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BRILLIANCE IS SUCCINCT

Embrace and respect the short communication

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Brilliant ideas are the building blocks of knowledge. Winning the Nobel Prize is a reasonable indicator of the brilliance of an idea. John Nash, with colleagues, won the Nobel Prize for the “pioneering analysis of equilibria in the theory of non-cooperative games” (The Nobel Prize, 2019). The Nobel Prize committee lists the Nash equilibrium as one of the key contributions. John Nash communicated proof of the existence of Nash Equilibria (Nash, 1950) in 908 words, 28 of which he uses to thank a colleague who suggested the theorem Nash needed to derive his proof.

Brilliant ideas require a huge amount of thinking, but communicating them does not necessarily require many words. Many leading academic journals, therefore, publish so-called Short Communications or Research Notes: authors present their ideas succinctly, while providing methodological details in supplementary files.

Yet, in today’s academic environment, authors and universities struggle to embrace and respect short publication formats. I personally love writing Research Notes: straight to the point. Suits me. In my role as Editor-in-Chief, I sometimes suggest to authors the Research Note as a more suitable format for their work. Many react offended: “This paper is too good! We don’t want to *waste* it by *downgrading* it to a Research Note. We don’t want to *undersell* our contribution.” Recently I witnessed a university’s attempt to develop a scheme for incentivizing desirable publications. The university chose to exclude short publication formats. So: today, John Nash would be perceived as “wasting”, as “downgrading”, as “underselling” his work. His university would not be rewarding him for proving the existence of Nash Equilibria.

We need to rethink. We need to refocus. We need to remember what really matters. In knowledge creation, brilliant ideas really matter. Sure, sometimes communicating a brilliant idea requires many words. But often it does not. Often, if the idea cannot be expressed succinctly, it is just not brilliant enough.

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