

Theme issue contribution

The Emergence of the Academic Candidate: Evaluation as textual dramaturgy

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Abstract

Our contribution sheds light on the dramaturgies of evaluation that precede candidate selection in academic organizations. The dramaturgies unfold across committee meetings, reviews, and reports that funnel the pool of candidates into a shortlist of prospective members. Because they are prolonged and not all stages involve copresence, the continuity and consistency of evaluative processes is a central dramaturgical problem. It highlights the constitutive role of written documents for the continuity and consistency of organizational evaluation processes. We marshal evidence from a comparative study on academic candidacy in two organizational settings: grantmakers, who select candidates for funding, and universities, who select candidates for professorships. Drawing on archived records produced in the context of research grant applications and professorial recruitments between 1950 and 2000, we distinguish two regimes of textual agency throughout the processes of evaluation: documents structure the process of candidate selection throughout dramaturgical stages, and they act as relays that transfer assessments of human actors across dramaturgical stages and time. In addition, by focusing on organizational access and showing how organizations make people before even hiring them, we draw attention to the emergence of a highly scripted dramatic figure in academic life: the candidate.

Keywords: academia; candidates; documents; dramaturgy; organizations; textual agency

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Introduction

Academia takes place in various organizational settings, and academics have to juggle different membership statuses in their daily work: they can be members of universities and colleges, they have contractual relationships with funding agencies and publishers, and they engage in professional associations. Academic organizations grant researchers access to material resources as well as the possibility to capitalize on the organization's visibility and legitimacy to the outside world. However, in times of scarce public funding for research and performance-based research governance, academics increasingly have to apply for resources inside and outside of the academic institution they belong to (Whitley and Gläser 2014). Being a candidate has thus become a pervasive feature of contemporary academic life. Because they are almost in a continuous state of candidacy, academics have to perform the role of the worthy candidate in different contexts and for a variety of purposes to forge their position in the academic world.

Although candidacy plays an important role in academic life, we know little about the process throughout which academics present themselves as candidates for organizational resources, and about the evaluative problems academic organizations face when they have to select prospective members. Crucially, prospective members are not selected based on ad-hoc decisions but through evaluative processes. Throughout these processes, evaluators with heterogeneous interests mobilize different criteria and principles to identify their "ideal candidate" (Lamont et al. 2000), while, in turn, candidates attempt a performance that is molded to meet these expectations and thus "offer their observers an impression that is idealized" (Goffman 1959: 23).

Following Goffman, we conceptualize the candidate selection process as a dramaturgy that is shaped by a specific – in our case, organizational – environment and which unfolds throughout a series of committee meetings, reviews, and reports that funnel the pool of candidates into a shortlist of prospective members. Because not all stages of the dramaturgy involve copresence, and academic evaluation is not only diachronic but also notoriously prolonged, the continuity and consistency of the performance is a central dramaturgical problem. In this article, we investigate how written documents remedy this problem. Our focus on "textual agency" (Cooren 2004) reveals how documents facilitate the continuity and consistency of organizational evaluation processes by establishing two regimes of agency: they provide a structure that lends the candidate selection process coherence and unity, and they act as relays that document, establish, and transfer assessments of human actors across a series of dramaturgical stages.

We marshal evidence from a comparative study on academic candidacy in two organizational settings: grantmaking organizations and universities. Both organizations are relevant cases for the

regulation of access to resources. They represent highly bureaucratized settings that provide ample evidence for textual agency. We gathered and analyzed archived records produced in the context of research grant applications and professorial recruitments between 1950 and 2000, a period that represents major changes in the German academic funding landscape and career system. The corpus comprises a total of over 2,000 documents, including job advertisements, application guidelines, motivation letters as well as grant proposals, and allows us to develop a comparative and longitudinal perspective on academic evaluation.

In highlighting the constitutive role of documents for the dramaturgy of evaluation, we hope to expand the analytical and methodological repertoire of valuation studies. In addition, by focusing on organizational access and showing how organizations make people before even hiring them, we draw attention to the emergence of a highly scripted dramatic figure in academic life: the candidate.

Literature review: Evaluation as a process and the role of non-human actors

Competition has always been an inherent feature of science (Merton 1996). Yet empirical accounts abound that observe a change in the way science is organized (Whitley and Gläser 2007; Shattock 2014). Competition, it is argued, is no longer an inherent logic of the profession – rather, it has become a managerial principle of the research organization (Musselin 2010a, 2021; Espeland and Sauder 2016; Board of Editors 2021). It is both the chosen mean to allocate scarce symbolic and material resources and serves as a controversial index for quality (Hicks et al. 2015): the worth of research, the researcher and the research institution reveals itself through comparison with others. With the multiplication of competition comes the necessity to compete and, hence, to apply, to evaluate and to select (Stark 2020).

This article investigates competitions for access to organizational resources such as (grant) funding, to publication space, prizes, fellowships, or academic positions. It takes a processual and comparative view of the evaluation of academic candidates stretching from the moment of application to the final decision of the jury. Scholars interested in the (e)valuation of academics have analyzed, for instance, how funding panels reach consensus in face of uncertainty and disagreement in the group (Roumbanis 2017), or how panels mobilize criteria like “originality” (Guetzkow et al. 2004), “excellence” (Lamont 2009), or “impact” (Derrick and Samuel 2016) to argue for the quality of grant proposals. Regarding the recruitment of professors, research has revealed how different academic criteria like networks and publications (Combes et al. 2008) intertwine in the

decision-making process with non-academic criteria like gender (van den Brink and Benschop 2012) and how reviewers weave together disparate evaluative criteria into coherent trajectories (Hammarfelt et al. 2020). Yet, the literature on evaluation – and especially evaluation in academia – tends to focus on evaluative “situations,” i.e., time constrained moments of interaction in a copresent group. Although the “situationalism” of valuation studies has recently been challenged (Waibel et al. 2021), most empirical studies continue to conceptualize evaluation as a situated practice (see also Krüger and Reinhart 2017). The current article proposes to open up analytical perspectives by conceptualizing evaluation as a dramaturgical process that spans across evaluative stages. The concept of dramaturgy suggests the existence of a collective plot, or a script, enacted by those engaged in academic evaluation. The plot is designed to justify a collective decision to grant or not grant a person access to organizational resources. Our cases of candidate selection in professorial recruitment and grantmaking convey that this process can be more or less formalized and vary in length. For this reason, it is essential to focus on how the drama may be sustained over different evaluative situations or “stages.”

We therefore turn our attention to the role of written documents as a neglected aspect of agency in valuation studies. The field of valuation studies has become increasingly interested in the evaluative agency of non-human actors such as indicators (Hammarfelt and Rushforth 2017; Kullenberg and Nelhans 2017), infrastructures (Krüger and Petersohn 2022), algorithms (Baka 2015), and rankings (Espeland and Sauder 2007; Brankovic et al. 2022). In most of these cases, things with agency are conceptualized as “devices” (Muniesa et al. 2007; Hamann et al. 2023). Few studies attend to written documents as things that have agency and that can make a difference in evaluation. Examples of such approaches are Latour’s analysis of the role that the anatomy of scientific articles plays in the construction of facts (Latour 1988), Winsor’s study on the organizing capacity of “work orders” in a laboratory (Winsor 2000), Hamann and Kaltenbrunner’s analysis of how *curricula vitae* affect biographical representation in evaluative settings (Hamann and Kaltenbrunner 2022), and Ehrenstein and Muniesa’s account of how carbon offsetting projects rely on “paper devices” like financial contracts (Ehrenstein and Muniesa 2013). It is this strand of literature that we contribute to in order to further valuation studies’ understanding of the agentic role of documents. To this end we draw on the textual agency approach (Cooren 2004; Ashcraft et al. 2009). Anchored in organization studies, this approach highlights the agentic capacity of written documents in organizational processes. Informed by speech act theory and its notion of performativity (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) as well as actor–network theory (ANT) and its emphasis of socio-material practices (Latour

1999; MacKenzie et al. 2008), the textual agency approach offers to the field of valuation studies notions of performativity and agency that transcend the notion of human actorhood and recognize both the material and the temporal dimension in the constitution of value. Our cases show how, throughout the evaluative dramaturgy of candidate selection, written documents provide a structure and act as relays for evaluations.

The current article proposes three contributions to valuation studies more generally and the literature on academic evaluation in particular. First, we strive to emphasize the role of written documents for academic evaluation by showing how they organize its processual dimension. Second, we argue that written documents construct a specific dramatization that constitutes candidates. Third, it became evident that the dramaturgy of evaluation varies with regard to the type of membership it targets. The following section will discuss how we mobilize these contributions to study different cases of academic evaluation: candidate selection in grantmaking and professorial recruitment.

Theory: Candidate selection as an evaluative dramaturgy

Academic evaluation, like many other forms of cultural valuation, deals with incommensurables. Academic achievements and worth are notoriously difficult to grasp, measure, and assess (Lamont 2009; Karpik 2011). One consequence is that academic assessments are hard to replicate due to the uniqueness of both reviewers and the reviewed (Chubin and Hackett 1990; Cicchetti 1991; Langfeldt 2001). Attempts to formalize evaluative practices have resulted in complex arrangements including a multitude of actors: candidates, papers, and grant proposals are funneled into an elaborate evaluative process featuring reviews and reports, as well as jury and committee meetings, before being ranked and selected (or not) (Hirschauer 2010; Serrano Velarde 2018). We propose to frame this evaluative process as a “dramaturgy.”

Goffman (1959) developed the concept of dramaturgy as an all-encompassing conceptual metaphor to capture how social situations are organized around issues of performance and framing (Oswick et al. 2001; Boje et al. 2003; Manning 2008). While he argued that elements of the dramatic seep into everyday life via a multitude of forms and channels, he developed his most systematic account of the dramaturgy of organizations in *Asylums* (Goffman 1961). In this particular form of organization – a total institution – people are constrained in clearly defined roles that afford little room for discretion. The organization foresees a particular way to process patients, molding them to organizational routines until no trace of the former self is left

(Sundberg forthcoming). Borrowing on Goffman's insights into the organizational processing of people, we propose to focus on the way organizations select new members. The application process thereby encompasses the actual application of prospective candidates as well as their evaluation. The dramaturgy of evaluation develops on three dimensions: the dimension of the plot, the role dimension, and the textual dimension.

First, the heuristic of the dramaturgy underlines that processes of evaluation are purposefully arranged in a specific order and toward a common goal. Conceiving of evaluations as having a "plot" counters the prevailing situationalism of valuation studies and emphasizes that evaluations proceed throughout different stages that span across time and space while building on each other. For the current article, the notion of evaluative dramaturgies conveys recursive assessment of the candidates at different points in time in view of reaching a final decision regarding candidate selection.

Second, just as Goffman's dramaturgical theory suggests that a person's identity is not stable but constantly remade as the person interacts with others, the notion of candidate selection as a dramaturgy emphasizes that candidates' qualities and traits, expertise and reputation, rights and duties – and, ultimately, worth – are not determined in a onetime act of evaluation. Rather, they emerge as a function of organizational expectations – which are conveyed to the candidates as a role – and the degree to which the candidates' performance responds to these expectations and values (Goffman 1959). In line with newer research on figures of dramatization such as Callon's "homo economicus" (Callon 1999; MacKenzie et al. 2008) or Lezaun and Muniesa's "business self" (Lezaun and Muniesa 2016), we argue that the academic "candidate" emerges as a leading dramatic figure in the process of evaluation.

Third, because candidates' achievements and worth are notoriously difficult to assess and because organizations have to form a coherent set of expectations toward candidates, the continuity and consistency of candidate selection is a central dramaturgical problem. This problem is further aggravated because candidate selection is usually a prolonged process that does not involve copresence throughout all stages of the process. Yet, candidate selection has to conclude with a legitimate decision that is recognized by the circle of direct participants and beyond (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). We argue that written documents play a crucial role for the organization of candidate selection by ensuring continuity and consistency of assessments throughout time and space (Asdal and Reinertsen 2022). While human actors evaluate, assess, and decide over candidates, written documents act both as a structure by stabilizing and organizing the evaluative process and as a relay that connects stages of the dramaturgy by transferring human assessments throughout the evaluative process

(Cooren 2004). Highlighting the constitutive nature of documents for evaluative dramaturgies such as academic evaluation implies that the organization of such dramaturgies is an ongoing, interactive achievement transcending situated forms of human agency (Asdal 2015). Thus, particular attention will be paid to how written documents relate to each other to stabilize and structure the evaluation of candidates. Relatedly, the agency of documents extends to the human actors partaking in the evaluation because documents explicate and transfer candidates' performances, as well as the evaluations and decisions of reviewers and jury members. In highlighting the constitutive role of written documents for the dramaturgy of evaluation and the constitution of the dramatic figure of the "candidate," we join scholarship in valuation studies that has been concerned with the agency of written documents and hope to expand the analytical and methodological repertoire of valuation studies.

Data and methods

This study builds on the systematic comparison of how candidates are evaluated and selected in two "most different" organizational settings within academia (Otner 2010): German grantmakers, who select candidates for funding, and universities, which select candidates for professorships. The two cases differ with regard to the temporal dimension of resource allocation (Bakker et al. 2016). Grantmakers establish a temporary relation to their candidates in the sense that the successful applicant will receive funding as well as the symbolic benefits of being considered the funder's "grantee" for the duration of the research project. The plot of this dramaturgy is geared toward granting successful candidates temporally limited access to organizational resources. In comparison, becoming a full professor at a German university usually entails a lifetime position in both the university and the civil service apparatus of the German state, which universities are legally part of. Thus, the plot aims at granting selected candidates permanent access to material resources as well as the symbolic benefits the professorial status entails. To trace changes in the evaluative dramaturgy over time, we use archival data that documents the evaluation and selection of candidates over a period of 55 years. We chose to concentrate on the years between 1950 and 2005 for they represent, historically speaking, a period of major change for the governance of German academia:¹ While university reforms in the

¹ While we managed to gather application documentation from grantmaking institutions for the entire period of observation, data access to professorial appointment procedures was constrained by law. Due to the German law on data privacy, we were unable to access archival records on professorial recruitment for the past 30 years. This limits our data access in the case of professorial appointment procedures to the years between 1950 and 1985.

1970s expanded access to tertiary education, the period from the 1980s onward was marked by continuous financial cutbacks and the implementation of competition-based managerial practices (Wolter 2004; Schimank 2005). Simply put: the available funding for research decreased. Our data thus covers a period of time in which academics increasingly had to apply for organizational resources to do research and in which being a candidate thus became a pervasive feature of academic life. By embracing a longitudinal perspective on evaluation dramaturgies, we shed light on the historical constitution of evaluative situations and the roles, expectations, and normative ascriptions attached to it.

The case of grantmaking

Our analysis of grantmakers draws on written documents produced in the framework of the renowned “open call” program (Normalverfahren) at the German Research Foundation, DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) between 1959 and 2005.² With a budget of €3.3 billion per annum (DFG 2019) and a nearly 100-year-old history, the DFG is by far the most influential grantmaker in Germany. The beginning of modern grant writing practices dates back to the DFG’s introduction of the first application guideline in 1959. Application guidelines – and more specifically those published by the DFG – have played a crucial part in the rationalization and professionalization of grant writing practices by formalizing the rules of interaction between the grantmaker and the candidate. By the mid-1970s, most German funding organizations worked with application guidelines. The introduction of such guidelines changed the evaluative dramaturgy because it demanded that the proposals would go through peer review if they were deemed “complete” and “in order.”

Following Goffman, application guidelines set the stage for the evaluative dramaturgy by explicating the funder’s expectations. Because they bring forth the formal requirements that “candidates” (Serrano Velarde et al. 2018) have to adhere to when they apply for funding by writing grant proposals, these documents may be considered a form of “staging talk” (Goffman 1959). Application guidelines provide information about the general terms of funding as well as concrete, action-oriented messages about the grant-writing and evaluation process (Kastberg 2008). Rather than just stipulating ways in which candidates ought to frame grant proposals, the agency of application guidelines consists in laying out specific expectations regarding the role of the candidate. These then form the backdrop against which candidates’ performance and impressions are assessed in

² The “open call” program is not only the oldest but also one of the most important tools for funding basic research in Germany.

the following stages. To grasp the performance of candidates throughout the evaluative dramaturgy, we marshaled three main data sources: all DFG application guidelines issued in the “open call” program from 1959 to 2005, archival data from the DFG, and 80 grant proposals written by organic chemists and political scientists between 1975 and 2005 (sampling the documents in 10-year intervals). The corpus contains about 1,000 pages of material.

The case of professorial hiring

Our second case analyzes the archival records from 145 appointment procedures that took place at 16 universities between 1950 and 1985. The corpus we have analyzed comprises a total of over 1,500 documents, including job advertisements, applications, reviews on candidates, and laudations in which committees explain their choices for the shortlist. Appointing professors in Germany is an intricate and rather bureaucratic procedure that often takes a year or more (Musselin 2010b). Since full professors are civil servants of the state, the formal appointment is carried out by the respective state government, while the scholarly evaluation that precedes the formal decision is made on behalf of the state in an appointment procedure.

The evaluative dramaturgy of professorial appointments developed in the 1950s, became a standard routine by the early 1960s and, although the evaluative criteria for professorial hiring changed, the process itself did not undergo radical changes throughout our period of study. The plot of the dramaturgy opens with the job advertisement, a document that explicates the expectations of the appointment committee (and the department it represents). Following Goffman, candidates’ applications, which include at least a cover letter, a curriculum vitae (CV), and a list of publications, are crafted to convey an impression that is consonant with these expectations. The application documents guide the appointment committee’s decisions on which candidates make the longlist to be invited for a job interview. The candidate’s performance at the job interview is supplemented by another crucial type of document: external reviews that the appointment committee solicits from peers. Drawing on the application documents, external reviews, and the impression from the job interview, the committee concludes its work by deciding on a shortlist of two to three candidates. This shortlist is given coherence and stabilized by a document called “laudation”, which explains the committee’s decisions and the precise order of candidates on the shortlist. Together with the shortlist, the laudation is submitted to the subsequent decision-making bodies in the university. Just as candidate selection of grantmakers is fundamentally carried by written documents, several documents play a constitutive role for professorial

appointments: job advertisements, candidates' applications, external reviews, and laudations.

Methodology

Our analysis of the archival material draws on a grounded theory perspective (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Denzin 2000) with an emphasis on iterative analysis that goes back and forth between data and theoretical concepts. We conducted multiple rounds of systematic coding which allowed us to identify the main processes through which candidates are evaluated and selected. In a first phase of open coding, we categorized data according to content in order to identify prevalent themes in the assessment of candidates. Several recurring codes, for example, regarding organizational expectations or candidates' performance, emerged in this initial step. In a second round of axial coding, we condensed and interconnected the codes in order to establish connections within and across different types of documents. The intra- and intertextual approach of our analysis has proven to be particularly fruitful in studying the constitutive role of written documents for the evaluative dramaturgies of candidate selection.

We proceeded from the assumption that the textual agency that shapes the evaluative dramaturgy of candidate selection in both professorial recruitment and research grants can be reconstructed via archived records. Our approach emphasizes the agency of job announcements, application guidelines, applications, reviews, or laudations (Cooren 2004; Prior 2012). In order to uncover the relational aspect in these texts, we crafted an analytical framework that targets the dramaturgies of candidate selection both within and across different documents. The framework is particularly sensitized for the "local translocation" (Cooren 2004: 374) of assessments because it allows us to trace how the evaluation of candidates is structured both by a document's purpose at a specific stage in the plot and by references to assessments made at previous stages of the process.

Findings: Two cases of academic candidate selection

Textual agency in the evaluative dramaturgy of grantmaking

The following section is concerned with the constitutive role of written documents for the dramaturgy of candidate selection for research grants. The section first shows how application guidelines shape the dramaturgy of candidate selection by conveying organizational expectations toward candidates. Second, it illustrates

how grant proposals take up these cues and herald the next step of the dramaturgy by constituting a dramaturgical front that allows the grantmaker to make sense of the applicants (Goffman 1959: 13–19). The section concludes by discussing how the organizational expectations and the resulting evaluative dramaturgy have changed throughout our period of study.

How application guidelines explicate expectations toward candidates' performance

The first application guideline published in 1959 presents the DFG as a membership-based organization that aims at supporting the work of scientists and engaging in community-building (Torka 2009). Early application guidelines exert little “directive dominance” (Goffman 1959: 62). Rather than prescribing a standardized repertoire for the role that is to be assumed by candidates, the dominant modality of early application guidelines is permissive and enabling. Candidates are addressed as “researcher,” “professor,” or “scholar” in search of rightful support for their research ideas. This reflects the wide range of expectations toward candidates. In line with this, early application guidelines also give rather cursory instructions for candidates’ performance. They do not decidedly pre-structure the subsequent steps of the evaluative dramaturgy but merely highlight the options

candidates have when they write a grant proposal. These options are conveyed by a list of bullet points that candidates should address in their texts (Figure 1).

<p>Anträge können jederzeit gestellt werden. Sie sollen enthalten:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. das Thema des Forschungsvorhabens,2. das Arbeitsprogramm,3. die voraussichtliche Dauer der Arbeit,4. eine Aufgliederung der erbetenen Forschungsmittel. Die einzelnen Anforderungen sind zu begründen.
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Figure 1: DFG application guideline 1959

Translation: Grant proposals can be submitted at any time and should include: (1) the topic of the research endeavor; (2) the work program; (3) planned duration of the work; (4) a list of the required resources. These are to be justified.

Source: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. 1959. Hinweise für Antragsteller. Franz Steiner Verlag: Wiesbaden

The guidelines were published every year (with minor changes only), until a completely new application guideline was issued in 1981. Following a massive increase in applicants, the grantmaker was confronted with the need to be more selective and transparent about

decision-making.³ The 1981 application guideline responds to this need: it is not only more detailed but also compulsory for all, thus structuring the evaluative dramaturgy more decidedly and standardizing grant proposals toward greater continuity. This consistency between applications, in turn, would allow peers and decision-makers to compare different grant proposals. The new application guideline states the grantmaker's expectations toward candidates more clearly and in form of a role: "the applicant" (*der Antragsteller*). Since 1981 and in all the successive revisions of the application guidelines, "the applicant" is increasingly disciplined into fulfilling a growing list of expectations with regard to the grant proposal. While in 1959, the applicant was "free to write the proposal the way he chooses" (DFG 1959), the 1981 guideline features predominantly directives – that is, speech acts – that are to cause the reader to take a particular action (Austin 1962). Applicants are supposed to take responsibility over budget and establish a work plan including a clear repartition of tasks. In the proposal, "the applicant must make explicit where he positions his work and what type of contributions he is going to make to the existing literature" (DFG 1981). Moreover, the guidelines convey that the grantmaker expects "detailed information regarding the methodological framework of the study and existing methodological competencies at the institute or the applicant's work group" as well as a "short description of the main research findings and publications of the applicant" (DFG 1981). Guidelines articulate these expectations with the help of modal verbs indicating obligation and constraint such as "must" and "should." Whereas early application guidelines emphasized the rights of candidates to apply for resources and express their thoughts freely, application guidelines published after 1981 stress candidates' duties. As expectations toward candidates and the complexity of the role they have to perform increase over the following years, so does the size of application guidelines. By the end of our observation period, guidelines confront prospective candidates with 40 pages of instructions indicating how to perform their role, that is, what to write, when, and how.

Throughout the years, what emerges from the ever-expanding guidelines is a value framework that spells out a more and more coherent set of organizational expectations and expects the candidate – i.e., the "applicant" – to perform an increasing number of duties. An updated version of the application guideline issued in 1995 specifies these duties, and disciplines candidates to become both reliable project managers and productive researchers. On the one hand, candidates are made responsible for managerial aspects of the project: "The quality of

³ In the 1970s, the German university system witnessed a massive expansion of both student and staff numbers (Wolter 2004). As a result, the number of grant applications increased, as did the sums of money for which researchers applied.

the work program is of paramount importance for the evaluation of this proposal. The work program should show what part of the budget is dedicated to which specific work task” (DFG 1995). At the same time, the application guideline issued in 1995 highlights the importance of the project output and making a novel contribution to research. Thus, the role of the productive researcher conveys another expectation to which candidates-turned-applicants have to adjust.

The development outlined thus far reveals that application guidelines exert textual agency by structuring the candidate selection process and lending coherence to the evaluative dramaturgy. First, they standardize grant writing techniques. For example, the page limit for grant proposals is reduced to 20 pages and the candidate is constrained “to answer the questions included in the application guidelines and only those” (DFG 2003). Second, guidelines structure the evaluative dramaturgy by establishing “the applicant” as a taken-for-granted role and ascribing an elaborated set of rights, duties, and expectations to this role.

How grant proposals endorse the role of the ideal candidate

In the next step of the dramaturgy, grant writers have attuned their performance of “the applicant” to the guidelines and the inherent value framework. Their grant proposals lend the candidate selection process coherence and unity by responding precisely to the expectations that have been explicated by the application guidelines: proposals position candidates as competent, reliable, and productive project managers. Being geared toward the funder’s expectations, grant proposals constitute a dramaturgical front that allows the funder to make sense of the candidate (Goffman 1959: 13–19).

Grant proposals dating from before the publication of the first compulsory application guidelines in 1981 tend to be heterogeneous with regard to both content and style. They have in common that they offer precious little details with regard to the work program, expected results, or even the project’s budget. Driven by a belief that research is an open-ended, exploratory, and holistic process that is difficult to plan, early proposals focus instead on the research problem. They document the applicant’s knowledgeability and competence by discussing the existing literature and describing the phenomenon that is to be investigated in great detail. As a result, the actual grant proposal reads more like a book manuscript or a paper than a modern project outline.

The 1981 application guidelines brought a sharp turn in the way candidates could adjust their performance to the funder’s expectations. Because the new application guidelines confront them with the need to justify the relevance of their planned contribution and the soundness of their work plan, grant writers assume a role that is supposed to

71 Valuation Studies

meet the funder's expectations. Grant proposals written in the 1980s document this performance by featuring, for instance, detailed literature reviews of up to 40 pages in order to demonstrate the applicant's level of expertise. While they also include punctual information on the planned division of tasks, it is only in the 1990s that grant proposals firmly position the candidate as a competent project manager:

The project will be implemented by the applicant and the research assistant. However, the research assistant will be responsible for the larger share of work since the applicant is constrained by his teaching duties. (Grant proposal, 1985, political sciences).

The following work division is based on the scientific background and competences of the research team: [the applicant] will focus on establishing the theoretical framework of the research project and lead the empirical investigation. (Grant proposal, 1995, political sciences).

As illustrated by the quotes, later proposals provide more details regarding the allocation of tasks and responsibilities within the project team. Proposals establish the candidates' managerial skills by documenting, for example, how the efficacy of task allocation is ensured through the recruitment of competent team members. The fact that proposals take up the expectations they find articulated in the guidelines underlines that documents do not only structure the evaluative dramaturgy but also act as relays that connect different stages of the dramaturgy and thus lend coherence to the evaluative process.

Grant proposals submitted after 1981 also respond to the expectations established by the guidelines by signaling the "reliability" of applicants – that is, their ability to ensure the project's success and feasibility. Especially in the life sciences, risks of failure refer to the potential occurrence of errors or inconclusive outcomes in a series of trials. While failure is considered an integral part of the experimental research process in early proposals, the norm is challenged over time, as the following quotes suggest:

(...) many research groups have worked on the structural analysis without success. Given these risks, it is understandable that our work plan provides but a first orientation. Instead, it must continually evolve and adapt analysis to the research process. (Grant proposal, 1975, organic chemistry).

As the collision took place in a strong electric field, [...] it was impossible to measure the angular distribution of the ions. This is why the applicant has worked these last two years on improving the reflection collider by developing an apparatus that allows for capture and analysis of the

diffusion of cluster ions while checking [...] for angular distribution. (Grant proposal, 1995, organic chemistry).

While the first quote from 1975 names sources of failure, the second quote from 1995 features a sophisticated contingency plan. The proposal not only documents the contingency measure. Rather, it assures evaluators that the necessary steps have been taken to facilitate optimal trial conditions before even receiving the funding. In both the disciplines we investigated – organic chemistry and political sciences – contingency plans included a combination of preliminary studies and financial cross-subsidization – thus signaling a deep commitment on behalf of the applicant to the success of the project.

The role of the applicant as a competent and reliable project manager goes hand in hand with expectations regarding research performance and project output. The promise of future research outcomes in the form of “expected results” is a significant dimension in grant proposals – especially in the 1990s and early 2000s. By framing applicants as productive and successful researchers, grant proposals suggest a strong correlation between a proposal’s projected results and their past research record, as the following quote suggests.

In a recently finished research project funded by the DFG [name of research project] [selfreference, self-reference], the applicant and his research team developed an interactionist analytical framework that allows mapping of the dynamic exchange between foreign trade and the existence of supranational governance structures. (Grant proposal, 2005, political sciences).

The second step of the evaluative dramaturgy reveals the textual agency of grant proposals. They take up the expectations laid out in the application guidelines and allow for candidates to perform the role of “the applicant” in a way that is supposed to match the expectations of the funder. In doing so, grant proposals organize candidates’ performance and give coherence to this stage of the evaluative dramaturgy.

Changing organizational expectations in the evaluative dramaturgy of grantmaking

Nowadays, “the applicant” has become a taken-for-granted role academics assume when becoming candidates for research grants. The historical analysis of application guidelines and grant proposals reveals that the constitution of this role was not immediate. Rather, “the applicant” is the result of an incremental process throughout which guidelines and proposals established a role that fits the expectations of the grantmaker: application guidelines have become more decided and resolute in establishing more – and more specific – expectations

toward candidates. Grant proposals have responded to these expectations and constituted a dramaturgical front that allows both the candidate to perform according to the funder's expectations and the funder to make sense of the candidate (Serrano Velarde 2018).

With regard to the subsequent steps of the evaluative dramaturgy, i.e., the review process and the DFG's final decision, we have to concede that we were not granted access to the reviews or to the jury decisions. Nevertheless, we assume two things: first, although peers were not given concise guidelines for the evaluation of the grant proposal in the timeframe we studied, their reviews could hardly stray from the value framework articulated in both application guidelines and grant proposals. If they were to give a qualitative judgment, it was on the backdrop of the expectations and values established by the two documents. Second, peers qualify as reviewers because they have been successful with grant proposals themselves. The funder thus selects peers for the review of grant proposals that have already worked with (and thus internalized) the positions presented in the funder's documentation. It is thus highly likely that the next steps of the evaluative dramaturgy reproduce the value framework articulated by the application guideline.

Textual agency in the evaluative dramaturgy of professorial hiring

This section is concerned with the constitutive role of written documents for the dramaturgy of candidate selection for professorships. It first reveals that job advertisements kick off the evaluative dramaturgy but leave the organizational expectations toward candidates rather underspecified. Accordingly, application documents do not take up the specific expectations of the appointing department and establish a rather general performance. Second, the section shows how reviews and laudations specify expectations toward candidates' performance in the subsequent dramaturgical steps. It concludes by discussing how organizational expectations and the resulting evaluative dramaturgy have changed throughout our period of study.

How job advertisements and applications leave expectations toward candidates underspecified

The beginning of the evaluative dramaturgy for the appointment of professors is strikingly similar to our case of grant writing. A first similarity is that application guidelines in the previous case consist only of a few bullet points during the first decades of our period of study (see Figure 1) and establish increasingly detailed expectations toward candidates from the 1980s onwards. Our analysis reveals a

similar development for job advertisements, the documents that kick off the evaluative dramaturgy for professorial hiring. Until the late 1970s, job advertisements had not specified expectations toward candidates in a systematic way. Rather than prescribing a standardized repertoire for the role that is to be assumed by candidates, job advertisements exert little “directive dominance” (Goffman 1959: 62). They merely state the research field of the vacant professorship and outline the minimum formal requirements for the job (habilitation, research interest, experience in the field of the vacant position, teaching experience). Beyond this, job advertisements do not offer conclusive information regarding the expectations of the appointing department. As a second similarity with application guidelines for grant proposals, early job advertisements address candidates as “personality,” “applicant,” “scholar,” or “holder of the position.” This vagueness indicates that the role candidates are expected to assume in the plot are not clearly defined (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Exemplary job announcement for modern history, 1968

Translation: The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University Fridericiana of Karlsruhe (Technical University) has a vacancy for a full professor in history and director of the department of history. A personality is sought with completed scholarly education (modern history), habilitation and teaching experience as well as an interest in the economic and societal problems of the technical age. Applications including CV, publications list and references from experts at institutions of higher education are requested to be sent to the dean of faculty by 10.12.1968.

Source: Published in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Nr. 266, 14. Nov. 1968

In the 1980s, job advertisements become more comprehensive. They go beyond stating the mere minimum formal requirements and indicate more clearly how candidates are expected to perform their role. Job advertisements now distinguish formal requirements and qualitative expectations of the committee regarding research and teaching experience of the candidates. An example of the latter would be the following quote from a job advertisement in 1981: “The focus of the applicant’s research and teaching should be social history of Eastern Europe. It is expected that he [sic] can read seminars on the

history of Southeastern Europe” (job advertisement, 1981, history). However, roles evoked by job advertisements are still diverse, reaching from “applicant” to “prospective holder of the position.”

In the 1980s, the typical job advertisement is considerably more extensive than advertisements in the earlier decades of our sample. Although our data on professorial appointment procedures ends in 1985 (see note 1), research on current job advertisements suggests that these have become even more extensive and include an increasing number of requirements (Klawitter 2017). In terms of textual agency, more recent job advertisements thus pre-structure the subsequent steps of the evaluative dramaturgy more decidedly.

Throughout our period of study, job advertisements were usually formulated in a passive, proclaiming voice that does not address the candidate directly (e.g., “a position at University X is to be filled”; job advertisement, 1983, German studies). Even the last paragraph of job advertisements, which lists the documents candidates should include in their application, maintains the passive voice. A typical example from 1982 reads: “Applications in German language [...] are to be sent to [...]” (job advertisement, 1982, history).

Responding to rather underdetermined job advertisements that do not address them directly and give merely cursory instructions for their performance, candidates enter the evaluative dramaturgy with few clues about the specific expectations of the appointing department. The value framework in which candidates can position themselves is thus rather wide. Consequently, candidates’ applications in our sample are not geared to the specific expectations of the committee or the department. At this point, the consistency and coherence of the evaluation process has to be considered rather low.

Just as job advertisements stipulate more requirements and expectations from the 1980s onward, applications become more extensive and differentiated throughout our period of study. This development is reflected by a major shift in the format of CVs (Hamann and Kaltenbrunner 2022). The main documents in candidates’ applications until the 1970s are narrative CVs in which candidates develop their biography as a coherent course of events that is presented through selective storytelling. From the 1970s onwards, CVs transition into the form of a list, which breaks up coherent narratives into bullet points and keywords that cover biographical events in an increasingly differentiated fashion. With regard to textual agency, the application is no longer carried by the CV alone but complemented by a number of additional documents that have gained importance (and length) over time. From the 1970s onward, CVs are complemented by extensive, internally structured lists of publications and of taught seminars. These additional documents open up a space for intertextual relations. Numerous relations are established between the different documents of the application: CVs often reference specific

positions on the publications and seminar lists. For example, one CV reads: “My main research is archeology of the Middle Ages, some journal articles on medieval realia have appeared, cf. publication list Nr. 35, 40, 42, 45” (CV, 1981, history).

In contrast to our first case, the textual agency during the first stages of the evaluative dramaturgy is rather weak. Neither job advertisements nor applications decidedly structure the candidate selection process toward greater coherence and consistency. First, they do not establish a taken-for-granted role that candidates could assume but convey a variety of different roles. Second, the documents introduce a wide value framework and give few clues about the specific expectations candidates have to meet with their performances. Job advertisements leave organizational expectations toward candidates rather underdetermined, prompting applications that do not explicitly relate to the vacant position. Specific expectations toward candidates only evolve and consolidate in the subsequent stages of the evaluative dramaturgy, to which we will now attend.

How reviews and laudations explicate expectations toward candidates' performance

In order to arrive at a shortlist of candidates, committees have to narrow down the hitherto wide value framework and agree on a common vision of an “ideal candidate” (Lamont et al. 2000). This is coherent with what Goffman writes about a set of performers – which he coins a “performance team” – needing to cooperate in a single dramaturgy. Instead of a rich and diverse definition of the dramaturgical situation, the performance team has to commit to a common definition of the situation (Goffman 1959: 53). Reviews and laudations, the two documents that shape the dramaturgy at this point in time, play a crucial role for establishing a common stance and give coherence to the evaluative dramaturgy.

Reviews, solicited from two to five peers, then narrow the value framework by assessing the most promising candidates from the scholarly perspective that is anchored in a specific scientific community. It is from this perspective that reviews put a strong focus on the candidates' research rather than other academic credentials concerning, for example, teaching or administrative skills. For instance, one review praises a candidate's “rare double-talent to combine extensive, educated theoretical interests with perseverant empirical work” (review, 1972, history). Reviews mobilize detailed expert judgments on the candidate's research at length, discussing, for example, mastery of methods, originality of research, contributions to the literature, or the overview of research fields. Sometimes these accounts are complemented by brief assessments of a candidate's teaching experience or on their personality: “He is a benevolent human

being, and one wishes that the less benevolent students would appreciate this” (review, 1969, German studies). These examples convey how reviews constitute a dramaturgical front to allow the committee to make sense of the candidate. This front is informed by a scholarly perspective rooted in a scientific community.

After job advertisements and applications left expectations toward candidates underspecified at the previous stage of the dramaturgy, reviews exert textual agency by introducing a scholarly perspective that provides a structure and orients the candidate selection process. Sometimes the agency of reviews extends to establishing intertextual relations with other documents. In these cases, reviews refer to the application documents of the candidates. For example, one review documents that a candidate’s “publication list [...] is extensive and quite impressive” (review, 1962, German studies). Other relations between reviews and application documents are even closer, although less explicit. Some reviews in our sample contain passages, for example, on a candidate’s employment career that match the text of the candidate’s CV word for word and are thus likely copied from one document to the other. These variations of intertextuality not only show how the different steps of the evaluative dramaturgy interact but, more importantly, how written documents act as relays that transfer the assessments human actors make across different stages of the dramaturgy and thus lend coherence to the evaluative process.

In the next and final step of the evaluative dramaturgy, laudations are another type of document that contributes to further narrowing the value framework. The domestic concerns of the appointing department may have been discussed in committee meetings, but thus far they have not been documented in the dramaturgy. Because coherent expectations are unlikely to emerge in heterogeneous recruitment committees, there are bound to be different visions of how candidates should perform for a given departmental context. From this follows the need to settle a coherent collective position that all members can subscribe to. The textual agency of laudations is to establish this coherent perspective. Laudations gloss over any conflicting visions of the appropriate candidate that are likely to occur between human actors at committee meetings and undertake an ostentatiously unanimous and unambiguous assessment of shortlisted candidates. For example, laudations establish that committees “have unanimously decided” (laudation, 1972, history) on the candidates’ order on the shortlist, or that candidates at the top of the shortlist are “by a long shot the most qualified of the candidates” (laudation, 1974, history). By inscribing such definite assessments into the evaluative dramaturgy, laudations conceal any heterogeneity and ambiguity in the committee’s assessment. In doing so, they lend further coherence to the candidate selection process and stabilize the plot.

When laudations justify the selection of candidates for the shortlist, they extensively position candidates according to their professional capabilities and research productivity. In doing so, laudations routinely reference the reviews. Establishing these intertextual relations allows laudations to tap the evaluative authority of scholarly expertise explicated in the reviews. For example, one laudation states:

As demonstrated by the attached reviews from [reviewer 1] and [reviewer 2], [the candidate] today enjoys broad recognition by leading historians as an established researcher. (Laudation, 1959, history).

Another example of how laudations relate to reviews reads like this:

Faculty has arrived at the conclusion – a conclusion that has been confirmed by the judgment of external peers – that it would be impossible to attract a better or even equivalent candidate. (Laudation, 1958, German studies).

By establishing intertextual relations with reviews, laudations act as relays that transfer assessments of candidates' performance across different steps of the evaluative dramaturgy, thereby lending coherence to the overall process. Yet, laudations do not merely tie together existing information on candidates that has cumulated throughout the procedure. While reviewers and candidates themselves can only ever assume expectations of the appointing department, laudations allow committees to make explicit the specific domestic expectations toward candidates. For example, one laudation states that a committee's

suggestion for the appointment has been led by the consideration that this chair [...] has to cope with a press of over 700 students of German studies. Therefore, the committee has given those personalities the preference for the shortlist that are not only renowned as scholars, but that, by predisposition and penchant, are up to the special pedagogical and organizational tasks that result from this emergency situation. (Laudation, 1955, German studies).

This example conveys that specific organizational circumstances, local tradition, and domestic hierarchies are important contextual factors for the formation of expectations toward candidates. Yet, notably, these expectations had not been established at the beginning of the evaluative dramaturgy and thus could not be conveyed to candidates as a role they should assume.

Changing organizational expectations in the evaluative dramaturgy of professorial recruitment

Historical analysis of professorial hiring reveals two main aspects. First, organizational expectations toward candidates have changed

throughout our period of study. The most obvious change is that laudations increasingly include teaching and administration in their assessments of candidates. Since the 1960s, candidates are not only evaluated according to their capabilities as researchers but increasingly also according to the breadth of their teaching portfolio and their teaching experience, especially regarding bigger lectures. From the mid-1960s onward, research is not the only criterion for appropriate candidates, and different professional capacities have to be weighed against each other. These changes in expectation toward candidates have to be seen in light of the massive expansion of tertiary education in Germany that both challenged organizational structures and shifted attention to the teaching duties of academics. For example, one committee estimates a candidate's publication output to be "smaller both in scope and in weight," but states that this shortcoming is "compensated by his administrative and pedagogical capabilities, which preponderate in an overcrowded subject like German studies" (laudation, 1962, German studies). The differentiation of expectations toward candidates means that the role candidates have to perform in the evaluative dramaturgy becomes more complex over time.

At the same time, and second, the role candidates have to perform materializes only toward the later stages of the evaluative dramaturgy. While the application guidelines in our first case establish rather specific expectations and thus a tangible role for candidates to assume already at the beginning of the plot, the value framework in the case of professorial hiring remains broad for most of the candidate selection process. It is only later in the plot that candidate selection is given coherence. From this it follows that major aspects of the role candidates are expected to perform come about only after they have already performed in the dramaturgy.

Discussion and conclusion

While textual agency in evaluation remains more or less invisible for research that is confined to human practices, to single written documents, or to the decision that forms at best the endpoint of an evaluative process, our approach contributes to the strand of valuation studies that emphasizes the constitutive role of written documents. Our case studies have demonstrated that textual agency is particularly crucial for processes of evaluation that are diachronic, prolonged, and do not always involve copresence. Throughout these processes, evaluators with heterogeneous interests mobilize different criteria to identify their "ideal candidate" (Lamont et al. 2000) and candidates attempt a performance that meets these expectations and thus "offer their observers an impression that is idealized" (Goffman 1959: 23). In other words: it is human actors that assess candidates, convey their assessments over time, and ultimately try to reach legitimate decisions

on candidate selection. However, human evaluators are both enabled and disciplined by written documents. More precisely, we have found that, across our two cases of candidate selection in grantmaking and professorial hiring, documents employ two regimes of agency: they both provide a structure and act as relays.

Regarding the first regime of agency, written documents provide a structure that lends the process of candidate selection coherence and unity. In the case of grantmaking, we have seen how this regime of agency develops over time, following a carefully scripted plot. While earlier application guidelines give merely cursory instructions for the candidates' performance, guidelines after 1981 are compulsory for all candidates and give rather detailed instructions. This gives the subsequent stages of the dramaturgy coherence and direction. This coherence is evident in grant proposals, which respond to the expectations documented in the guidelines. For the case of professorial hiring, our analysis reveals that the structuring agency of written documents only emerges during the later stages of the plot. While job advertisements lend the dramaturgy little coherence because they do not explicate a detailed set of expectations toward candidates, reviews introduce a specific scholarly perspective for the assessment of candidates, and laudations establish a coherent collective position for the decision of the committee. Both documents provide a unifying structure for the candidate selection process.

As a second regime of agency, documents act as relays that establish and transfer assessments and decisions of human actors across the stages of the evaluative dramaturgy. In the case of grantmaking, our analysis shows how proposals take up the expectations explicated in the guidelines. This suggests that guidelines and proposals establish values and expectations of the funder and transfer them across the stages of the evaluative dramaturgy. In the case of professorial hiring, we have seen how reviews refer to application documents and how laudations refer to reviews to transfer assessments across the stages of the dramaturgy. Across both cases, these intertextual relations show how documents enable the "local translocation of constraints and abilities" (Cooren 2004: 374). Yet, the two cases also convey different modes in which texts can act as relays: in the case of professorial hiring, reviews and laudations regularly link different stages of a dramaturgy to transfer assessments of human actors across these stages. However, this regime of agency is confined to the specific evaluation the reviews and laudations are used in. We see no evidence in our data that the documents link different professorial appointment procedures across time. In contrast, application guidelines also act as relays across evaluative dramaturgies – i.e., between different grant proposals – by linking them to the very value framework explicated in the guidelines.

Through the interplay of human evaluators and the two regimes of textual agency emerges a value framework, a corridor of values and norms in which the candidates' performance is assumed to take place and which is geared toward the organization's specific expectations and requirements. The emerging framework can provide both candidates with cues about the role they are expected to assume and human evaluators with cues about how to assess candidates and ultimately reach legitimate decisions.

Our comparative study on academic candidacy in two organizational settings reveals that the value framework emerges in very different ways. In the case of grantmaking, the intertextual dimension of the evaluative dramaturgy reproduces the value framework articulated by the funder's application guideline. Even though a certain degree of deviation from and variation of these values is possible at the stage of peer review or during the jury committee meeting, the legitimate funding decision tends to mirror positions presented in the application guidelines, i.e., at the first stage of the dramaturgy. Written from an authoritative position (Lammers 2011), application guidelines inform potential candidates about the role they are expected to assume and the rights and duties that come with this role. Because it is rare that grant applicants interact directly with the organization, grantmakers govern access to a temporal membership at a distance during the application phase. It is through the application guidelines that grantmakers demarcate the discursive realm within which academics can effectively perform their role as worthy candidates via their grant proposals (Figure 3).

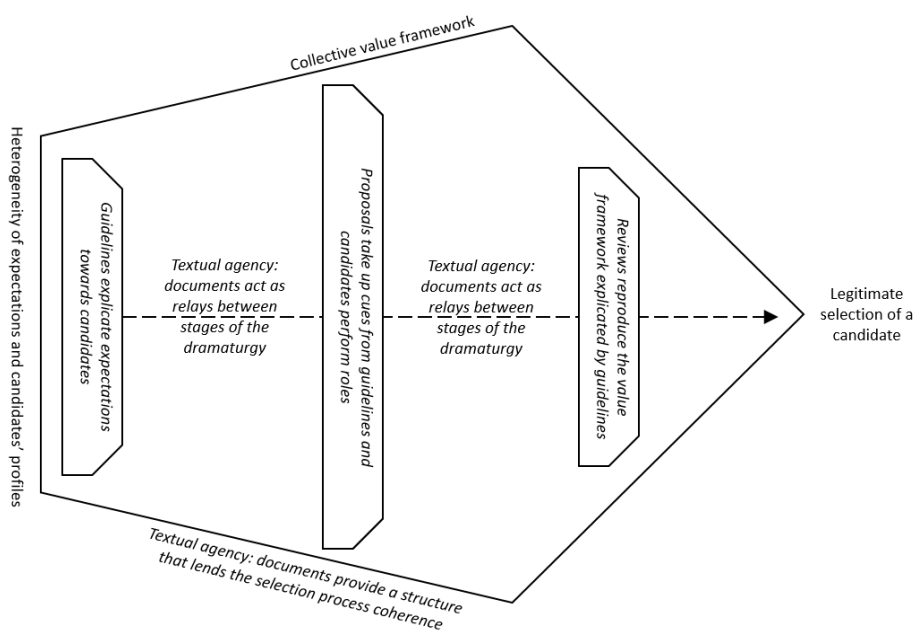


Figure 3 The evaluative dramaturgy in research granting

Source: Authors' own work

In the case of professorial hiring, the value framework remains open and tacit at the beginning. Prospective candidates cannot correctly anticipate the specific expectations of the recruiting department and thus perform their role in a rather general way, emphasizing a broad range of experiences in research, teaching, and administration. It is through the different stages of the evaluative dramaturgy that the value framework is refined and narrowed across different documents. The list of prospective candidates is filtered, round after round, until a shortlist is agreed upon. The different perspectives and the incoherence of the evaluative dramaturgy are concealed by laudations at the final stage. By referencing other documents written throughout the evaluation process, the laudation creates the illusion of a coherent value framework encompassing all stages and all participants (direct and indirect) of the evaluation, thus facilitating a legitimate decision on candidate selection (Figure 4).

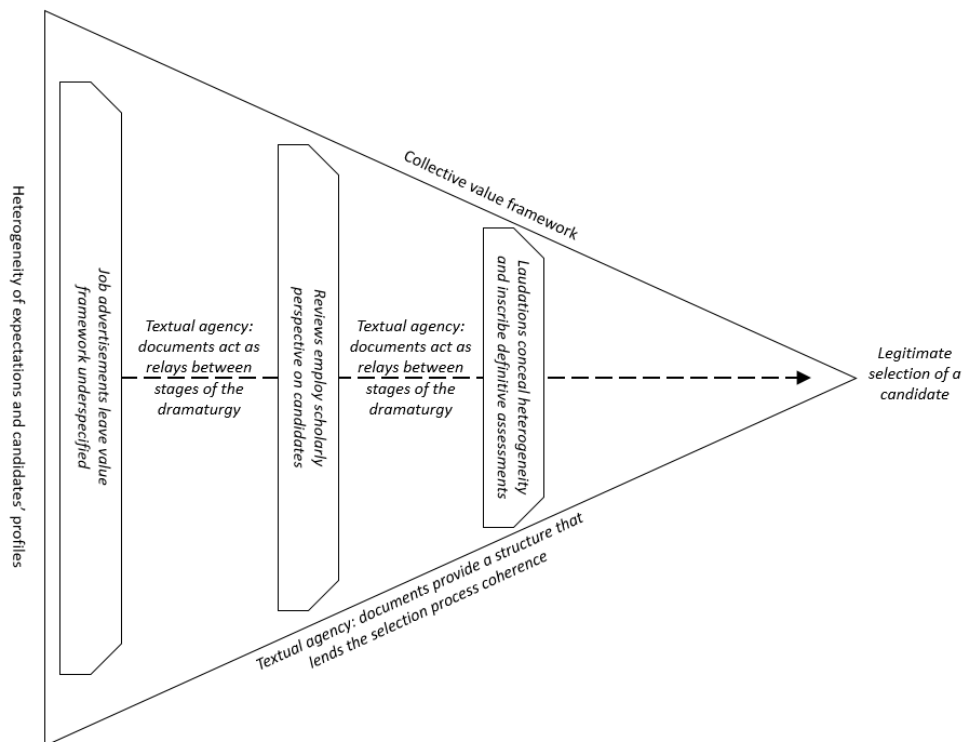


Figure 4 The evaluative dramaturgy of professorial appointment procedures

Source: Authors' own work

Our two cases illustrate how textual agency contributes to solving a central dramaturgical problem: the continuity and consistency of organizational evaluation processes. In both cases, written documents both establish and transfer evaluative statements as well as structure evaluative processes and lend them coherence. But how should we

explain the variation of the dramaturgy of evaluation in our two cases? We started by assuming that the type and duration of membership (temporary versus permanent) would bear on the dramaturgy of evaluation. Based on the empirical insights we gathered, we can now argue that temporary membership requires the academic organization to ensure a commitment to its value framework from the very onset of the evaluation process. Given the high fluctuation of temporary and voluntary members such as grantees, reviewers, jury committee, and senate members, grantmakers need to be able to select people and projects that fit their organizational agenda and accept to work toward a common goal: selecting the right type of applicant for a limited duration of time. Thus, application guidelines spell out roles, rights, duties, and expectations that serve as normative script for the subsequent stages of the evaluative dramaturgy. As a result, guidelines have a disciplining effect on the assessment of all participants of the evaluation process.

In the case of professorial hiring, however, the membership in question is a potential lifetime position.⁴ Participants of the dramaturgy are permanent members of the organization. The performance in this case is thus shaped by different expectations and affordances. The value framework that includes the organization's expectations is emergent insofar as the members need to claim their relevance and act collectively to work toward a more or less consensual recruitment decision. In this case, the appointing organization can afford not to impose a clearly defined value framework right at the beginning of the assessment. Instead, the protagonists of the dramaturgy can be left to figure out the value framework on their own because the organization can rely on long-term members to act on its behalf. If the evaluative dramaturgy has disciplining effects, they are of a procedural nature: written documents relay the evaluative compromise reached at different points, thereby committing the participants to a degree of procedural (and normative) coherence.

Our contribution addresses research gaps that scholarship on textual agency may investigate further. First, future research is needed to better comprehend the complicated dynamics between different regimes of agency as well as intra- and intertextual agency in evaluation. Special attention should be paid to comparative research designs that allow for systematic theory building regarding the observed variation of evaluation processes and dramaturgies. Second, future research on the agency of written documents in evaluative processes may pave the way for historically minded research of (e)valuation that focuses on the constitution and change of value frameworks, roles, and practices. Third, the article hints to the

⁴ All appointment procedures in our sample were for full professorships.

emergence of a new figure of dramatization. In the time period we observed, we witnessed the emergence of a concrete set of role expectations regarding applicants. In dramatizing the figure of “the candidate” as focal point of the plot, textual agency not only provides the means to discipline both peers and applicants to play their part in candidate selection. Rather, the figure of “the candidate” has developed into a leading character of the social drama that is academic competition. Even before the stage of selection is being reached, even before applicants gain access to the organization’s resources, they have to comply with organizational expectations regarding candidacy. As candidacy has become an important moment in academia and academics are almost in a continuous state of candidacy, they increasingly find themselves in situations of evaluation, submitting themselves to – and simultaneously being subjected to – a multiplicity of value frameworks. Academics can engage playfully with the diverse opportunities of positioning that open up throughout their careers, reinventing themselves with each candidacy. At the same time, the need to embrace the normative affordances of candidacy can also exert disciplining effects on academics whose identity is regulated time and again in various organizational contexts and according to differing organizational expectations. This raises a number of empirical questions: how far-reaching are the disciplining effects of temporary membership for the self-perception and the work of researchers? How do the normative constraints of temporary membership bear on the primary institutional affiliation of academics? More research is needed to comprehend the coping strategies and effects of candidacy on academics.

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85 *Valuation Studies*

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