Lyzette Hoffman

In search of a metaphor for the ever-eluding obligation of academic publishing

Universities have an obligation to serve the community in producing knowledge. In addition, the investment of the government in tertiary education in the form of subsidies should be repaid by furthering scientific research. Publication of academic articles is one of the most important ways to communicate research and knowledge produced. Yet more than two years elapse before a researcher's article is published. Publication pitfalls and possible solutions for optimising publishing of academic articles were investigated in a roundtable discussion. A metaphor is suggested to better understand and manage academic publication.

Soektog na 'n metafoor vir die immer ontwykende verpligting tot akademiese publikasie

Daar rus 'n verpligting op universiteite om die gemeenskap met die produsering van kennis te dien. Die regering se belegging in tersiêre onderrig deur middel van subsidies, behoort in die vorm van wetenskaplike navorsing terug betaal te word. Publisering van akademiese artikels is een van die vernaamste maniere om navorsing en kennis te kommunikeer. Tog verloop daar meer as twee jaar vir 'n navorser om 'n artikel te publiseer. Publikasiehindernisse asook moontlike oplossings vir die optimering van die publikasie van akademiese artikels, is tydens 'n tafelronde bespreking ondersoek. 'n Metafoor om akademiese publikasie beter te verstaan en bestuur, word voorgestel.

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The importance of academic publishing, on the one hand, and the lack of publishing, on the other, necessitate urgent investigation. In the South African research community of approximately 16 000 researchers, 7 000 articles were published in the year 2000, an average of 0.4 articles per researcher, which translates into more than two years to complete one article (ASSAf 2006: 1).

1. The role of universities in research and academic publishing

Universities are multi-output organisations producing research, teaching and community service (Abbot & Doucouliagos 2001: 92). The efficiency with which inputs produce desired outputs is an important public policy issue, as universities are also a major expenditure component for taxpayers. With increased competition for students globally, the efficiency of universities is also an international issue (Abbot & Doucouliagos 2001: 96).

The relationship between research and teaching has been discussed and studied extensively over the past few years.[1] One such research party, the Lancaster University in the UK, launched a project enhancing the teaching-research nexus (Dept of Educational Research 2006). Different conceptions of research can be identified in different orientations to research. The trading orientation towards research has "products of research: publications, grants, and social networks (in the foreground). These are created and then exchanged in a social situation for money, prestige or simply recognition" (Brew 2001: 277). Research and subsequent academic publishing can also be considered to constitute a "creative industry" (Gibson & Klocker 2004: 424).

Universities are at the centre of the research and human capital-generating process (Abbot & Doucouliagos 2004: 251). In their study, Abbot & Doucouliagos (2004: 251) found that research income, academic staff and postgraduates are all positively associated

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1   Cf Barnett 2005, Gottlieb & Keith 2004, Kochukhov 2006, Verburgh *et al* 2007.

with research output. There are noticeable differences across different types of universities, with the newer Australian universities lagging in research performance, and producing fewer academic articles than more established universities.

Currently 255 South African scientific or scholarly journals are recognised by the South African Department of Education (ASSAf 2006: 32). In 22 disciplines South African articles had a relative impact equal to or higher than the world impact (ASSAf 2006: xv). In terms of the number of journals indexed, this report also states that South Africa, publishing 20 journals (emanating from a single country), shared position 26 with Sweden, while Egypt and Kenya (from the same continent) publish one journal each.

Scientists in different fields adhere to different publication patterns. Scholars in the social sciences and humanities tend to publish more in local journals because of the contextuality, historicity and local nature of their materials (ASSAf 2006: 35). The ASSAf study found that 90% of articles in the humanities from 1990 to 2002 were published in South African journals. There is a significant ageing cohort of actively publishing scientists in the South African Science System, as well as a general increase in female-authored articles (ASSAf 2006: 50).

2. Metaphors to deepen understanding

The classical model of metaphor claims that metaphors are artefacts of language use and arise from objective similarity (Norvig 1985: 357). However, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) claim that metaphors are not merely matters of language, but are used extensively in reasoning and understanding. In fact, the human conceptual system is metaphorical and metaphors not only point out similarities but also create the similarities. Lakoff & Johnson represent a cognitive approach, addressing metaphor in terms of systems where whole experiential areas are conceptualised metaphorically and have coherent realisations at the level of words and idioms (Moon 2004: 197).

Metaphors can be useful in finding solutions and seeing things from a new perspective. Metaphor is a tool of epistemology. "Implicitly,

the search for a unifying theme leads to metaphor because metaphor transports ideas across knowledge fields …" (Baake 2003: 29). Furthermore, research practice can be guided by the application of metaphors (Ritchie & Rigano 2007: 123). Researchers might also take up new challenges of writing by developing and applying writing metaphors (Ritchie 2006: 186).

In comparing the use of metaphors by technical communicators and academics, the latter favour metaphors of human agency, physical presence and complex social interaction (Sherwood 2004: 107). However, academics also participated in the abstracted, object-oriented metaphors favoured by technical communicators (Sherwood 2004: 107). Metaphors can play powerful roles in the social construction of human reality (Hamilton 2000: 237). In describing a reality where academics are involved, use should thus be made of metaphors using the "human factor" as well as interaction.

3.   Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be explored: discerning the pitfalls of academic publishing will help to find the solutions and increase academic publishing among academia, and finding a metaphor for the experience of academia struggling to publish, will help to find a solution for the low publication rate of academia in general.

4.   Method

4.1 Participants

Non-probability sampling utilising an accidental sample (Huysamen 1994) of psychologists attending a Psychology conference at the University of the Free State, South Africa, was used.

The eight participants (four male and four female) represented five South African universities. Only two members of this group have published an article/s in accredited journals. Another member's article had been rejected. The other participants are currently working on articles or planning an article. Being part of an academic

milieu, all participants were aware of the challenges experienced by academia to publish. Even though the majority of them have not yet published an article, their contact with colleagues who have started publishing, gave them ample opportunity to discuss the challenges of academic publishing. The small number of participants encouraged participation in the discussion.

4.2 Procedure

Roundtable discussion as a group work technique was employed (Anon *s a*). The pitfalls and the possible solutions in publishing academic articles were set as the topics for discussion. All the participants were given the opportunity to share their ideas freely. Where a statement was unclear, the person was asked to explain. All ideas were written on a flip chart. Afterwards, inductive analysis of data from the roundtable discussion, making use of the constant comparison method, was employed (Dye *et al* 2000).

5. Results

5.1 Pitfalls for academic publishing

The discussion focused on the three parties involved. The academic/ potential author, the institution where s/he is employed, and the publishers. The first aspect mentioned regarding the academic/potential author was time management. The high workload regarding the presenting of lectures, on the one hand, and finding time to work on publications, on the other, was a definite pitfall. It was also acknowledged that motivation for publication was mostly extrinsic (referring to the financial gains and possible promotion). The responsibilities of academic life have a definite influence on publication productivity. Cutting (2007: 1023) found a peak in the submission of articles at the beginning of the semester and a gradual decrease thereafter.

Regarding the institution employing the academic, a lack of back-up in various forms, was considered a pitfall. Although the usual amount of work was expected, some extra back-up was not given

to help a person to publish. Furthermore, students trained at these institutions were not adequately mentored to be prepared for publishing articles.

The publishers can also be a pitfall for academic publishing. Receiving a rejection letter from the publishers reduces the motivation to work on an article again. There is no place where an author can lodge a complaint regarding bad/unfair editorial practice. Costa & Bergallo (2008: 412) also complain about journals rejecting an article because it is "considered inappropriate for the aim of the journal and subsequently publish very similar articles". They believe it is mandatory to inform editors about reviewers whose work is not of an appropriate quality.

5.2 Solutions for academic publishing

Solutions presented at the roundtable discussion concerned the following: institutional back-up, collaboration and the launching of a "Publishing Committee".

First, institutional back-up that will increase academic publishing includes:

• Personnel to help prepare articles

This could include research assistants or professional officers to update the literature review and advise on writing style, as well as administrative personnel to apply author guidelines and manage the submission and re-submission process.

• Heads of department who are eager to implement support measures

Recruiting personnel to help prepare articles is a policy issue. In this regard, the head of a department needs to use the appropriate channels to obtain extra personnel, or to involve other personnel in supporting authors of articles. In addition, appropriate support mechanisms ought to be discussed in departments. This managerial issue could include the following: high-speed internet access at home for productive authors, a designated research day each week, research assistants, and so on.

- Delegation of teaching and other responsibilities to complete an article

Articles in draft format often need a high input before they can be submitted for publishing. Exempting an author from lecturing and other responsibilities for a short period to prepare the final article can speed up the writing process. A system of application for temporary delegation of teaching and other responsibilities should be in place. This could include (contract) lecturers on standby for unforeseen circumstances, as well as delegating of teaching responsibilities on a regular basis (for example, shortly after the completion of a research project, to prepare an article on the research at hand). Regular responsibilities (committees, student administration, meetings, and so on) could also, where possible, be rotated between personnel to make more time available for the writing of articles. Following this route, work responsibilities are arranged, bearing the publication of articles in mind, instead of the writing of articles being secondary in the planning of a department.

- Mentoring of inexperienced writers by experienced peers

Academia should be encouraged to publish articles from their own PhD or Masters' studies. Their promoters can be co-authors. Co-authoring articles can help share the burden and help less experienced authors. In addition, each research project should, if possible, include at least one person with experience in publishing articles. They can act as mentors in the writing process.

- The institution should also foster a publication culture

This culture should be generated at undergraduate level. Woodward-Kron (2004: 141) refers to apprenticeship as a way of educating students in becoming part of the "discourse community" of their academic field. In his study, however, students' and tutors' opinions differed on the role of writing assignments and tutors' comments in the development of the student's proficiency in academic writing (Woodward-Kron 2004: 157). The findings suggest that attention should be paid to the feedback given on student assignments, as these play a role in shaping the student's academic proficiency .

These assignments can be a preparatory exercise for writing research reports as well as publishing academic articles.

Academia and students should be encouraged to attend conferences and to publish afterwards. Financial support for postgraduate students to attend conferences will increase their exposure to researchers, and be an incentive to publish an article afterwards.

A publication culture must be fostered among staff members, without putting them under additional stress and pressure. This can be done by alternating lecturing responsibilities with writing of academic articles. A productive publication output can also be rewarded with the allocation of research/administrative assistants, further fostering a research culture.

There should be clear departmental "rules" regarding the number of publications required. Euben (2002) discusses the problems that arise when departmental/institutional requirements are not clearly communicated. Among others, a person's promotion can be compromised if the quality or quantity of the articles published is not in line with the regulations. Where a person was unaware of the regulations, it may even lead to lawsuits. Scholarship criteria should be communicated consistently and applied fairly.

Secondly, collaboration between researchers at different universities can increase academic publishing. Information regarding good sources and journals that can be contacted can be shared. Collaboration with institutions, individuals, private/public organisations in research projects will also benefit publication output. However, Lee & Bozeman (2005:673) found differing results on the effect of collaboration on publication productivity. On the one hand, the simple number ("normal count") of peer-review journal papers is strongly and significantly associated with the number of collaborators. However, when productivity is examined by "fractional count" (dividing the number of publications by the number of authors), the number of collaborators is not a significant predictor of publishing productivity. They consent that their focus was entirely on the individual level, not taking into account possible benefits of collaboration to groups, institutions and scientific fields.

Thirdly, a publication committee should be launched with the following tasks:

- Distribute the findings of this roundtable to participants, departments, research offices of Universities who attended the conference.
- Manage publishing in Psychology, communicate with South African universities (as an interface),
- Report back on the roundtable discussion,
- Do research on publishing in Psychology (needs assessment and SWOT analysis (strong and weak points, opportunities, threats).

A regulatory board, where complaints against "unfair handling" can be lodged, should also be investigated. It must be taken into account that the council of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) recently established a "Committee on Scholarly Publishing in South Africa" (CSPiSA), as well as a "Scholarly Publishing Unit" (SPU) within the ASSAf office (ASSAf 2008a: 2).However, the handling of author complaints against editors is not one of the functions set out by ASSAf.

6.   Discussion

Developing and managing knowledge has a long tradition in academic organisations. Publishing this knowledge forms part of the endeavour to develop knowledge (cf Harley *et al* 2006: 10). Therefore, it could be stated that publishing is a *sine qua non* for academia. Being an academic per se means to publish. Costa & Bergallo (2008: 412) remark: "Publishing our findings in high-prestige, peer-reviewed journals is undoubtedly the *conditio sine qua non* of academic success …" Glatthorn's book "Publish or perish – the educator's imperative" (2002) illustrates this fact. The slogan "publish or perish" has given rise to various books, workshops and articles, showing the importance of publishing in the academic world (for example Euben 2002, Glatthorn 2002, National Conference of University Professors 2005).

Discerning the pitfalls of academic publishing in this study did help to find solutions to increase academic publishing among academia. Thus the first hypothesis can be accepted. The solutions

suggested include institutional back-up, collaboration, and the launching of a "Publishing Committee".

Taking into consideration the literature on academic publishing as well as the findings of the current study, a metaphor can now be suggested. "Metaphors have the potential to create new realities for researchers" claims Ritchie (2006: 186). It can also be used to create new possibilities for action (Ritchie & Rigano 2007: 123). A response to a metaphor in science emerges not only from rational analysis of word meaning, but also how words strike the ear in combination with other words (Baake, 2003: 10). With Sherwood's study (2004) in mind, a metaphor using the "human factor" as well as interaction will be useful in an academic reality.

The following metaphor can make a meaningful contribution to the discussion: academic publishing as a creative industry with performance-stressed participants. The notion of academic publishing as an "industry" is not new (Barnett & Low 1996: 13). Publishing is classified as one of the "creative industries" (Scott 1997: 323). Gibson & Klocker (2004: 425) refer to "an academic fashion cycle, which plays out through a particular industrial actor-network of academic knowledge production, circulation and reception".

Viewed from this metaphor, academic publishing is not merely a part-time hobby or something to be done half-heartedly. Neither is it something to be done in isolation, without the knowledge and expertise of others in the field. This expertise could include document editing, experience in publishing, or being knowledgeable in the specific subject. If academic publishing is regarded as a creative industry, it must be managed in a way resembling the industry. "Production" should be optimised by giving the potential author the necessary resources (time, support personnel), building in a system of encouragement (mentoring), continuous training in academic writing skills, and rewards (extrinsic and intrinsic).

The metaphor "academic writing as a creative industry with performance-stressed participants" refers to the experience of the participants of this and other studies. Florida (2005: 7) found that, according to the theory of creativity, openness, diversity and tolerance

increase the quantity and quality of resources such as knowledge, human capital and technology. Participants in the study attest to this, as their experience of a closed, intolerant system expecting publishing together with all other academic responsibilities, makes it difficult to participate in the "creative industry" of academic publishing.

One of the solutions suggested by the present research group was the launching of a publication committee. This concurs with the metaphor of the "creative industry", supplying academia with a place where they can complain, as well as a group who can help to increase academic publishing. This can also be a uniting force in helping academia to collaborate in research and academic publishing. The ASSAf (2008b) approved a national code of best practice for editors and peer review for South African scholarly journals to standardise editorial practice. This could be utilised by the suggested publication committee in advising authors and handling queries.

Employing the suggested metaphor opens new insights into the dilemma of academia struggling to publish. It also suggests solutions for the low publication rate of academia in general. Thus hypothesis 2 of this study can also be accepted.

7. Conclusion

Research is one of the core functions of a university. Research goes hand in hand with academic publishing (Lundberg 2000: par 4.2). "[Academia …] needs to be prepared to publish more in future," states Graver *et al* (2008: 16). Using the metaphor "Academic publishing as a creative industry with performance-stressed participants" can make a contribution towards managing and increasing academic publishing at universities. It is recommended that research incorporating a larger number of academia should be done to be able to more clearly map the pitfalls and possible solutions for a higher rate of academic publishing. Use was made of a non-probability sampling technique, restricting the application of findings to the larger population of academia.

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