Reviewer’s report

Title: How do organisations implement research impact assessment (RIA) principles and good practice? A narrative review and exploratory study of four international research funding and administrative organisations

Version: 0 Date: 29 Aug 2019

Reviewer: Simon Deeming

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your draft manuscript. I found the addition to the literature regarding the practicality of RIA application versus the theory insightful. The emphasis upon the funding organisations also represents an important distinction.

The following feedback is intended, and hopefully found to be, constructive.

General comments:

The emphasis upon the funding organisations' perspective represents one of the key novelties and yet the paper generally could draw more on how this perspective differentiates or informs upon the issues identified/discussed. Many of the points regarding the reality of implementing RIA apply broadly to research organisations within the research ecosystem.

The Discussion should explicitly address the stated Aim of the research.

While interesting, the Discussion could link more explicitly to the results. There is a lack of clarity regarding how the explicit themes identified, link into the points raised in the discussion.

Health only comprises one component of the portfolio of research conducted by the CSIRO. Consequently, their RIA framework has been developed to address the broader range of research, albeit highly translational. There is no comment or insight regarding how this may/may not have informed on their RIA approach compared to the health-focussed funders.

Synchronisation with other assessment systems is noted, but the point appears insufficiently emphasised given the importance for researchers. I presume the process of conducting the UK's REF, for example, both shapes and prioritises the thinking of researchers and the information available for other funding IAs. Related points are made at different parts of the text i.e. Results L39 (isolation); Discussion L10 (conflict of commitment)

Specific comments:

Results - The second paragraph could be clearer with respect to the presentation of the five examples (that met the criteria). Possibly shift the introduction to the 124 to following the five examples. I had to read a few times to comprehend a simple structural point. Similarly, the key themes have sub-headings, but the five examples do not, which does not assist the reader with a view to the structure of the paper and their respective progression.
Results L19 (sorry no page numbers provided) - I'm not sure if this should be 'key themes' or categories of studies. Potential to distinguish from subsequent themes. What is the point of introducing these three categories first? To illustrate the mix found (but these categories do not total 124)?

Results L54 (Automating) - 'facilitated readiness'? Readiness or actual conduct of...?

Results L23 (Paragraph) - I can see how it has emerged, but the quote does not explicitly support the preceding point

Discussion - L53 - Can you state 'what works'? The paper is really a summary of 'what is currently happening', there is no explicit assessment of what works.

Discussion L31 - ...successful funders... Successful? In what respect? How measured? Subjective assessment. In implementing RIA? In producing a ROI? In increasing ROI? In assessing the process of implementation? Recommend removing successful and adjusting; or explicitly specifying meaning.

Discussion L4 - '4. Recognise Benefits: a focus...' I presume that the authors mean recognise the benefits of the process of conducting RIA, rather than societal/enviro/health/economic benefits as commonly examined by RIA? Recommend clarification

Discussion L4 - '4. Recognise Benefits:' Comment re whole section - One of the benefits that is identified in the results, but not included in this Discussion 'factor', relates to the education, capacity and cultural change that conduct of the process brings to the researchers/research community. This point illustrates how the Discussion could link more explicitly to the results.

Limitations - While noting the limitations of the convenience sample, the text should address how this may affect the results/insights i.e. i. speaking to the IA engaged; ii. speaking to organisations educated in the ISRIA orthodoxy.

In the abstract, the discussion has been melded into the Conclusion. Is this correct?

Summary

The study complements some existing ideas and expands these insights/considerations. The key value of this study, acknowledging its investigative status, relates to i. the operational reality of RIA and ii. the funders' perspective. It would benefit from a edit that focussed on the explicit aim and drew out the critical points (and culled others) relating to these novel elements. Naturally, I have focussed upon suggestions that might add value to the manuscript rather than detailing all the strengths. I hope this helps.
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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
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Acceptable

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