

Correspondence

Social justice in the Belt and Road plan

Guo Huadong outlines proposals to share big data on Earth observations across Asia, the Middle East and East Africa to ensure that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will contribute to sustainability (*Nature* 554, 25–27; 2018). Sustainability also includes issues of social justice and so, on the basis of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the BRI should include respect for human rights as well, so that everyone benefits.

In our view, the BRI could achieve this social sustainability by including bottom-up participation in all countries involved. China should do more to encourage European countries to sign up to the BRI and enhance the balance of views.

Transnational 'digital democracy' should reach beyond the exchange of goods, services and investments by empowering citizens, increasing opportunities for all and promoting peace (D. Helbing and P. Seele *Nature* 549, 458; 2017).

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Grounding ME/CFS therapies in science

I welcome the suggestion that patients with myalgic encephalomyelitis (also known as chronic fatigue syndrome; ME/CFS) should not be dismissed (M. Sharpe *et al.* *Nature* 554, 31; 2018). However, as someone who has been diagnosed with ME/CFS for 25 years, I contend that this argument should not be misused to perpetuate ineffective therapies that could raise false hopes and might amount to mistreatment.

As you point out (*Nature* 553, 14–17; 2018), the PACE trial authors (including two co-authors of Sharpe *et al.* in *Nature*) and others promote a form of

cognitive behavioural therapy that assumes ME/CFS symptoms can be reversed by teaching people to think differently, and a prescribed form of graded exercise that might be harmful.

Sharpe and colleagues urge readers not to reject scientific evidence that supports the use of such approaches. However, the Cochrane Reviews they cite rely on the results of the disputed PACE trial and several other studies that have similar methodological flaws. It is also notable that Sharpe and colleagues concluded: "There was little evidence of differences in outcomes between the randomised treatment groups at long-term follow-up" (see M. Sharpe *et al.* *Lancet Psychiatry* 2, 1067–1074; 2015).

The returns might be some way off, but the latest moves to pursue the growing evidence that ME/CFS symptoms are rooted in pathology is the proper approach (see, for example, go.nature.com/2fimftx).

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Bring supplementary citations into view

As David Shotton argues, all publishers should make bibliometric citations free to access, analyse and reuse (*Nature* 553, 129; 2018). I was disappointed, therefore, to find that references in online-only supplements in *Nature* can still be invisible, even though the problem was raised ten years ago (F. Seeber *Nature* 451, 887; 2008).

The use of online-only supplements and the number of citations they host has been rising steeply. For example, a highly cited paper entitled 'Worldwide acceleration of mountain erosion under a cooling climate' (F. Herman *et al.* *Nature* 504, 423–426; 2013) uses a global data set compiled by mining data from more than 400 publications. These references are listed only

in the paper's Supplementary Information and are invisible to Google Scholar and other citation-metric websites. One of those publications was mine.

As long as citation metrics are used for performance evaluation and to measure impact, lost bibliographic information is damaging — especially for early-career researchers. It is high time that *Nature* implemented measures to ensure the transparency Shotton advocates. **Kalin T. McDannell** *Geological Survey of Canada, Calgary, Canada.*
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Editor's note — *Nature* has now instigated a review of referencing practices, with the intention that all citations should be appropriately visible and indexed.

Nobel nominations reveal a way to win

We analysed hundreds of nominations for the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for the period 1901–66 to gain insight into how Nobel committees judged scientific research as worthy of this ultimate accolade.

Nomination letters become public 50 years after the award. Some simply highlight their nominees' lifetime achievements and portray individuals as world-leading scholars in their field. The (unsuccessful) nomination letters for antiseptics pioneer Joseph Lister, for instance, stated that he had "done more for the good of humanity than any other [living] member of the medical profession".

Others focus on discoveries that could open up new research areas. The sponsors of physician Charles Huggins, for example, argued that his "visionary" work meant that cancer was no longer perceived as an insurmountable problem. Huggins was awarded the Nobel in 1966 for his work on the hormonal treatment of prostate cancer.

The outcome of the nominations we studied

suggested to us that Nobel committees awarding this prize over the period in question were motivated by the potential research impact of a single innovation, rather than by a distinguished research record. This might explain why the pioneers of anaesthesia did not get the award (N. Hansson *et al.* *Anesthesiology* 125, 34–38; 2016). **Nils Hansson, Thorsten Halling, Heiner Fangerau** *Medical Faculty, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Germany.*
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Peer-review panels can be a wolf pack

I agree with Gemma Derrick that grant-review panels should be more collaborative so that they benefit from all the expertise around the table (*Nature* 554, 7; 2018). What I've seen of how these panels are conducted brings to mind a predatory wolf pack, rather than the tug of war between alliances that she describes.

My experience over the years is that one or two internationally eminent alpha personalities lead the room with their views on the applicant's kudos and calibre and whether this is sufficient to warrant consideration. The group dynamic then shifts palpably as panellists fall into line to concur. Individuals who would normally review work in their field confidently and independently start to act as a mob.

This unproductive behaviour would be alleviated if panels required all members to make their own initial assessment of proposals ahead of the meeting and to submit a voice message summarizing their appraisal to the chair. Final scoring could then be based on a composite of the raw scores by individual panel members, further informed by any extra insights arising from the subsequent group discussion.

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