Stimulating Productivity of Academic Staff

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Academics are like a herd of cats…

...impossible to manage!!
But, ...
cats always go to a dish of milk!
HE in Spain: a rather bureaucratic environment

- **Universities:**
  - Mostly public institutions (93% students)
  - Depending on regions for financial matters
  - Low diversification
  - Formally autonomous, but strong State regulation

- **Staff:**
  - Professors and most non-academic staff have a civil servant status
  - They are members of national bodies: same duties and salaries everywhere
Incentives in a Bureaucratic Environment

- **Professors (~60%)**:  
  - As civil servants, lack of incentives (apart of personal interest and integrity)

- **Several types of assistants (~25%)**:  
  - In fact, waiting for a civil servant position  
  - Promotion is the main incentive

- **Other staff (~15%)**:  
  - Professionals not interested in academic career
Incentives (National Level)

- Established in 1991, only for professors.

- Two types of incentives:
  - *Research productivity incentive*: a wage increase of 100€ per month after a positive evaluation of 6 years of research activities. National committees assess research.
  
  - *Teaching productivity incentive*: the same wage increase after a positive evaluation of 5 years of teaching activities. Assessment of teaching is made at institutional level.
The Consequences

- **Research incentive:**
  - Relatively demanding criteria. Around one third get a positive assessment.
  - The number of positive “sexenius” has become the most used criteria for rating individuals, ...even it is used for funding institutions.
  - In 20 years, the share of Spanish authors in the Citation Index has move from 0.8% to 2.6% (not only for this reason!).

- **Teaching incentive:**
  - “Evaluation culture” was not accepted at that time (1991), and assessment was left in the hands of institutions,...99.9% got (and still get) the positive assessment.
  - No incentive at all, and no influence on teaching quality or performance.
Incentives (Regional Level)

- University funding depends on regions.
  - Salaries of professors are fixed by the central government, but regional governments can increase wages based on individual assessment.

- Most regions have established “regional increases”:
  - In some regions, assessment is very formal. It is almost a linear increase of wages with no consequences on productivity.
  - In others, there is a real assessment. For instance, the Canary Islands have a system based on assessment of teaching, research and other services. In each area, there are three levels of achievement. So, academics can reach up to 9 “bonus”, that means, up to 10,000 € per year.
  - Opinions of academics in these universities confirm the remarkably impact on research and teaching activities.
Incentives (Institutional Level)

- Some regions link public financing to performance.
  - For instance, 10% of public funding of Valencian universities is related to performance indicators, some of them related to individual productivity.
  - Consequently, universities promote the performance of individuals to optimize their financing.
  - After 6 years of running this model, the increase in the values of some performance indicators is remarkable.

- Some universities have adapted internally the external financial system
  - For instance, the University Jaume I (in the Region of Valencia) has a full internal system of individual assessment with economic rewards. They are financed with the extra funds recruited by the university due to its improvement in the performance indicators.

- The regional government is planning to integrate regional and institutional incentives to allow institutions the search of their own goals.
Conclusions

- It would be better to change the whole system, moving to a less “bureaucratic environment” for academic staff.

- When this is not possible (at least at the short time), a system of incentives and awards has positive effect on performance of academics (and on their happiness?)

- Nevertheless, this kind of incentives should be:
  - Very carefully designed to avoid simplistic assessments which can jeopardize academic life
  - Periodically revised and renewed to avoid accommodating behaviours