

The pentagon of quality in academic publication

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Motivation for the theme

An academic journal editor has to decide on what strategy to adopt for dealing with the available articles: (s)he chooses what he thinks is promising and discards the other articles or does the opposite, that is, (s)he looks at what really has no chance of having relevant knowledge and spends time on the rest. It seems to be a tactical decision, but it is not. Nor is it simple to implement. Nor should it be an opportunistic short-term strategy because there is inertia in the community between receiving a signal, adjusting and reacting. From this decision, presented at its ends of application, the workload of the entire editorial ecosystem is defined.

When we editors make mistakes in the desk stage, betting on the article that has no chance of being perfected, we increase the workload of reviewers, authors and editors and this, although not captured objectively, generates unnecessary wear and tear: professionals that we respect and with whom we want to have long-term relationships pay the price. Assessments of Type 1 and type 2 errors are in our mind all the time. Somehow, academic productivism affects the entire ecosystem by pressing for quantity of publications (Miranda, Carvalho, & Ramos, 2016), and quality needs to be translated in a very practical way.

In some cases, the reviewers note the strange suggestion of an additional round when they recommended that the article be rejected. On the editor's side, by looking at a feasible list of adjustments, (s)he can understand that providing that additional round has a cost-benefit in which the community wins. No editor wants to miss out on a good article, and authors can collaborate by reflecting more on when the article is ripe for submission for the sake of communication. Depending on the attitude of the community, having a good quality article can be increasingly difficult to publish (Trzesniak, Plata-caviedes & Córdoba-Salgado, 2012), also due to the prematurity of the submission.

I do not want to discuss what quality would be in terms of journals and association with citations, but in structuring and offering the articles to the community so that they are useful. In fact, somehow, the generation of knowledge should improve the quality of life of human beings (Sabadini, Sampaio, & Koeller, 2009). This is true in any area of knowledge, whether in areas related to people's health, or in the health of organizations, for example. Ensuring that this knowledge reaches the community is something fundamental for everyone.

I have seen many promising articles in RC & F whose promises have not come true. Some possible answers: "I made a mistake in betting", "the authors did not engage", "the communication of what to do was not efficient", etc. After going through an endless list of "etc.", I want to stimulate the actions that I consider relevant, where to start?

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Perfecting communication is a work of art, something unique for each article. A technique should exist to perfect the article that is at the same time flexible and guiding. I do not believe in a magic formula, but there should be something that could relate someone's experience and knowledge to an approach that would enhance efficiency, indicating what should be prioritized in the process. In any dimension of human activity, we think, at first, of rupturing innovation, something very different, but in some cases, looking at what already exists and perfecting it can be a way to provide effective and rapid innovation. Who knows, with this, we could stimulate new, even more innovative and disruptive contributions?

Given the problem, would there be anything any of us could do?

It was thinking about the above question that the look at the set of five elements came about, which countless journals use totally or partially by numerous journals as something that is considered in the analyses, but absolutely independently among the various elements. The set of five elements, which I will call a pentagon, are: **innovation, relevance, gap, contribution and impact**. All this subordinated to a **problem**, which is based on a **construct** for the development of research in a given **field**.

They exist but, in many cases, they are offered by the authors in a bureaucratic way and not as the brain of research developed in a creative, serious and robust way and that has to be communicated in the same way. Often, the logic of communication is based on the take for granted approach, as if its understanding were obvious, without a vision of facilitation and prioritization of the fundamental user, the reader.

The definitions of each element go through specifics of each area and even of the journals, and the set provides the figure of the pentagon, which can be a supporting structure for something. The triggering question would be: *would there be an opportunity to use this set of elements more efficiently?*

To answer the question, some reflections are needed:

1. What are the possible configurations of the pentagon?

Understanding that the anchor of any analysis is the problem and that, in some areas, a research question is offered, the pentagon can be used as a balancing abstraction of elements that can provide the **intrinsic quality of a research** when dealing with the theoretical construct, field, and methodology.

Several possibilities are presented and Figure 1 contains, at the center, the editors' consumption dream, that is, a pentagon with emphasis on all elements. In other words, a research communication that has a clear gap, a noticeable innovation dealing with a relevant topic that offers an enlightened contribution, impacting society in some dimension. Easy to succeed, right? It seems that it is not so easy, and the shapes of the pentagons on the four sides of Figure 1 illustrate the alternatives.

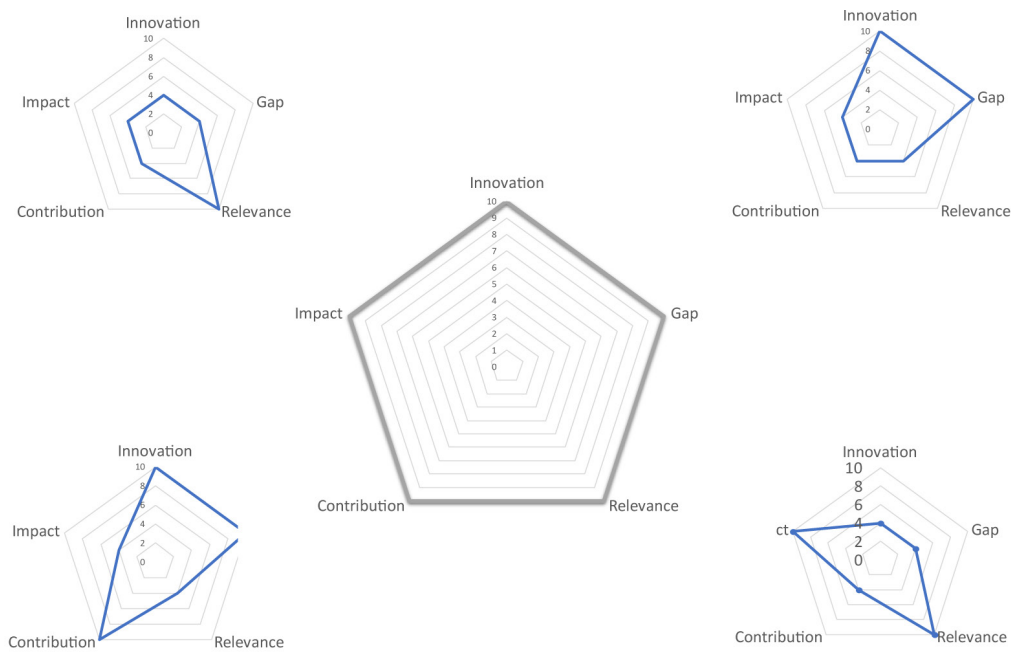


Figure 1. Various ways to find the quality pentagon in academic communication.

Try to recall an article on an extremely relevant topic, but without any innovation. Or, then, another article in which the gap was clear, but of low relevance and, consequently, low impact. How about research with potentially high relevance and a high impact, but which, due to lack of deepening, reveals an inexpressive gap and, thus, little relevant innovation?

The article may present weaknesses in these same elements and, instead of simply being rejected, it can be improved at different moments in the knowledge construction, provided that the authors understand where and how to adjust their research communication.

I believe you have realized that the opportunity is linked to the pentagon's disclosure. The elements may even exist quite appropriately, but you, the author, should worry about showing them to the agents who provide academic communication.

2. How could the pentagon be used?

Two strands with great potential benefit: a) relationship between the elements and b) dynamism of the process.

The first strand means to say that reviewing the **gap**, for example, does not correspond to simply saying that nothing has been written in Brazil on the subject. On the contrary, by evidencing what has been communicated on the topic, making clear what has not been researched, what is not known, as well as specifying the gap and proposing to reduce or eliminate it, **innovation** is evidenced. This innovation is the way we can highlight the **contribution**, which may not eliminate the entire gap, but is relevant including for other researchers to rest on and offer their contributions. In the end, understanding the contribution, we can perceive the **impact** that the new knowledge generates in society, in some kind of dimension, be it economic, social or cultural, or even in all dimensions. This relationship requires some level of abstraction and approximation with the field, strengthening the evaluation of the article.

The strand of dynamism, in turn, is linked to the commitment to improve the work, going through the elements several times and identifying new opportunities for improvement in changing them. As an example of this, by improving the expression of the gap, additional conceptual and empirical points of innovation, new contributions can be identified and, thus, research can exert even greater impact.

If the individual is not satisfied with the improvement of the work, (s)he should try again, perhaps one or two weeks later, if the circumstances permit so. The dynamism of improvement is something noticeable if the author is willing to improve the work and perhaps more than one round provides very significant benefits.

3. When to use the pentagon

Looking at the studies that I have the opportunity to analyze, the use of the pentagon reasoning in the design and implementation of the projects would be very useful. Taking these elements into intense consideration would greatly benefit the whole community, as some changes may be unworkable if they occur after the fieldwork.

Looking at a ready article and analyzing its strengths and weaknesses regarding communication meets my main motivational demand from the editorial perspective though.

Final comments

The aim of this editorial was to instigate reflection and critical analysis of the community, supporting and/or questioning the proposal. If the approach makes sense, try to use it your way. Research can be done to validate that proposal or not. Understanding what conditions can be offered to delimit, challenge or extend the approach is also fundamental. Try it out and reach your own conclusion.

I am dissatisfied with the *status quo* and the loss of efficiency of studies that could be more valued if properly hammered out. It is not just about having articles accepted in academic journals, but about their longevity. After all, communication is not the end, but the beginning of the impact of research someone will use. Think about it, because long-term utility makes the crucial difference. In your life and in the community. The author's commitment to the article should be long-term, and intrinsic quality can be an important factor for your article, in addition to being accepted and published in a disputed journal, to have a long useful life: long life to the article!

The responsibility for this work should start with the authors, although supported by the reviewers and editors. More careful work by the authors would benefit the entire ecosystem, including themselves; these, at the very least, with a significant reduction in the publication time. We will not need two, three, four or five revisions, if the studies arrive more mature. This has always been said, but a possible approach is proposed here on how to do it.

Some people believe that models can answer any question and eliminate problems like magic. Bad news: they don't. They can enhance efficiency and eventually increase the chance of success of research that would otherwise not be successful. In the end, what happens is that we continue depending on the talent, motivation and commitment of the main ingredient in the editorial process: the human being. The technique exists to make life easier and more efficient and, broadening the expectation, to make people happier. That's all.

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