

Don't be misled by citation figures! (18)

Journal Tuning

For almost twenty years, Dos Santos had been editor-in-chief of the *European Journal of Molecular Biochemistry*. A period in which he had witnessed many changes, particularly in the most recent couple of years.

For most of that time, "Chief Ed" had been an immensely satisfying job. The *European Journal of Molecular Biochemistry* was the official organ for the major biochemical research society in the world and it was considered by many as the best journal in the field. Consequently, Dos Santos himself also shined in the splendour of the magazine; he was, after all, an undoubtedly important and powerful man in the community.

He had been able to enjoy that prominence for a long time – until a few years ago when journal impact factors were introduced. He hadn't been prepared for the bitter surprise that this new bibliometric tool had in store for him. "His" *European Journal of Molecular Biochemistry* ranked at an unexpectedly low sixth place in the category "Biochemistry and Molecular Biology". Five journals had higher impact factors. But worst of all, the number one was *Molecular Biochemistry*, the journal published by the competing US society of biochemists.

Dos Santos, however, wasn't a man to waste time crying over spilled milk; he took action. It didn't take long for him to figure out how the impact factors were calculated – and, just as quickly, he spotted some weak points in the method. He was determined to exploit them mercilessly on his way to a higher impact factor.

For example, Dos Santos also rapidly ascertained that, on average, case studies and essays do not collect as many citations by far as original research papers and "technical reports". Okay, the *European Journal of Molecular Biochemistry* published no case studies but each issue contained four essays. As interesting as those were in general, in the future Dos Santos decided to drop them and focus on more "technical reports", instead. As an additional improvement, he would raise the number of reviews from currently two per issue up to six because reviews attract even more citations.

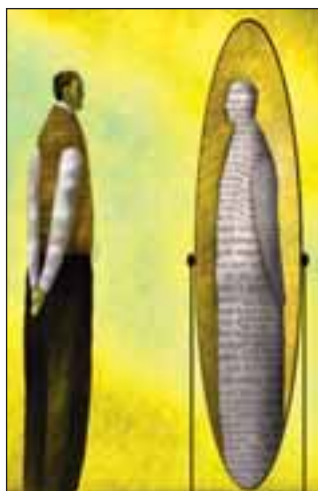
Similarly, Dos Santos had discovered that the number of citations was roughly proportional to the length of the corresponding article. Therefore, he planned to throw the "Short Communications" section out of the journal and permit only long and comprehensive research articles for publication. His simple speculation was that fewer, but longer, articles would each be cited much more frequently. That way, the impact factor should show an immediate jump.

Neither had it escaped Dos Santos' notice that the "Lords of Impact Factors" only considered articles, reviews and "notes" for calculation of the total number of journal articles – "citable items", as they called them. Editorials, correspondence letters and meeting abstracts, on the other hand, were not included, although the citations of those were, in turn, added to the impact factor calculation. Dos Santos didn't actually understand the reason for this; however, what was immediately clear to him was that he would have to include as many meeting reports as possible, as well as provoking editorials and a substantial "Correspondence" section. This package would give "his" journal an even further boost.

And, last but not least, Dos Santos had a particularly ingenious idea: twice a year he would convene a nomenclature conference, the results of which would, of course, appear immediately in the *European Journal of Molecular Biochemistry*. And those results, as everybody knows, are certain to bring in an abundance of citations because any ensuing papers in the respective fields would need to refer to them.

Thus, Dos Santos very quickly came up with a fine "package of measures". Its establishment was bound to take a little while but patience is a virtue and Dos Santos was really keen to ensure he would re-gain his lead from *Molecular Biochemistry*...

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