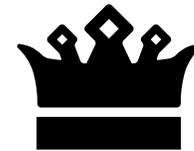
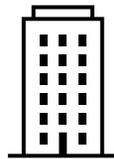
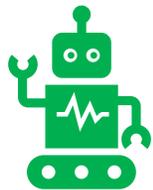
- External actors' values and traditional metrics may not comply with the strategy and missions of the institution.
- External actors' values and traditional metrics may be used without considering the consequences.
- Carefully prepared values should be the starting point of responsible research evaluation.



Evaluation types

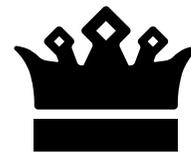
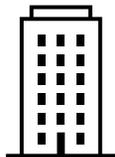
Qualitative evaluation of department every fifth year, incl. self-assessment, site visit from international expert panel, etc.

Quantitative management information, for example, dashboards with current data and metrics.



Evaluation types

- Qualitative evaluation of department is perceived by the interview persons as gold standard.
- Quantitative management information is used for micro decisions in everyday work.
- SCOPE or other frameworks are not used. Nor is training or use of evaluation experts.



Results – once again:

1. HE leaders are experienced, but research assessments are initiated reactively and are driven by metrics.
2. There is a genuine interest in learning more about responsible research evaluations, and attitudes towards supporting frameworks such as SCOPE are positive.
3. But there are barriers; Barriers to meaningful and responsible evaluations include perceived external pressure (stakeholders) and a general inertia in established monitoring and evaluation systems.

Implications

- Supporting frameworks such as SCOPE should be promoted more actively.
- Knowledge of frameworks such as SCOPE will enable changes in current evaluations practices and will, eventually, also lift the quality of HE research evaluations.
- As in the implementation of gender equality plans and open science, YOU as research managers and administrators (EARMA members) can play a key role in advancing more responsible research evaluations.

Supporting tools



- SCOPE guide
- 5 arguments to persuade HE leaders to evaluate responsibly
- Case studies

<https://inorms.net/research-evaluation-group/>

Online workshops coming up where participants can use SCOPE in their own research assessments. Will be announced at:

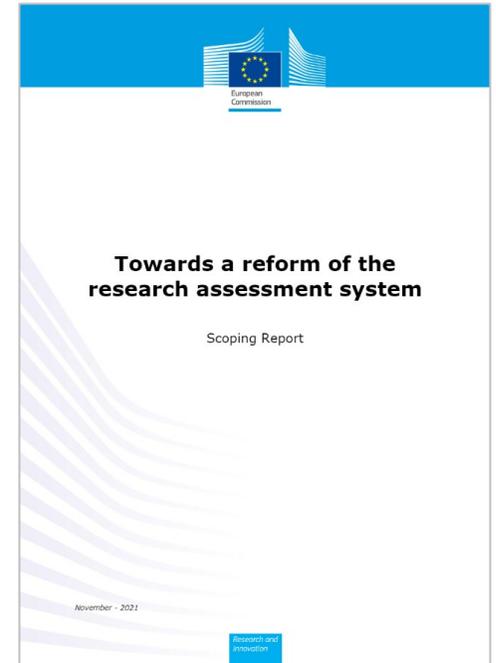
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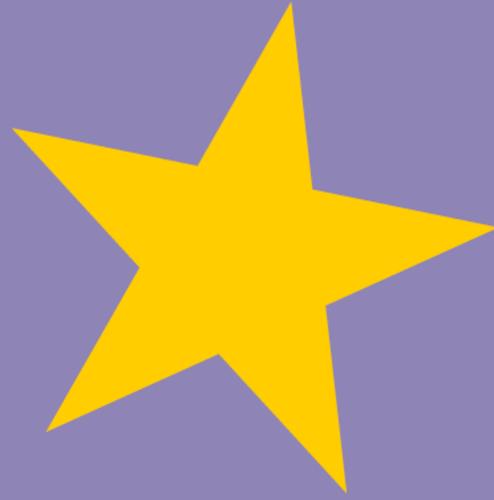
Concluding remarks

- We talked to 10 Danish HE leaders... How do HE leaders in other countries approach research evaluation?

At European level:

- Scoping report by the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (European Commission)
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/707440>





THANK YOU

