

IMPACT ARTICLE

Mental and institutional barriers to creating impact

Hans van Dijk

TIAS School for Business and Society, Tilburg, Netherlands

517

Received 14 November 2023

Revised 15 February 2024

16 April 2024

Accepted 26 April 2024

Abstract

Purpose – In this impact paper, I outline how a new inclusion theory generated non-scholarly impact even before it was published and share my personal experiences with mental and institutional barriers to creating that impact. With this, I hope to (1) help readers relate to and understand the issues that they are facing in creating impact and (2) inspire academics and academic institutions to remove obstacles to creating impact.

Design/methodology/approach – After outlining the new theory and the impact it has generated, I autobiographically describe the barriers to impact that I experienced, split up into two categories: mental and institutional barriers.

Findings – I discerned six main barriers that I had to overcome. Three of these are mental obstacles: impact order beliefs, prioritizing impact and a lack of examples. The other three are institutional obstacles: a lack of incentives for doing impact work, a lack of resources and an incompatibility between the impact form and the institutional environment.

Originality/value – It can be daunting to hear about the impact that others are having when the journey to get there is being left out and success stories run the risk of pretending that there were no or only a few obstacles involved. In sharing the struggles involved with doing an impact in my particular case, I hope to provide a more realistic insight into the barriers that one is likely to face in doing impact and issue a wider call for removing barriers to making impact.

Keywords Impact, Inclusion, Institutional barriers, Mental barriers

Paper type Professional insights

I have been invited to share my experiences and reflections with making an impact based on a New Inclusion Theory (NIT) that I developed in collaboration with Jasmien Khattab (van Dijk and Khattab, 2021). In doing so, I adopt the pluralistic notion of impact as outlined by Aguinis *et al.* (2014). In opposition to conventional impact approaches that prioritize scholarly impact and suggest that a focus on other forms of impact come at the expense of scholarly impact, Aguinis *et al.* proposed that there are other forms of impact (e.g. political, organizational, educational) that are also relevant for academics and academic institutions and that these different forms of impact can strengthen and support each other. I very much agree with this perspective on impact, and in this paper on NIT, I show that the different forms of impact indeed can strengthen each other. I call it NIT because it has not been published yet.

There were various angles that I could take in writing this article. I opted for a focus on the mental and institutional barriers that I experienced and had to overcome, given that those barriers can hinder academics in pursuing and achieving any type of impact other than the

© Hans van Dijk. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

A million thanks go out to Jasmien Khattab for co-developing the new inclusion theory together with me, and Carolin Ossenkop for co-founding the Including Behavior Institute. They were both instrumental to the journey that I have outlined here.



scholarly type (i.e. publishing academic papers), and I expect that many readers will recognize and relate to these barriers. I therefore hope that my story will help academics in detecting and overcoming barriers in their own pursuit of making impact beyond the scholarly kind. In addition, I hope that this article will serve as a call to academic institutions to remove barriers to making non-scholarly impact and support non-scholarly impact initiatives and endeavors.

To give the reader an understanding of what context I am talking about, I will first briefly outline what the NIT entails and what impact has been generated based on it. Subsequently, I will outline and reflect on the obstacles that I faced along the way and how I dealt with those.

New inclusion theory

The foundation of NIT is the question: What kind of behaviors result in perceptions and experiences of inclusion and exclusion? Its premise is that any perception or experience of inclusion and exclusion stems from including or excluding behaviors (cf. [Hahn and Knight, 2021](#)). However, the nature of including and excluding behaviors is different from the nature of perceptions and experiences of inclusion and exclusion. As perceptions, inclusion and exclusion are opposites ([Mor Barak, 2000](#); [Shore et al., 2011](#)): you either feel more included, or more excluded, but you cannot feel or experience full inclusion and full exclusion at the same time. In contrast, as behaviors, inclusion and exclusion are mutually constitutive ([DoBusch, 2021](#); [Goodin, 1996](#)): you cannot include some people without excluding others. For example, each time you hire or promote an individual, there are various other individuals who are not hired or promoted. When inviting your team members to a team meeting, you are excluding all non-team members.

Based on this rationale, some main implications that we outline in our NIT are that (1) we constantly engage in acts of exclusion, (2) many of these excluding behaviors do not result in experiences of exclusion, (3) perceptions and experiences of exclusion do not necessarily stem from excluding behaviors and (4) exclusion as behavior in and of itself thus is not necessarily negative or bad. In determining what it is then that makes individuals experience exclusion, we argue that at its core lie perceptions or experiences of illegitimacy. When individuals are excluded in ways that they deem illegitimate, they are most likely to experience exclusion ([van Dijk and Khattab, 2021](#)).

Importantly, perceptions of legitimacy are subjective ([Tost, 2011](#)). Individuals thus may have different beliefs and ideas about whether exclusion is legitimate or not. What helped me develop NIT was reviewing [Sumpter's \(2020\)](#) autoethnographic paper in 2018 for EDI, in which she reflects on her experiences as a novice surfer trying to socialize with experienced, male-dominated groups of surfers. Sumpter offered an interesting explanation for why experienced surfers exclude beginning surfers:

(. . .) it can be dangerous in the water when someone who does not know what they are doing. Members are wary of providing access to non-members due to the safety hazards, while paddling on and riding fiberglass and epoxy-shelled boards of hard foam with sharp noses and piercing fins. (p. 273).

Whereas the general focus of Sumpter's paper was on incivility that she experienced as a non-member, she realized that in the eyes of the excluders, there may have been some legitimate reasons to exclude her and others.

The subjectivity of legitimacy makes it difficult to determine who is right when individuals have different beliefs about the (il)legitimacy of inclusion and exclusion ([Suddaby et al., 2017](#)). Actors may be convinced of their good intentions, but subconscious biases may make them blind to their own convictions. In NIT, Jasmien Khattab and I therefore argue that it is crucial that serious, open and non-judgmental conversations are held in organizations around issues where individuals have different legitimacy perceptions and beliefs ([van Dijk and Khattab, 2021](#)). Given that such conversations are rather different from the current

polarized debates where parties at both ends seem mainly focused on denigrating the other (e.g. companies going woke, affirmative action policies; Jenkins, 2024; Warren, 2022), we believe our NIT holds some major implications for improving Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) practice. Specifically, we believe that rather than convincing others about the importance of DEI, the focus should be more on uncovering differences in experiences and beliefs about the legitimacy of inclusion and exclusion and then facilitating dialogues to set clear norms and create alignment (van Dijk and Khattab, 2021).

Toward generating impact

While working on the paper and theory, I experienced early 2019 an improvisation theatre exercise by Ralf Wetzel from Vlerick Business School that shows how status influences your behavior (which he based on Johnston, 1981). The way in which status is conveyed in the exercise is via micro behaviors, such as an eye gaze, a smile, a nod or a remark. And what I noticed was that the nature of all those behaviors was either including by indicating interest in talking and listening to a person, or excluding by indicating no interest in that person and what they had to say. I realized that this exercise with some tweaks could serve as a great illustration of our NIT in showing the importance of feeling included, but also the fact that we constantly engage in including as well as excluding behaviors and that not all those excluding behaviors are illegitimate. Furthermore, in letting participants experience how including and excluding behaviors shape their experiences of inclusion and exclusion, it seemed a good starting point for facilitating dialogues about the legitimacy of including and excluding behaviors.

I was eager to develop and use the exercise to see how it would work in practice. At a meeting of the Future of Work and Organizational Psychology movement in 2019, which is a network that focuses, among others, on how to have a more practical impact with Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) research (Bal *et al.*, 2019), I talked about the exercise with Carolin Ossenkop, who is a befriended DEI science-practitioner. Together we decided to transform the exercise into a training on how to *do* inclusion for organizations. Based on the principles of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), we designed the training such that participants first engage in the exercise, after which they reflect on what behaviors made them feel included or excluded. Subsequently, in small groups, they reflect on and discuss similar behaviors that make them feel included or excluded at their workplace, consider factors at work that influence the occurrence and strength of including and excluding behaviors and come up with suggestions to foster inclusion and eradicate exclusion. In the plenary debriefing, we provide the highlights of NIT to help participants make sense of their reflections and make informed decisions about how to foster inclusion (for more information about the training, see includingbehavior.com).

We tried out the training to ~50 organizational change management consultants of a large consultancy firm at the end of 2019 and virtually to ~75 participants at the 2020 edition of the Academy of Management Meeting. Reactions were very positive. One person shared that being excluded as part of the exercise made him demotivated and disengaged, which resulted in more exclusion, thereby creating a vicious cycle and opening his eyes to how detrimental even a single occurrence of exclusion can be. Another person shared that her high status in the exercise made so many people come up to her that she could not attend to all the requests that were coming her way. This made her realize that exclusion is sometimes not just functional, but also necessary. In discussing such seemingly conflicting insights and revelations, participants together came to a better understanding of the importance of experiencing inclusion, the behaviors that underlie perceptions and experiences of inclusion and exclusion and what can be done to foster inclusion in the workplace.

These experiences motivated us to start promoting the training and spurred me to search for more ways to gather non-scholarly impact based on the NIT. After facing and overcoming

a couple of obstacles that I discuss below, in September 2022 Carolin Ossenkop and I ended up with setting up our own, independent organization, called Including Behavior Institute. Its mission is “to be the global knowledge and expertise center on how to *do* inclusion” (includingbehavior.com). The reason why we coined it an institute is that it reflects the academic underpinnings underlying our activities. We invited a number of researchers with whom we talked about the institute before, who showed interest and whose expertise fits the institute to join the institute as well. These DEI experts range from PhD students to full professors and helped us to further develop the institute. We gradually invited some other researchers as well. Currently, we have 16 researchers from five different countries who are affiliated with our institute.

Impact generated

There are a range of impact activities that emerged from the NIT and that are carried out via the Including Behavior Institute: First, the training. Second, we developed a train-the-trainer training. Third, giving talks about our theory and/or methodology regarding how to foster inclusion. Fourth, setting up research projects and helping researchers. And fifth, writing and publishing academic papers.

Regarding the first, it is impossible to determine how often the training has been given, how many people we have reached in doing so and what the effects were of the training. Many different people give the training, and we are not keeping track of who gives the training when. As for myself, I estimate that I have given it around thirty times in five different countries to groups ranging from 10 to 100 participants (there is technically no maximum number of people who can participate in it), the large majority of which being practitioners. About the effectiveness of the training, quantitative as well as qualitative evaluations are always very positive. But despite that there are a sheer number of researchers involved in our institute, we actually still have to properly assess the effectiveness of the training. For now, the following three quotes from evaluations of a training given by someone else than me provide some insight into what participants learn from it:

Today’s session was incredibly insightful (. . .) I was so happy to see the complexity of DEI being broken down

I really liked this session!! The game made me realize how inclusive and exclusive behaviour take place and made me aware of my own biases etc.

It was really an (internal) emotional rollercoaster, I learned that a lot of work still needs to happen from my side.

A main reason why we do not know how often the training has been given is because we developed a train-the-trainer training. The reason for this is that we hope that the training will be used by as many people as possible, and that won’t happen if we are the only ones who give it. Developing a train-the-trainer thus was a main way for us to enhance our non-academic impact. We keep a list of people who successfully finished this training. This is made public on our website so that it is clear to everyone who are certified by us to give the training. Currently, there are 29 trainers in seven countries.

Our theory and research are integrated in most of our training, but sometimes we are invited for a talk about our theory without giving the training. Given that none of our research is published yet, this mostly happens in research seminar sessions, but we have also already been invited several times by organizations or events to speak about our theory, research and approach to inclusion. Organizers then usually find us via our website, via word of mouth, or because they saw us speak or attended a training elsewhere. In the beginning, I was a bit hesitant to speak about NIT without it being published because I feared it would get hijacked (see the section on obstacles below). However, NIT helps organizations make sense of how

they can really do inclusion, and I believe that to be more important than mitigating the risk that other researchers may steal our thunder. I do not have any insight into results of these talks, but a two-page article based on a keynote presentation at a large international bank was shared in their employee magazine to over 40,000 employees.

Regarding setting up research projects and helping researchers, there are currently five PhD students affiliated with the institute, of which I co-supervise two. Connecting those PhD students with each other and the other researchers involved has led the PhD students to support each other in their projects, inspire each other and start several joint research projects. Even though they have talked with some of the more senior researchers, it has been proven more difficult to really get them to cooperate. My impression is that the more senior researchers are simply too busy and already have too many things going on, but we may just need to do a better job at getting and keeping them involved. One activity that we are organizing in April 2024 for the second time, is an institute day to discuss research and practice with our researchers and trainers. Among others, we hope that it will foster some more collaborations.

Finally, in terms of writing and publishing papers, my biggest frustration is that our theory paper still is not published. It got rejected a couple of times, and COVID-19, becoming a dad, health issues, and shifting priorities have delayed me and us to push that paper. It does form the basis of various other papers that are or will soon be submitted, and there are more research projects that we are anxious to start with once the theory paper is published.

A key question in that regard is if all these non-scholarly impact activities have obstructed me from publishing the theory paper that is the foundation of it all. That could be true. However, in line with [Aguinis *et al.*'s \(2014\)](#) pluralistic notion of impact, it is not just that NIT has resulted in the above-mentioned forms of non-scholarly impact, but many of these activities have helped us to further develop, improve and flesh out NIT. For example, leaders have reflected in various trainings on their reasons for not including employees in decision-making, which have helped us gain a better understanding of when and why exclusion is sometimes deemed functional and necessary. Furthermore, the train-the-trainer sessions are usually followed by DEI professionals and generally involve elaborate discussions that have helped us consider how legitimacy beliefs regarding inclusion and exclusion are shaped, maintained and changed. For example, several participants indicated that they found a conceptual model that we developed too complex, which spurred us to refine and simplify the model. As such, I think that our theory paper has improved due to all these forms of non-scholarly impact, and in the spirit of pluralistic impact, I like to believe (but am open to the fact that I may be biased here) that once our theory paper will be published, our opportunities for making non-scholarly impact based on it will substantially increase.

Having said all of that, it is interesting to note that these impact outcomes have been generated without NIT being published yet. And whereas these impact outcomes may look nice and impressive (or at least interesting enough to warrant an invitation to write this article), there were many factors that I benefited from. These include, but are not limited to having a great co-author in developing NIT, an equally great business partner in setting up and developing the institute, having gained visibility as an established and tenured researcher, working for a well-regarded institution, receiving wonderful input and support from experts and various opportunities that sometimes came out of the blue (e.g. after a referral by someone else, or having read a post on LinkedIn). I recognize these privileges and acknowledge that others with similar ideas and skills may generate less impact because they do not have these privileges.

Being privileged does not mean that there are no barriers or obstacles at all. I often struggled in the process of generating these different forms of non-scholarly impact. In reflecting on where these struggles came from, I realized that they mainly stemmed from a variety of barriers that I faced. In pursuing pluralistic impact, other researchers may face a

number of these barriers as well and possibly even other and larger ones. However, by learning about the barriers that I faced and how I overcame those, I hope that I can help other researchers in recognizing and overcoming those barriers. In the following two sections, I therefore outline six barriers that I expect to be recognizable for other academics as well. The first section focuses on three personal, mental barriers, whereas the second section focuses on three institutional barriers.

Mental barriers to making impact

The first hurdle that I had to overcome was my belief that publishing comes before having non-scholarly impact. Reasons for this were the possibility that others would steal my work, the importance of first letting reviewers assess if there are no major errors in our reasoning, and a lack of examples where non-scholarly impact came first. Although now it may appear otherwise, I have restrained myself over the past couple of years in pursuing impact because our theory was and is not published – and I still am restraining myself. I sometimes worry if all the impact activities are not increasing the chances that others will be stealing our thunder. This impact paper is a prime example, given that in earlier versions I was cautious about mentioning the central role of legitimacy in our NIT. At a deeper level, I am worried that reviewers may identify a fundamental flaw in our reasoning. The more I and we promote our theory, the more we have to correct in case our theory is proven to be flawed. Meanwhile, harm may have been done by the application of our theory. In particular, our assertion that excluding behaviors are not necessarily negative or bad can of course easily be taken out of context and used for wrongful purposes.

Looking at all the impact that we have already made, I am currently happy that I did not let these beliefs and fears fully restrain me. The publishing process sometimes takes way too long, and I consider it liberating to realize that making a non-scholarly impact can already happen before publishing the research that is the foundation of the impact. There are many more ways to test new ideas than putting them out for blind peer review via academic journals, and with all the feedback that we have sought and received, my fears and worries about potential flaws in our NIT have largely gone away. Nonetheless, I will probably remain a bit worried that our theory will be stolen as long as we have not yet published it.

My second mental barrier was making a non-scholarly impact a priority. An important reason why there were three years between developing the NIT and founding the institute was that I prioritized my research and teaching over making a non-scholarly impact. Of course, incentives also play an important role in that (see the institutional barriers below), but it starts with my own conviction and decision regarding the importance of non-scholarly impact and pursuing that. I do believe that research, teaching and impact can strengthen each other, but am also aware that they do not necessarily act synergetically, and especially in the beginning of making a non-scholarly impact, there is a lot of sowing without reaping. This made me concerned about my career progress if pursuing non-scholarly impact would come at the expense of my research output.

What helped me overcome these concerns and insecurities regarding the prioritization of non-scholarly impact was talking with others about it, and noticing how well the training and our theory were received. Social validation and support apparently are very important to me, and this reminded me of why I am in science in the first place: to change the world for the better (cf. [Aguinis et al., 2014](#)). Given how little effect our research sometimes seems to have on practice, I figured that I might as well put time and effort into pursuing non-scholarly impact even though it may harm my scholarly impact.

A third mental obstacle for me was that there was not a template that I and we could use. We had to design everything from scratch – and we still are. I have experience in setting up and leading multiple volunteer organizations, but running an independent institute felt like

something entirely different. Moreover, because I knew of no academics that did something similar, it made me wonder if I am not trying to do things that should – or perhaps even *could* – not be done. In reflecting on what the main issues were in this regard for me, I realized that I felt in particular insecure about the business side of running the institute: how to make sure that we would not go bankrupt or get into difficulties with the tax authorities while at the same time receiving a decent compensation for all that we put into our impact activities.

Partnering with a science practitioner was essential for me to feel secure enough about the business side of things to go for it. Questions remained regarding what activities are fine to do for free, what activities we can ask to get compensated for, and how much compensation we can ask for. Being able to discuss that and have someone who you share that burden with already makes it a lot easier (I guess it is illustrative that I speak of it as a burden). More generally, there is the question of what our institute exactly is. Are we a for-profit organization, a hybrid organization or a social enterprise? Not even being sure about what we are showcasing I guess how much we are still in the dark of what we are doing exactly – let alone knowing how we should do whatever it is that we do.

Taken together, each of these barriers were overcome in different ways, but two things were essential. The first was becoming aware of the nature of the barrier, and the second was acknowledging and understanding my own role and responsibility in that barrier. Obviously, knowing the source of the problem is crucial for getting rid of it. The more tenacious issue for each of the three mental barriers was owning them and understanding that I had to work on myself to overcome those barriers. Part of me found it tempting to externalize the barriers and absolve myself from any responsibility or part in raising and maintaining the barriers because then I could just focus on doing and publishing research. This part of me considers the belief that publications should come prior to impact as an academic principle or norm, believes that my institution only pays me to conduct research and teach and believes that being involved in business is something that does not suit me. However, the part of me that wants to contribute to making the world a better place helped me understand that there can be exceptions that warrant to engage in creating non-scholarly impact prior to having your research published, that society finances my institution with the hope of generating impact beyond the realms of research and teaching, and that there are ways to work around my insecurities and lack of interest regarding the business side of running an institute.

Institutional barriers to making impact

Whereas I believe that a variety of barriers were and are under my own control, they were and are also partially affected by barriers at the institutional level. With this, I mean both the university that I worked for as well as the wider academic system that affects how things are done in my former university. The first institutional barrier to making an impact that I had to overcome was a lack of incentives and rewards for non-scholarly impact. My head of department called me the “impact champion of the department,” which was a nice recognition. But I did not experience that as being translated into any more tangible reward. This apparent lack of connection between time and energy spent and rewards received meant that there were no institutional incentives to do impact work in any other way than publishing papers and teaching, i.e. the scholarly and educational kind of impact.

Interestingly, in 2019, the Dutch universities rallied behind a plan to make non-scholarly impact a more prominent responsibility for researchers (VSNU *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, in my department, impact was one of the five main aspects on which I was formally evaluated. I, therefore, hoped that I could run the behavior institute as part of my work activities. At the same time, discussions were still ongoing about how making an impact would be stimulated, recognized and rewarded at my university, School and department, and prior experiences of

making an impact resulted in a compliment at best, and at worst in critical questions and remarks about why I would spend my time on generating non-scholarly impact.

When I discussed the plan for the including behavior institute with my department and school, they were generally positive about the idea of the institute. However, it was made clear that I would not get any time for setting up and running this initiative, and that any money that I would earn would have to go to my School and department. This would mean that I would give away control and autonomy in running the initiative that I set up, while not seeing any material reward for the energy and effort that I put into it. I therefore decided to work on this in my own time to at least experience the joy of doing it in the way that I see fit and not be frustrated by bureaucracy.

The second, somewhat related institutional obstacle was a lack of resources for doing non-scholarly impact work. There are various elements involved in setting up an organization like our institute that can be outsourced easily and would save much time and effort (e.g. steps and procedures involved in founding the organization, finding out about all the legal aspects of running the company, designing a logo, website, document and presentation templates). Not receiving resources to outsource work that I am not trained in (and am not really interested in) meant that I had to invest serious time and effort to do that or find people willing enough to do that.

As mentioned, collaborating with Carolin Ossenkop, who is a researcher as well as a DEI consultant helped a lot. In addition, I was fortunate with a spouse who is a designer and was willing to help me with setting up a website, otherwise, this probably would have made me give up. But it also made me wonder how many impact ideas are killed before they start due to a lack of resources and support. An issue with the institutional context is that academics are already expected to do a lot of “free” labor (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer, 2024), but if that is also going to be expected impact activities, many of such activities will not happen or will be a fraction of the quality that they can be when receiving proper support. The main reason for us to ask compensation for some activities of the Including Behavior Institute is to ensure that we can offer a decent quality, but I notice that I sometimes feel guilty when doing so. I believe that guilt at least in part stems from the institutionalized expectation that much of the impact work that we do should be done for free.

Finally, the third institutional barrier to doing non-scholarly impact was the incompatibility between the form in which we wanted to do impact and the institutional environment. (Research) Institutes tend to reside within a single academic institution, which is interesting given that the majority of academics collaborate with colleagues at other academic institutions. In discussing the institute with my department and School, I also raised the issue that the department or university could not own the initiative because I set it up with an external science practitioner. I, therefore, asked if it would be possible to design it as an interorganizational institute. However, that idea was immediately shot down, simply because there were no possibilities (or at least no precedents) for such small-scale, bottom-up initiated cross-institutional collaborations.

After deciding that we would go for an independent institute, I had to request approval for running it as an ancillary activity, which I requested in June 2021. After several inquiries to my management team about the approval process over several months, I learned in February 2022 that there had been multiple meetings at the school and university level in which my request for starting the institute was discussed, but none of those involved me. Frustrated by this process, I went to the School’s administrators, and they indicated that they struggled with the research activities of the institute because they considered research to be my main role as faculty. In proposing to conduct all research-related activities for the institute from my faculty position at the university and all other activities for the institute in my own time, we agreed within 15 min of the meeting, and I finally received approval.

In combination, these institutional barriers suggest that academic institutions consider different forms of impact and activities toward generating those forms of impact to stand in isolation, that efforts toward generating a particular type of impact come at the expense of generating other forms of impact, and that scholarly impact is and should be the main or even only priority of academics. Even in the Netherlands, where there have been ongoing talks about making non-scholarly impact a core task of the universities, scholarly impact is still considered to be the main task of academics, and non-scholarly impact activities are somewhat discouraged. In asserting that the various activities of the behavior institute (be it research, training, train-the-trainers, connecting and networking, speaking) strengthen and support each other, I hope to raise awareness about the potentially synergetic effects of the different forms of impact (cf. [Aguinis et al., 2014](#)) and call on academic institutions to remove their barriers toward generating non-scholarly impact.

Conclusion

Taken together, I believe that making (non-scholarly) impact is the joint responsibility of the individual researcher as well as the academic institution that they work for and are embedded in – both the organization as well as the country-wide academic institutional context. First and foremost, researchers themselves should determine how involved they want to be in doing impact. Considering that many of us are at least partially financed by public money, I personally believe we have a *moral obligation* to give back to society. Of course, we do that via our research and teaching, but much if not all of that primarily – or even only – reaches highly educated and hence often privileged individuals. By engaging in impact, we can also reach and/or more directly help those in less privileged environments.

Second, academic institutions have an elitist status and image and are excluding the majority of individuals in society who do not adhere to their educational standards. This means that by their nature, academic institutions contribute to (social) inequalities ([Bal et al., 2019](#); [van Dijk et al., 2020](#)). Regardless of whether they are privately or publicly funded, I therefore believe that academic institutions also have a moral obligation to actively reduce (social) inequalities. Given that they cannot do that via their research and teaching activities, the way to do this is by pro-actively engaging in other forms of impact. In Dutch academia, the impact talk is present, but in many ways, they still need to walk the talk. Rather than providing obstacles to doing impact work, academic institutions should stimulate and promote researchers to engage in non-scholarly impact. This could be done in a variety of ways, for example by linking impact activities not only to recognition but also to rewards, providing resources and offering support.

References

- Aguinis, H., Shapiro, D.L., Antonacopoulou, E.P. and Cummings, T.G. (2014), “Scholarly impact: a pluralist conceptualization”, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 623-639, doi: [10.5465/amle.2014.0121](#).
- Bal, P.M., Dóci, E., Lub, X., van Rossenberg, Y.G., Nijs, S., Achtnak, S., Briner, R.B., Brookes, A., Chudzikowski, K., De Cooman, R., De Gieter, S., De Jong, J., De Jong, S.B., Dorenbosch, L., Ghoreishi Galugahi, M.A., Hack-Polay, D., Hofmans, J., Hornung, S., Khuda, K., Klamer, R., Mendy, J., Mol, S.T., Navarro, J., Notelaers, G., Ossenkop, C., Pickett, J., Röllmann, L., Sanderson, Z., Sosnowska, J., Spanouli, A., Vantilborgh, T., Van Dijk, H. and van Zelst, M. (2019), “Manifesto for the future of work and organizational psychology”, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 289-299, doi: [10.1080/1359432x.2019.1602041](#).
- Dobusch, L. (2021), “The inclusivity of inclusion approaches: a relational perspective on inclusion and exclusion in organizations”, *Gender, Work and Organization*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 379-396, doi: [10.1111/gwao.12574](#).

- Goodin, R.E. (1996), "Inclusion and exclusion", *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 343-371, doi: [10.1017/s0003975600007219](https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003975600007219).
- Hahn, T. and Knight, E. (2021), "The ontology of organizational paradox: a quantum approach", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 46 No. 2, pp. 362-384, doi: [10.5465/amr.2018.0408](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0408).
- Järvinen, M. and Mik-Meyer, N. (2024 In press), "Giving and receiving: gendered service work in academia", *Current Sociology*, doi: [10.1177/00113921231224754](https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921231224754).
- Jenkins, L.D. (2024), "Can affirmative action survive on the world's campuses?", *Current History*, Vol. 123 No. 849, pp. 33-36, doi: [10.1525/curh.2024.123.849.33](https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2024.123.849.33).
- Johnston, K. (1981), *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, Eyre Methuen, London.
- Kolb, D.A. (1984), *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Mor Barak, M.E. (2000), "The inclusive workplace: an ecosystems approach to diversity management", *Social Work*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 339-353, doi: [10.1093/sw/45.4.339](https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/45.4.339).
- Shore, L.M., Randel, A.E., Chung, B.G., Dean, M.A., Holcombe Ehrhart, K. and Singh, G. (2011), "Inclusion and diversity in work groups: a review and model for future research", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 1262-1289, doi: [10.1177/0149206310385943](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310385943).
- Suddaby, R., Bitektine, A. and Haack, P. (2017), "Legitimacy", *Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 451-478, doi: [10.5465/annals.2015.0101](https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0101).
- Sumpter, D.M. (2020), "Bro or Kook? The effect of dynamic member evaluation on incivility and resources in surf lineups", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 261-284, doi: [10.1108/edi-04-2018-0075](https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-04-2018-0075).
- Tost, L.P. (2011), "An integrative model of legitimacy judgments", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 686-710, doi: [10.5465/amr.2011.65554690](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.65554690).
- van Dijk, H. and Khattab, J. (2021), "On legitimate exclusion and illegitimate inclusion: a paradox theory of inclusion", *Academy of Management Proceedings*, Academy of Management, Briarcliff Manor, NY, Vol. 2021 No. 1, 12980, doi: [10.5465/ambpp.2021.12980abstract](https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2021.12980abstract).
- van Dijk, H., Kooij, D., Karanika-Murray, M., De Vos, A. and Meyer, B. (2020), "Meritocracy a myth? A multilevel perspective of how social inequality accumulates through work", *Organizational Psychology Review*, Vol. 10 Nos 3-4, pp. 240-269, doi: [10.1177/2041386620930063](https://doi.org/10.1177/2041386620930063).
- VSNU, NFU, KNAW, NWO and ZonMw (2019), "Room for everyone's talent: towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards of academics", available at: <https://www.universiteitennederland.nl/recognitionandrewards/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Position-paper-Room-for-everyone%E2%80%99s-talent.pdf> (accessed 3 November 2023).
- Warren, D.E. (2022), "'Woke' corporations and the stigmatization of corporate social initiatives", *Business Ethics Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 169-198, doi: [10.1017/beq.2021.48](https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2021.48).

Corresponding author

Hans van Dijk can be contacted at: h.vandijk@tias.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com