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Michael Saren *Editors*

Improving the Evaluation of Scholarly Work

The Application of Service Theory

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Foreword

Tell me how you will measure me, and then I will tell you how I will behave.

If you measure me in an illogical way, don't complain about illogical behavior.

—Eli Goldratt

When I returned to my academics to get my Ph.D. after an extended stint in entrepreneurial activities, one of the first things that surprised me was the ubiquity of student evaluations and the role they played. The situation appeared to be grounded in several assumptions. First, the logic seems to be that students were the customers of Higher Education (HE) and thus the proper evaluators its effectiveness. Second, it seemed to assume that classroom performance was the correct measure of effectiveness. It also appeared to assume that finals week, often about the time that projects are due and students are thus under the most pressure, is the right time to request effectiveness assessments. I questioned at the time whether or not any of these assumptions were legitimate.

Interestingly, I found pretty much universal sentiment among the other doctoral students and faculty in my program. Likewise, I also found the same among faculty at other universities where I have since been employed. Yet, the almost sole teaching-related criteria for faculty advancement continues to be student evaluations. In fact, the administration at one school with which I was affiliated was so committed to them that it floated a remedial coaching program for any faculty member whose overall evaluation was below the college average. Presumably, the goal was to elevate all faculty teaching evaluations to above average, which is of course impossible, by definition. I have only worked at one university where someone actually tried to assess effectiveness independently from student evaluations—an also somewhat questionable practice of dropping in on a single class.

None of this is intended to suggest that the student-survey process is worthless in general; surely, student feedback can provide valuable input for instructors. Rather, it is intended to question whether or not the process and perspective—the student's-fit the purposes for which it is being used. Clearly, students are something like customers and thus beneficiaries and maybe even payees, but they are hardly the only, or even the most important, referents. In many countries, higher education is "free" (i.e., paid by society through governments) and, even in the ones where it is not, student tuition usually covers a relatively small part of the costs. More generally, the list of potential beneficiaries is much lengthier, including federal, state, and local governments, families, businesses, community groups of various kinds, alumni, professionals, and society in general, to name a few.

This broader perspective raises questions about how we should think about *effectiveness.* Is it a measure of the pleasantness of obtaining something, which seems like what student evaluations are primarily assessing, or is it something more encompassing? As indicated, regardless of the fact that almost everyone I have encountered seems to acknowledge the fallacy of the practice of evaluating faculty instructional effectiveness, and eventually discharge or advancement decisions, from the students' perspective of classroom practices, the practice has become entrenched.

While, intuitively, I found all of this troubling from the start, it was not until I began to actively participate in the development service theory that I began to see the problems more clearly. The underlying issue is how we think about *value* and thus *evaluation and from what perspective.* Traditionally, value has been seen as something one party creates and then delivers to another, for *consumption.* It is based in an *industrial logic*, which typically sees value embedded in a tangible good during a process of *production.* The perspective was that of the producer—often captured in terms of *engineering quality*. Originally, service theory just extended this thinking by conceptualizing "services" as intangible goods, which, by their unique nature, necessitating the production and consumption of value to occur simultaneously. Thus, evaluation was seen in terms of evaluation of quality at the point the *service encountered*. This led to reconceptualizing quality as *service quality*—quality as *perceived by the beneficiary*—which is a step in the right direction but, arguably, is an incomplete journey.

Fortunately, service thinking has continued to progress over the last 40 years or so. Now, it is more common to understand *value as cocreated*, not just between providers ("producers") and beneficiaries ("consumers") but through service-for-service exchange in nested and overlapping *service ecosystems* (e.g., families, firms, industries, universities, communities, and societies), comprising a whole host of interconnected actors, many of which are often unaware of their participation. Likewise, *value* is becoming reconceptualized in terms of *benefit* for some actor, or set of actors, in this value-cocreation process, with benefit being further understood in terms of *wellbeing* (i.e., viability/survivability). This implies a temporal dimension to value that extends well beyond the service encounter. It also implies multiple referents (ecosystems) in any value cocreation process, and thus the necessitation of the specification of value *from the perspective of which particular referent(s) made clear*. While emanating from the service literature, at least aspects of this emerging service thinking are having considerably more widespread influence on the understanding of the economic and social activity, in general.

I have had the good fortune of being associated with one of the theoretical frameworks that is intended to capture and extend these shifts: Service-Dominant (S-D) logic. Thus, when informed about this book project, I was delighted for several reasons: First, because it represented a significant initiative intended to improve the HE system by aligning metrics with desired benefits for multiple beneficiaries; second, because I discovered that S-D logic was playing such a foundational role across the various related topics and chapters. Moreover, I was pleased to be invited to write the foreword for the book, especially given that the initial invitation came from one of the true pioneers of service theory, Evert Gummesson.

The evaluation of the HE problem extends well beyond student survey processes of course. It extends to the evaluation of faculty research, which is typically based on number of articles published in highly ranked journals. But the relationship between journal ranking and the likelihood of individual article impact is extremely low. In fact, the impact, by almost any measure, of the vast majority of articles in highly ranked journals is trivial at best.

These and similar measures and their derivatives are also used to form composite metrics for schools and universities, almost all based on output, rather than a benefit. An unfortunate exception to this output focus is the practice of using *incoming* grade-point averages and qualifying-test scores as measures of school and university effectiveness, thus leading to the increase in standards for acceptance for thesis metrics to increase rankings, with little regard for the role of education in providing more meaningful benefit. An extension of this input-based approach is using name-brand of the graduate school for assessing the fitness of new faculty, regardless of their performance. While only anecdotal, I can cite numerous examples of highly celebrated and impactful graduates and faculty of business schools who would not be admitted or hired based on the current, increased levels of input metrics.

Clearly, the purpose of this book is not to resolve all of these issues; rather, it is more likely intended to initiate a much-needed conversation, through the suggestion of alternative perspectives that hopefully will contribute to more meaningful evaluative criteria and metrics. It seems to me that the core lesson is simple but powerful: HE is essential to societal wellbeing and thus to many of its subsystems. To be fully effective, it is essential to (1) continually zoom in and zoom out to link compatible definitions of wellbeing at various levels of aggregation (e.g., individual student, university, and society) and (2) identify associated, aligned, evaluative criteria and metrics. Collectively, theoretical orientations emanating from the service theory, and perhaps especially from S-D logic, can provide a theoretical framework for approaching these tasks.

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About This Book

The origin of this book is an article published in *The TQM Journal*, co-authored by the editors Díaz-Méndez, Saren, and Gummesson entitled "Considering pollution in the Higher Education (HE) service ecosystem". It was awarded the Emerald Literati 2018 Highly Commended Award, and Emerald also expressed an interest in learning more about the issue. When we received an invitation from Springer Press to write a book expanding on this theme, we thought that it was an ideal opportunity to deepen the study of the evaluation of teaching, learning, and scholarship in higher education. We also hoped that by drawing together, reviewing, and assessing its main strands, we would be able to identify potential means for the improvement of the evaluation of academic work.

The editors would like to thank all our colleagues who contributed chapters for the book as well as the academics who participated in the survey of experts. We are especially grateful to Prof. Stephen Vargo for providing such an authoritative foreword to the book. We also want to express our gratitude to Sanjiev and his colleagues at Springer Nature for their professionalism and all their help during the production of the manuscript.

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Introduction

Michael Saren, Montserrat Díaz-Méndez, and Evert Gummesson

Abstract This introductory chapter explains the origins of this book, its rationale and the editors' aims in critically analysing the methods for the evaluation of teaching, learning and scholarship in higher education (HE). The core problem which we identiy for HE is similar to the performance evaluation issue faced by many public services; i.e. if service quality is a difficult concept to define, measuring public service quality is an even greater and potentially contentious challenge. In many countries, HE institutions and regulatory bodies have simply adopted commercial evaluation practices which we consider problematic when applied as metrics of performance and quality in HE institutions. This book aims to open a debate on this controversial area of measuring scholarly work through the lens of the latest theory and developments in service theory. The editors introduce the following chapters by the contributing authors to the book. These apply various service theory approaches in their critical analyses of the various measures, methodologies and applications of quality evaluation by universities, regulators and state authorities in many countries. Taken together these chapters provide an overview and assessment of the current issues regarding the quality of scholarship, research, teaching and learning in institutions at HE level.

Keywords Higher education · Quality evaluation · Scholarship · Service theory

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1 Background

The origin of this book is an article published in *The TQM Journal*, co-authored by the editors Díaz-Méndez, Saren and Gummesson entitled “Considering pollution in the higher education (HE) service ecosystem”. It was awarded the Emerald Literati 2018 Highly Commended Award and Emerald also expressed an interest in learning more about the issue. When we recieved an invitation from Springer Press to write a book expanding this theme, we thought it was an opportunity to deepen the study of the evaluation of teaching, learning and scholraship in higher education. We also hoped that in pull together, reviewing and assessing its main strands we would be able to identify potential means for inprovement of the evaluation of academic work.

Higher Education (HE) constitutes an essential means for social and economic development, therefore governments, regulatory authorities, civil society, employers, students and others demand evidence from HE institutions of the quality control and rigour in their processes, methods and outcomes and their productivity and efficiency measures.

This increasing concern about HE quality has prompted institutions to divide university teachers’ work into different areas (teaching, dissertations supervision, tutorship, research, management, etc.) and to design different methods aimed at measuring performance, quality and productivity of such areas. While the need to evaluate HE services is widely accepted, the rationale for this book is our view that current practices in different countries jeopardize the role of the university as a reference point and site of knowledge generation, scientific progress and professionals education. In many countries HE institutions and regulatory bodies have simply adopted commercial evaluation practices that produce figures and numbers which may be appropriate for business stakeholders in a naive belief that they also represent valid, comparable metrics of performance and quality of HE institutions.

Based on research in the service discipline, this book undertakes a wide-ranging critical analysis of the methodologies, metrics and instruments used by governments, regulators, managers and academics themselves to evaluate the academic work of universities. The purpose of this book is to expose and anayse the key parameters of this growing and controversial topic of measuring scholarly work such as rankings of universities, academic indicators (bibliometrics, scientometric, citations indices), the ranking of journals, student evaluation surveys, academic productivity and success rates, etc. The chapters will each apply a rigorous analysis based on the main literature development in service theory such as Service Dominant Logic, Service Science, Ecosystems and Network approaches.

2 What is the Problem?

Concerns about the value of education, teaching quality, and standards of governance in universities goes back a long time. Perhaps best known for his ‘Theory of the

Leisure Class' (1899) Thorstein Veblen also produced a trenchant critique of the US university system in his 'Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men' (1918). In the first chapter entitled 'The Place of the University in Modern Life' he attacked the "bootless meddling" of governing boards and of the presidents they appointed. They understood the value of a dollar and of publicity, but not much else, Veblen claimed and worse, they moulded higher education in their own likeness where "the first and unremitting duties of the staff are those of official management and accountancy". Veblen's critique of the university includes a serious effort to understand the nature and history of the field of higher education of his day.

There appears to have been an urgency in many countries to evaluate HE services and collect ratings of the perceived quality of their education services. Various types of evaluation metrics are now routinely applied in HE institutions across the world, however, in spite of—or perhaps because of—their global profusion they remain controversial. Government authorities, funding bodies and university managers have become increasingly focused on monitoring their academic performance with the main objective apparently being to ensure that students are satisfied with the quality of their educational experience. When student satisfaction is used as the primary measure of quality, then one unintended consequence is that many academics and teaching professionals in universities are confused about their purpose and their role in the education system. Academics' career and promotion criteria normally take several performance measures into account, of which student satisfaction is only one indicator. We think now it is time to reflect on the most important controversies, weigh up the main standpoints and propose solutions. The impact of academic evaluation systems extends beyond universities and their staff and students with widespread consequences for national economies, societies and the production and dissemination of knowledge in core academic disciplines.

Of course, like all public services the quality of HE must be evaluated using appropriate measures and criteria. Indeed, some measurement of quality and performance of medical services, schools, legal services, government administration, police services, etc. is necessary in order to achieve the best allocation of public resources and to ensure 'value for money' of public expenditure The problem arises when deciding what criteria and methodology are appropriate to evaluate the'quality' of each type of service (Propper and Wilson, 2003). In common with other public services, HE has important differentiating characteristics which affect the nature, creation and distribution of both their value and quality compared to most private sector services. For example, normally public services involve co-creation of value, often in conjunction with users; multiple inputs to quality that are not easily disaggregated; several types of beneficiaries requiring widely distributed value provision; and quality of service is often supplier specified which users find difficult to judge. Taken together these features necessitate the careful design and tailoring of quality evaluation measures and methodologies for public services. It is not always clear how or if this is the case when we consider quality evaluation process that are currently being increasingly applied in HE institutions.

3 Measuring Performance in Public Services

Performance indicators and quality measures have a long history in both the private and public sectors. While such metrics are now a familiar feature of public service management, their use in the UK multiplied with the Labour administration after 1997 which introduced more than 300 performance targets across all government departments in 1998, directly linked to budget allocations and translated into many more targets and performance indicators at lower levels of government (Hood et al., 2009). Targets, rankings and other performance measures are now a familiar feature of public service performance management. Performance indicators are widely used as part of broader accountability mechanisms aimed at improving public service performance. The simplest form of performance measures are raw outcomes, which measure the outcomes of an organization or programme at some designated date; for example, the number of individuals who survive after emergency admissions for heart attacks, or the number of pupils passing examinations at a certain grade. While they are easy to understand and relatively low cost to collect, they only deal with one dimension of a complex output, and do not provide sufficient information to isolate the impact of the organization on the measured outcome. For example, patients may have recovered from heart attacks without medical intervention or pupils may have passed examination without having attended the teacher's classes.

Public services like education however often have multiple goals, not one primary 'target' and their outputs can be complex, multi-dimensional and collectively delivered by several providers. Where this is the case, as in most HE institutions, the result of these characteristics of the service is that performance relative to specific goals is difficult to measure (Jacobs & Goddard, 2007), a good example in HE is when the overall quality of the service is measured by means of an evaluation of teachers' performance by their students. This seems to assume that a satisfactory teacher's performance per se will result in an acceptable level of value of educational quality as perceived and evaluated by their students. We argue that conducting a single unidimensional student 'opinion survey' of this type completely fails to constitute a fair and reliable evaluation methodology. This highlights the importance of differentiating between teachers' evaluation and students' value. One solution we recommend is to employ the concept of service ecosystem in order that inherent complexity of the HE education can be properly recognized and taken into account (Díaz-Méndez et al., 2017).

A further complication which can arise are opportunities (and often positive incentives) for gaming. For example for lecturers or teachers in HE this could attempt to improve their teaching scores by various means that may result in students' rating a higher core of their teaching quality, but which does not actually improve the value of the education experience for the students. For example, they may award students higher grades, or provide more 'clues' regarding the topics to be covered in the examination. Even when the measurement system is designed to take account of behavioural responses by those being assessed the type of gaming may not necessarily occur in the manner expected by those who design the system (Le Grand, 2007).

4 About This Book

With this book we aim to open a debate on this growing and highly controversial area of measuring scholarly work through the lens of the latest theory and developments. If value is a notoriously difficult concept to define, public value is an even greater and potentially contentious challenge. This is due in part to the various debates in disparate academic disciplines and interest groups regarding public value for the public sector, for the private sector, for citizens, consumer and other beneficiaries, what public value might comprise, and how it is created and measured (Brown et al., 2021). The following chapters provide some original analyses and critiques of different types of scholarly work metrics and processes with examples from several countries, cultures and educational systems, as well as explaining theoretical developments and methodological aspects.

Following this introductory chapter, in the next contrubution M. José Quero and Rafael Ventura recognize that universities have great responsibility as producers of value for individuals and society and as central drivers of knowledge-based economies and they have to adjust their mission and purpose accordingly. For this the authors set out a key challenge for HE institutions in modern societies: As that of bringing open innovation into their existing processes. In order to analyze this and identify guidelines for HE managers, the authors take a theoretical approach to the HE context as an 'ecosystem', identifying the actors, linkages and institutions that would improve the management of HE organizations through an open approach. Specifically, they develop the Balanced Centricity (BC) HEIs-University Ecosystem model in which the core of the system consists of the engaged actors in the HE context and the balanced relationships among them.

Mario Paredes-Escobar takes a Service Dominant Logic approach (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Vargo et al., 2015) in the next chapter to reframing the role of students in HE. The author starts from the current context where HE institutions are increasingly adopting marketing practices to promote their services in a competitive environment. This phenomenon is called "marketization of HE" and has led to the metaphor "students-as-consumers". Through a critical literature review detrimental consequences of the adoption of this metaphor are discussed. The author states that considering students-as-customers may hamper their learning, the quality of HE and ultimately, society at large. He ends up by proposing that HE should be conceived as a service ecosystem where students are active players with the main role of co-creating their own learning. The chapter delves into the idea that students' satisfaction in Education contexts is not related to service quality and goes beyond this misconception following a SDL perspective.

Sergio Barile, Francesco Polese, Luca Carrubbo, and Francesca Iandolo introduce the actor-for-actor (A4A) approach to Higher Education in their contribution. The relationships between participants and stakeholders in HE are particularly important in light of the changes in HE brought about by the recent digital revolution which has been accelerated by COVID-19. The authors demonstrate how the management of the HE can take advantage of the key elements that they identify in their study and how they can applied be to create a new HE value proposal.

Choosing a suitable methodological approach is essential for the research process and represents one of the most challenging decisions for scholars. This issue and its consequences in relation to service management is developed in the chapter on case research and theory by Cristina Mele, Maria Luisa Marzullo, Montserrat Díaz-Méndez and Evert Gummesson. They show how case theory is most suitable to service research and how it could contribute to new theoretical development. The authors explain case theory as a further recent extension of case study research arising from the need to include two theoretical approaches that face complexity more systematically and in a more structured way—network theory and systems theory. Driven by the complexity paradigm, this approach accommodates numerous other methods and techniques, which allows the authors to define the case theory approach as a 'mixed-methods approach' and as 'interactive research'.

In the chapter on the "lights and shadows" on student evaluation surveys the editors take the opportunity to expand on some of the issues that are briefly discussed in this introductory chapter regarding the efficacy and distortions inherent in the concept, process and conduct of student evaluation surveys of teaching quality asked on research in the service discipline, we undertake a critical analysis of the instruments that such survey employ and apply a Service Dominant Logic perspective as a service theory framework to conceptualise, analyse and manage teaching quality and learning goals. We argue that viewing education value as a co-creation process is necessary in order to ensure teaching and learning quality in the long term. This chapter focuses on the serious implications these surveys can have for the quality of learning and, consequently, for the quality of the professionals of the future. Although opinion surveys may not seem dangerous on the surface, their incorrect use can transform the roles of participants and distort the nature of the service.

As a long-standing teacher and professor at Leipzig University, Helge Löbler reflects on his extensive experience to reflect on learning and teaching in HE. In his chapter he examines and develops different approaches for teaching based on a constructivist methodology. He also discusses a different approach for evaluating teaching. He examines several important aspects of HE which have an impact on the educational process, including the teacher and learner who are part of the process; the reasons and roles they have in the process and the learning outcomes or learning goals they both aim to achieve. Lobler shows how it is important that this learning and teaching activity all takes place with a specific content in a specific learning/teaching environment.

Considering the recent world scenario, Francesco Polese, Carlo Alessandro Sirianni, Mara Grimaldi and Antonietta Megaro explore the influence of global Covid19 pandemic on teaching, learning and evaluation processes involved in HE by analysing the way in which knowledge exchange is reframed through ICTs and technology. Through the interpretative lens of Service Dominant logic the chapter describes HE as an ecosystem and investigates theoretically the transformations introduced in information management, technology adoption, resource integration, value co-creation and co-learning processes to challenge the sanitary emergency. The chapter looks into