
IMPACT FACTOR: IS ONLY ONE SCREWDRIVER ENOUGH?

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Although Mc Veigh and Mann in their article did not aim at discussing the use of impact factor (IF) nowadays, they did mention it has gone from being a measure of a journal's citation to an inappropriate tool to assess individual researchers and institutions (McVEIGH; MANN, 2009).

In Brazil, to make matters worse, misusing Dr. Garfield's original idea of IF, research sponsors (i.e. funding agencies) seem to zero in on the IF when deciding whether to give grants (GARFIELD, 1955). In other words, both researchers and research institutions are given less money if they fail to publish in high IF journals (KELLNER; PONCIANO, 2008). On the other hand, if one has less financial support one is less likely to be able to publish in high IF journals. Needless to say that this condition gives rise to a catch-22.

Bearing in mind that the IF is not suitable to assess researchers, other index measurements, such as h-index and e-index, were developed in order to appraise individuals (DODSON, 2009). Being quantitative measures, they help to avoid subjectivity in the evaluation of academic worth.

Although we acknowledge the objectivity of these indexes, we must remember that citations play a key role in their calculation. The same happens with the IF. The problem here lies in the simple fact that citations are made by people. Therefore it is plausible to surmise that citations could be biased by human emotions.

Taking into account emotional drawbacks, we reckon that deciding the future of researchers, institutions or journals based merely on bibliometric indexes may be, to say the least, unfair. Furthermore, we believe that these indexes may enlarge the gap between well established researchers, institutions and journals, and those that are beginning their scientific activity.

The solution to this problem could be, albeit far from straightforward, in the evaluation of singularities of individuals and institutions. After all, why using the same screwdriver for different screws?

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