Excellence, Innovation, Evaluation:
A critical view on how poor questions lead to misleading answers

@cameronneylon
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0068-716X
“How can excellence in innovation lead to economic growth?”
“How can excellence in innovation lead to economic growth?”
What do we mean when we use the word…

“excellence”?
Pursuit of excellence: We strive for excellence, seeking to apply the highest standards to benefit...
The university pursues academic excellence through the creation, preservation...
...to strive for **excellence** and distinction...
We prize excellence

Cape Peninsula University of Technology
We demand excellence
…with world-class excellence across all of its departments

Princeton
As a world-leading centre of academic excellence we aim...
The university counts the diversity of its community as [...] integral to its mission of excellence, and it is committed to diversity and inclusiveness in both educational...
excellence in...
excellence in professionally relevant teaching

University of Westminster
excellence in research and education

Indiana University
excellence in research, education and knowledge exchange

Strathclyde University
excellence in teaching, research, and public engagement

Cornell University
leadership, innovation and excellence in teaching and research

Curtin University
excellence for cultural, athletic and other events

University of Toledo
What do we mean when we use the word…

“excellence”? 
How can we determine or measure…

“excellence”?
[schools] are recognized for their **excellence** through national and international peer comparisons.

Indiana University
Pursuing \textit{excellence} means being satisfied with no less than the highest goals we can envision.

University of Missouri
Pursuing excellence involves being informed by regional, national and global standards, as well as our personal expectations.
“excellence” is the holy grail of academic life

Michèle Lamont
How Professors Think
excellence is produced and defined in a multitude of sites and by an array of actors

Michèle Lamont
How Professors Think
“excellence” tells us nothing about how important the science is and everything about who decides.

Jack Stilgoe
Against Excellence
Using the word excellence is a means of avoiding a difficult conversation.
Using the word *excellence* is a means of avoiding talking about *values*
Impact
Research
Economic
Culture
Education
Health
Environment
excellence

Research

Education

Economic

Health

Cultural

Environment
Impact

- Research
- Economic
- Cultural
- Education
- Health
- Environment

impact
innovation

- Research
- Education
- Economic
- Health
- Cultural
- Environment
evaluation
...what we may be doing [...] when we make [a] value judgement of a [...] work...
...articulating an estimate of how well that work will serve implicitly defined functions...
implicitly defined audience...
...experiencing the work under implicitly defined conditions...

Barbara Herrnstein Smith
Contingencies of Value
There is some good news...

Evidence of Impact: Over 150 citations according to Google Scholar....

Evidence of Impact: Over 2500 unique blog views to date…
Daniel Paul O'Donnell
6 June at 16:27 · AddThis Sharing ·

Holy Moses: 6k+ views and 200+ downloads in about 24 hours. I need to write more with these people! Cameron Neylon Martin Eve Damian Pattinson Samuel Moore.

Excellence R Us: University Research and the Fetishisation of Excellence
Excellence R Us: University Research and the Fetishisation of Excellence
FIGSHARE.COM
“excellence” becomes a performance
“excellence”
excellent performance ... in the place of
Change the narrative...
“soundness”
Researchers per million people
evaluation
PLOS ONE (and arXiv)
Infrastructure and capacity
Evaluation
Answers are easy...
...it's the questions that are hard