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EDITORIAL

Fashion or modern?

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Towards the end of the year many of us have to summarise the activities and output of the past months and compare them with the original planning. Such an action stipulates also reflections about the effects of the performed work and the sustainability of achievements. Similar end-of-year thoughts are in the minds of editors of scientific journals. They are associated with a special challenge for the journal devoted to quality of measurement results as outlined in the following.

Considering the huge amount of scientific journal articles, proceedings, institutional reports, PhD thesis, documentary standards, internet information, etc. published on measurement-related issues over an annual period, it seems to be timely to contemplate about the impact of the newly published measurement data, procedures and quality assurance (QA) tools. At first, what are the selection criteria used by many scientists for identifying a topic for research and later publication? It is certainly very welcome to select research topics of current relevance and importance. This corresponds with characteristics of 'fashion', namely to be popular. But who decides about such aspects? There are not only opinions from within the 'scientific community', which is anyway an ill-defined group, but also from research funding bodies, politicians, journalists, voters etc. Evaluations based on the number of scientific articles seem to indicate that contributions devoted to the topic of QA of measurements are still less 'fashionable' than reports about new analytical methods or data. The topic is therefore not well suited for 'scientific headline hunting', that means for attracting the attention of a wider scientific audience or even the public. Consequently, it is also less taken into account within generally executed mechanisms for research funding and selection procedures for career advancements.

The additional characteristics of fashion, namely 'short-term appearance' and 'fast changing' do not really fit with the design and application of appropriate QA measures or even QA systems. It requires not only time to develop and implement QA, but its effect and value will only become evident after longer periods of operation. Therefore, the fashion aspect is usually not a significant driver for performing and publishing QA-related work.

On the other hand, if one uses the opportunity of the year's end also to evaluate the number of really (possibly even widely) applied new measurement procedures in comparison to the number of published proposals in a given period of the recent past (such as the papers from 3 years ago), one may be disappointed by the impact of many research programmes and activities in analytical sciences. This puts in question the approach used in many selection and evaluation processes. In fact counting and comparing numbers of published papers or provided data is much easier than judging and comparing the quality of a project outcome. In that respect it is recognised that reliable, validated parameters for such impact-oriented comparisons are currently still mostly lacking.

However, one can currently observe in several measurement areas an enhanced attention to QA. This is clearly demonstrated by the increasing number of accredited testing laboratories, proficiency providers and reference material producers. The stimulus comes mainly from regulations, such as accreditation demands on official product control laboratories, and competitive advantages in a globalising market.

Therefore, QA of measurements is (a growing) characteristic of present and recent times. It is not antiquated or obsolete, that means it is 'modern'.

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Accreditation and quality assurance (ACQUAL) is the publication instrument for modern QA in measurements. It is informing its readership about QA issues of current interest and importance. Therefore, we would like to receive further manuscripts which can be used as a reference of best measurement practice and modern QA concepts. They should preferably become longer-term benchmarks. Practitioner's reports could further illustrate this with examples about their impact on measurement communities and their adaption in new application areas. However, it is understood and accepted that also intermediate findings or ideas which are still not completely developed in all aspects or have been widely tested can be very inspiring for ongoing scientific-technical work. Therefore, the timely submission of such papers is encouraged as well.

Looking forward to the coming year(s) I am confident that the awareness and understanding for appropriate, modern QA of measurement results will be enhanced not only in the challenge-driven (formerly called 'applied') research but also in curiosity-driven research and at all relevant levels of education and training.

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