

Impact of Performance-Based Research Funds on Researchers

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Money for quality. Encouraging research excellence by allocating funds to reward high performance sounds like a good idea. The goal is clear: increase the quality of research and ensure that good work is rewarded. However, performance-based research fund (PBRF) systems have their detractors. Are they an opportunity to make the system more fair or an open door to make money as the final expectation?

The principles of PBRF systems are based on the belief that rewarding high-performance attracts and motivates workers, but many consider that offering these kinds of rewards does not help the researchers personally. Here we have some of the main ideas defenders and detractors use to value or to criticize PBRFs.

For: Good Rewards Matter

Many consider that rewarding excellence with high funds invites researchers to work harder. It can help them to keep goals upward, focus not only on quality but also quantity, and increase their own exigencies. Last but not least, it can make them feel rewarded for their job, which is really important for researchers. The fact that an external organization values their research and success can help them to feel that their work matters outside academia.

Against: A Short-Term Benefit?

The main problem detractors find in establishing a fair and equal PBRF is that some aspects are not easily measured. To start with, ways of measuring research excellence vary by country. PBRF is accessed by universities and determined by the government in New Zealand, but is this model suitable to be adapted in other countries? Establishing a ranking for journals that belong to different disciplines can also be problematic. And what about those research outputs that are measured through the number of publications or citations? Finding a way to measure them equally doesn't look so easy. Establishing a system researchers don't find fair can be prejudicial to their productivity and self-esteem.

Many also consider that setting money as a final goal is a short-term benefit: maintaining high [self-esteem](#) is incredibly important for researchers, and valuing their work depending on economic rewards does not help forever. Feeding on constant negotiation and depending on external organizations to value their efforts can affect researchers negatively. Bad streaks exist, and a system that allocates funds to reward high performance may not help researchers who are having a bad time.

Defenders all over the world claim that PBRF systems have positive inputs, whereas many others focus on their weaknesses. The truth is that PBRF systems can motivate some researchers and, at the same time, be highly stressful and stifling to others.

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