

# 286 Narrative CVs – evaluative storytelling and the construction of academic value(s)

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## Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

## Abstract

In recent years, narrative CVs have gained prominence in the UK and internationally. This format aims to replace the traditional list-like CV and asks researchers for a descriptive story of their contributions to the field, leadership potential and wider societal impact. The key motivation behind introducing this format was to capture a wider variety of experiences and achievements beyond a narrow understanding of academic excellence. But do narrative CVs realise this promise? This paper starts to explore this question by focusing on the evaluative processes involved in the assessment of narrative CVs (as opposed to traditional ones). Employing an innovative methodology of vignette-based interviews, this study identifies different evaluative lenses mobilised in the assessment of narrative CVs, including story-listening (as opposed to story-telling) and veiled quantification. The paper offers key insights into the conceptual stretching of 'excellence' by exploring it as a process of addition rather than an extension.

## Full paper

*(Please note that this is work-in-progress. Please ask for the latest version before sharing or citing)*

## Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a growing critique of research metrics (e.g., journal impact factors or citation counts) as promoting a narrow understanding of 'good' research (de Rijcke et al., 2016) and damaging research culture (Wellcome Trust, 2020). In response to this critique, UKRI (2021) introduced a Resume4Researchers, a new CV format aimed at reconfiguring the reward and recognition system. R4R – a single format for all seven research councils – rather than a list of publications or research grants, asks researchers for a descriptive story of their contributions to the field, leadership potential and wider societal impact. The goal is to move away from publication metrics and instead “to broaden the range of things that researchers and innovators get recognition for” (Frances Downey, cited in Lacchia, 2021). Hence, narrative CVs are indicative of broader changes in the research environment and offer an ideal lens for exploration of the formulation and assessment of what is of value in academic life.

And yet, despite this undeniable promise of narrative CVs, little is known about the processes of evaluation of these formats. Narrative CVs have been the focus of practice-based opinions and evaluations of the format's effectiveness (Meadmore et al., 2022; Hatch and Curry, 2020), but the scholarly work has been limited (Bordignon et al., 2023). This work-in-progress paper aims to address this gap by providing new theoretical tools supporting the understanding of evaluative inquiry in assessing academic CVs. Against this backdrop, this paper explores two questions: i) What types of evaluative inquiry are mobilised in the assessment of narrative CVs?; ii) How is the academic value constructed in the process of evaluation of narrative CVs?

## Methods

This paper draws on vignette-based qualitative interviews to explore the differences in the assessment of standard and narrative CVs. The use of vignettes is an effective method for mimicking real-life experiences and exploring participants' interpretative processes (Jenkins et al., 2010). The participants were academics with experience sitting on the UKRI panels. Participants were presented with instructions to select one candidate to be awarded a fellowship and a short description of the terms of the fellowship. Participants were presented with a set of four 'mock' CVs: two standard CVs and two narrative CVs (based on an R4R template), each presenting candidates with traditional

academic or broader profiles (e.g. impact or leadership). Interviewees were asked to assess the four types of resumes and select one candidate whilst narrating their thinking processes.

## Emergent findings

The study is still ongoing, but the emergent findings point to complex dynamics of narrative evaluative inquiry. The key finding suggests that we can differentiate between the process of story-telling by evaluators who reconstruct the personal narratives from the traditional CV and story-listening/reading when they are presented with a story directly. These findings, on the one hand, suggest that peer review is inherently a practice of narrativization as the decision-makers “think in terms of stories” (Kaplan, 1986). On the other hand, it highlights the limitations of the use of narratives in evaluative settings. The interviewees discussed the CV in a relatively similar way, presenting relatively homogenous storylines. In this context, story-listening enabled more non-standardised stories and offered an opportunity for a richer explanation of the less standard career pathways. Nevertheless, the process of narrativization was largely driven by set categories of practice (such as research, impact, leadership, community service, etc.) and, as such, was, in fact, quite restricted.

Furthermore, the study has highlighted that even though narratives are often contrasted with numbers as opposite epistemic categories, the two were closely intertwined in the assessment process. For example, using numbers in the narrative CV format was generally seen as strengthening the storyline, and at times, numbers were even implied (e.g. in terms of ‘high-ranking journals’). Therefore, the quantified academic culture is inescapable, even with the CV format change.

Finally, this study points to the complexity of the processes of ‘expanding’ the concept of excellence. Seemingly, the assessment of different forms of CVs encouraged the interviewees to appreciate a variety of different categories of practice, such as impact, mentoring or leadership. However, arguably, the evidence that these different categories are entering the evaluative inquiry as ‘excellence’ is, at best unambiguous. The interviewees assessed and evaluated various practices, nevertheless differentiated them from the concept of ‘excellence’. Therefore, this concept expanded not by stretching but by adding ‘excellence adjacent’ categories.

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