Capturing scholarly "impact" often relies on familiar suspects like h-index, JIF, and citations, despite evidence that these indicators are narrow, often misleading, and generally insufficient to capture the full richness of scholarly work. Considering a wider breadth of contributions in assessing the value of academic activities may require a new mental model.

Two dimensions to illustrate "impact"

Broadening the definition of scholarly "impact" against two dimensions—the scale of contributions' influence and new types of audiences—can help institutions recognize and reward a wider variety of academic achievements and outcomes.

Expanded definitions for "impact" can help individuals identify and embrace different goals.

While some scholars may naturally be more oriented toward disciplinary work, seeing a broader set of "impact" characteristics allows academics to define, plan for, and pursue more personally meaningful career aspirations.

Two dimensions to illustrate "impact"

- Scale of influence
  - Scaled magnitude resulting in significant reach, scope, or stature
- Collaborative and advisory roles through partnerships and shepherding others’ work
- Direct contributions through deep disciplinary expertise

Disciplinary or field-specific audiences

Recognizing the impact created by cultivating future generations of scholars also rewards contributions of women and minoritized individuals who tend to bear heavier expectations and loads for mentoring.

Institutions or broader academic settings

Open datasets and open science are increasingly valued for their contributions to replication and research transparency. This broadens access and rewards a mindset of collaboration over competition.

Contexts external to academia

New audiences

- Reaching audiences outside of disciplinary or academic peers can broaden the societal value derived from scholarly work.

Researchers Katalin Kariko’s work on mRNA immunogenicity was repeatedly dismissed by elite journals and funders, yet became key to the development of Covid-19 vaccines.

While non-academic works and social media lack the rigor of peer review, communicating the value and importance of scientific advances to wider audiences makes scholarly knowledge more approachable and meaningful.

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