

The Assessment of the Managerial Impact of Research : the M Index¹

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Abstract: Business Schools face a growing challenge in terms of assessing their impact and more specifically the impact of their research. Two aspects of the impact of research have to be distinguished: the academic and the managerial. The academic impact is usually measured with the H index, the Impact Factor, the ranking of journals, etc. while the managerial (and more generally the societal impact) of research is generally not measured at all. The purpose of this note is to propose a tool to assess the managerial and societal impact of research.

Key-words: Impact, Academic Impact of research, Managerial Impact of research, Influence of researchers,

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I- Justification for the assessment of the managerial and societal impact of research:

The business school's mission can be defined as follows : « The School's mission is threefold:

- Educating “socially sensitive” and responsible experts and managers in cross-disciplinary skills,
- Generating and disseminating applied research that is management and business oriented so as to help managers think large and innovate,
- Creating the conditions for Agoras connecting the academic, socio-economic, cultural and institutional worlds⁴ “

Generally speaking, the term ‘impact’ is more and more present in the mission and the vision of business schools.

From this perspective and in a logic of strategic alignment, it is opportune to assess the business school's academic production in terms of its Managerial & Societal Impact, by which we mean that knowledge creation by the business school researchers is likely to have an influence on decisions made in organizations as well as on managerial practices. The analysis of the impact of the publications of the research centre reflects the business school's willingness to improve its managerial research impact and thus its relevance and social recognition. While seeking to assess this impact, the institution also wants to raise its researchers' awareness of this dimension and to increase their managerial impact. This assessment of the impact of managerial research should appear in the annual research reports and could be an innovation and differentiation factor for business schools.

Moreover, national and international accreditation and assessment bodies (AACSB, EFMD, etc.) are increasingly concerned with the impact of Business Schools and therefore of their research.

II- The role of this assessment of the managerial and societal impact of research

This assessment does not replace the conventional academic assessment, which relies on publications in peer reviewed journals that are themselves ranked by different methodologies (H index, Impact Factor, FT review ranking, etc.). On the contrary, it should complement the academic assessment. Each publication must undergo a double assessment both of the academic and the managerial impact.

The willingness to assess this Managerial & Societal Impact does not mean ignoring the difficulty of measuring the impact. This difficulty stems, on the one hand, from the diversity of impact mechanism paths and on the other hand, from the sensitive nature of impact measurement.

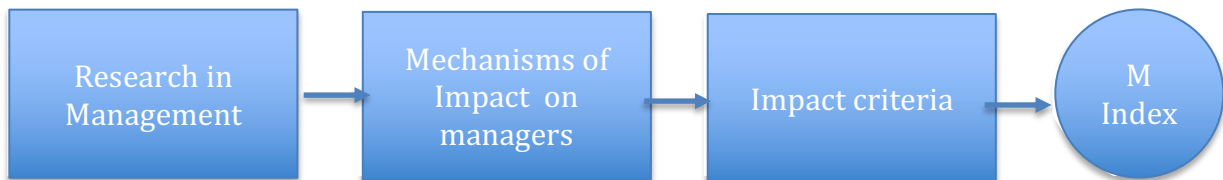
However, the difficulty of this exercise should not overshadow the need to reflect upon it as suggested by the results of the FNEGE 2016 survey on « the impact of research in management »⁵ ?

⁴ Mission of iaelyon School of Management.

⁵ <http://www.fnege.org/actualites/783/etude-2016-l-impact-de-la-recherche-en-management>.

III-Framework for measuring the managerial and societal impact of research

We can suppose that research in management has an impact on managers through different mechanisms or channels. It could be direct influence through discussion or presentation. It could be through learning or executive education seminars. It could be also through consultants or different media. Because these channels of impact are numerous and difficult to identify, we think it is more effective to focus on impact criteria. We may describe the M Index assessment process as follows:



The impact of research on managers and organizations may occur in all of the different phases of the research process. We can identify four sequential phases: (1.) the definition of the research project, (2.) the execution of the research project, (3.) the dissemination of the outcomes, and (4.) the practical implementation of the outcomes in organizations. Indeed, it is important to consider the impact of a research project not only in the final phase of result publication, but also upstream during the initial emerging phase of the project. The definition and execution phases of the research theme will entail rich interactions with organizations that may already lead to changes in attitudes and practices.

1. The impact during the definition of the research project:

The initiative of the research projects basically comes from the researcher who is interested in his/her theme or from an organization that uses researchers or from an interaction between the two. The emerging phase of research projects may give rise to more or less lively exchanges between researchers and managers. These exchanges in the early phases of the research project are an opportunity for a cross-fertilization of approaches that is likely to enhance researchers' and practitioners' conceptions.

2. The impact during the execution of the research project:

The execution phase of research in management generally entails empirical field data collection that once again is likely to bring researchers into contact with companies and organisations and thus to generate an impact upon them resulting from the reflections prompted by their questions. According to the nature of the methodology deployed to collect information, this impact will be of a different nature. In the case of a questionnaire sent to managers by post or through the Internet, we may think that the impact is limited but it does exist. However, in the case of participatory observation, of action research, the frequency and quality of exchanges will generate a more significant impact.

3. The impact during the dissemination of the research outcomes:

The dissemination of the research outcomes is likely to influence managers in their managerial practices. The first research dissemination channel is through

teaching. We may note in this respect that researchers sometimes (often) fail to mention their own research or those of their colleagues when they teach and tend to quote remote authors. The managers' perception of publication results requires a presentation in an understandable language (need to « translate » rather than popularize) via channels accessible to managers: conferences, articles in professional journals, online communication, videos or participation in radio and television programs.

4. The impact during the implementation of the research outcomes:

Beyond dissemination, researchers may be mobilised by organizations for the creation of tools, methods or decision-making processes resulting from their research. This association with the implementation of research outcomes may take on different forms: outcome specific communication to an organization; hosting of intra-organization working groups, hosting of educational seminars; consulting activities, etc..

IV- The assessment grid for the M Index Managerial & Societal Impact

Assessment Grid of Managerial Impact : M Index

Author :		Journal:	
Title of the article:		Date:	Nr
Phases of the research process	Managerial Impact Criteria	Impact intensity from 0 to 5 *	Qualitative and/or Quantitative Assessment (Justification)
1. Definition of the research project	1.1 In response to a socially urgent question		
	1.2 In response to an organisation's specific request		
	1.3 Research contract with an organization		
	1.4 Research linked to a research chair		
	1.5 Detailed co-definition of the research project with a research partner		
2. Execution of the research project	2.1 Online survey		
	2.2 Face-to-face interviews		
	2.3 Observation		
	2.4 Participatory observation		
	2.5 Intervention research		
3. Dissemination of the outcomes of the research	3.1 Integration of research work outcomes into pre- and post-experience courses		
	3.2 Presentation of outcomes to practitioners during conferences		
	3.3 Online videos, blogs, social networks, Web sites		
	3.4 Participation in radio and television programs		
	3.5 Articles in journals and newsletters read by the managers and professionals		
4. Implementation of the research outcomes in one or more organizations	4.1 Presentation of the outcomes in an organization upon its request		
	4.2 Hosting working groups on research outcomes in an organization		
	4.3 Research outcomes are taken up by consultants		
	4.4 Hosting educational seminars within the organization concerned by the research outcomes.		
	4.5 Creation of tools, methods to be implemented in the organization.		
M Index	20 criteria	/100	

V- Measurement : For each indicator/criterion revealing a form of impact, we can assess the intensity of the impact by a number of stars from zero to five indicating that the impact may vary from nil to very significant :

- One star: very weak impact
- Two stars: weak, limited impact
- Three stars: real, visible impact
- Four stars: strong, significant impact
- Five stars: very strong impact, with an exceptional intensity

The number of indicators/criteria being 20, the M index therefore varies from 0 to 100. An alternative could be to assign each of the four phases of the process an overall impact mark (from zero to 25).

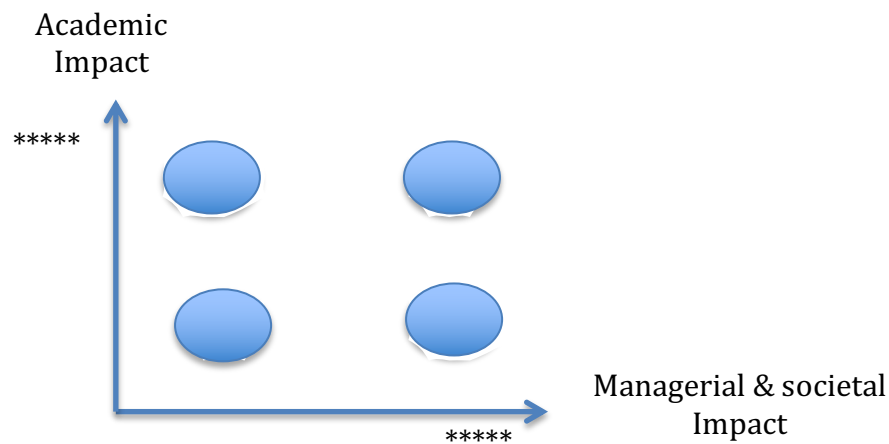
Measuring concerns each publication. One can imagine aggregating measurements of the M index per author and therefore have an average M index per author.

Please note that at the beginning of the implementation of the M index calculation, it is normal to have low indexes. This is due to the fact that the measurement is new and that authors do not necessarily remember the different kinds of impact their publications have had but also because this dimension has not been assessed up to now and therefore has not been taken into consideration by researchers. We might expect an M index increase over time.

VI- Validation of the measurement: the assessment of the impact measurement for each publication may be made by the researcher's self-assessment. This self-assessment must however be justified by qualitative and quantitative evidence that is as accurate as possible. A committee from the research centre will be responsible for validating individual M indexes.

VII-Implementation process : After a phase of exchanges between researchers in order to validate the list of indicators, the method should be tested and experimented before it is implemented. This system can easily be computerized and implemented on the Intranet.

VIII-Use of the M Index : The managerial impact index can be used by the research centre in order to emphasize its dedication to this dimension in management research ; it may also be part of a researcher's individual assessment policy and be associated with a bonus scheme. It can also be used to chart publications and researchers on a two-dimensional graph showing the publication of academic and managerial impact.



IX- Conclusion

The M Index evaluation process has been tested for a year in a management research laboratory and the following observations can be made:

- The levels of managerial impact as measured by the M Index are quite limited, which can be easily explained by the novelty of the tool and the low awareness of certain researchers regarding managerial impact issues
- The dispersion of impact levels between researchers is on the other hand very high. Certain researchers are much involved in intervention research methodologies that have a high M Index while others are involved in more traditional hypothetico-deductive methodologies with much lower managerial impact levels
- The use of the tool produced a much greater awareness of issues around the managerial impact of research and some researchers realised that they could raise their impact with little effort.

In conclusion we should underline the fact that a tool of this nature is only of interest when it is integrated into an overall policy of managerial impact measurement with associated development incentives.

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