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Toward a Gentle, Generalizable Framework for Scholarly Impact Conversations

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TOWARD A GENTLE, GENERALIZABLE FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOLARLY IMPACT CONVERSATIONS

Rebecca Welzenbach
Research Impact Librarian
University of Michigan Library
Altmetrics 6:AM October 10, 2019

WHAT'S A RESEARCH IMPACT LIBRARIAN?

I empower scholars to create the conditions under which they can establish:

- a strong public identity,
- a coherent account of their contributions to the scholarly enterprise,
- and a persuasive body of evidence for the impact of their work within the academy,
- ...and for the public.

Along with other librarians and informationists from across the University of Michigan Library, I coordinate the library's role in research impact initiatives on campus.

The shorter version: I help scholars present themselves and their work to the world.

CENTRAL CAMPUS & MEDICAL CENTER



Campus Map
 Courtesy of
 Campus Information



MANY KNOWN MEASURES ARE AVAILABLE!

METRICS ARE MEANINGLESS!

METRICS ARE EVERYTHING!

NOBODY KNOWS HOW TO MEASURE THIS!

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THE MACHINE

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THE MACHINE

They might say:

- How can our journal increase its JIF next year?
- Are we using fractional or non-fractional counting?
- 20% of my publications have an Altmetric score of at least 237, putting them in the top 2% of all research in this field.

Key assumption: Research impact metrics communicate something meaningful about my work and should be monitored closely. An increase in the numbers means that I'm doing better work!

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They might say:

- Everyone knows the JIF is flawed, but we can't get away from it.
- I'll just use my Google Scholar h-index, because it's higher.

Key assumption: Metrics are flawed, but I can't do anything about that. Playing "the game" is the best way to ensure that I get to carry on with the work that matters to me.

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They might say:

- My work can't be quantified!
- I only write books. The JIF is irrelevant to me.
- We must push back on the rampant, neo-liberal culture of assessment.

Key assumption: You don't actually understand my work, you just want me to conform to a system that doesn't serve me.

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They might say:

- First tell me all the things we can count, and then I'll pick and choose which ones I want.
- Actually I'll just include all of them.
- I'm not sure this actually shows impact. Is there some new, other metric that everyone is using for this?

Key assumption: I haven't found a clear, quantifiable way to demonstrate our research impact, so I must be missing something. Let's keep digging and add more!

NOBODY KNOWS HOW TO MEASURE THIS!

THE GATHERER

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The Nut Gatherers (1882),
William-Adolphe Bouguereau
(1825-1905)



THE CONVERSATION

1. Tell me about your work.
 - Why is it important to you?
 - What does success look like to you?
2. You're here for a reason--probably, you have to make a case for your work.
 - Who is evaluating you?
 - What are the stakes?
 - What is your desired outcome?
3. What *kind of work* is valued in this scenario?
 - Can we *specify outputs* that serve as evidence that you have *done* this work?
4. What criteria will be used to determine *whether the work is good*?
 - Are these criteria implicit or explicit?
 - Are there written guidelines or rubric
 - Have you made any commitments or promises (such as in a grant proposal)?
 - For each relevant research output, can we *identify indicators or measures* to demonstrate that it meets or exceeds the criteria?

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From overwhelmed to strategic!

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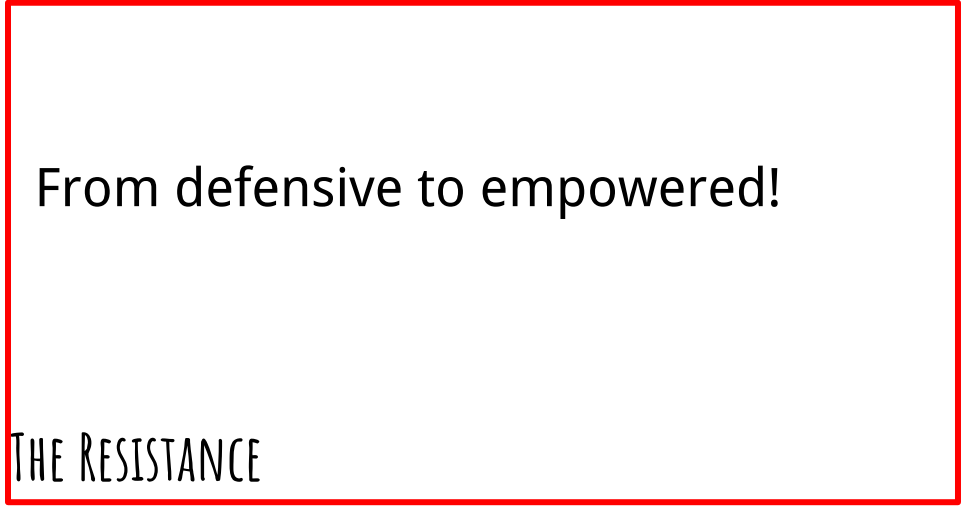
From defensive to empowered!

From overwhelmed to strategic!

THE RESISTANCE

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From passive to active!

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From passive to active!

From comfort to....panic.

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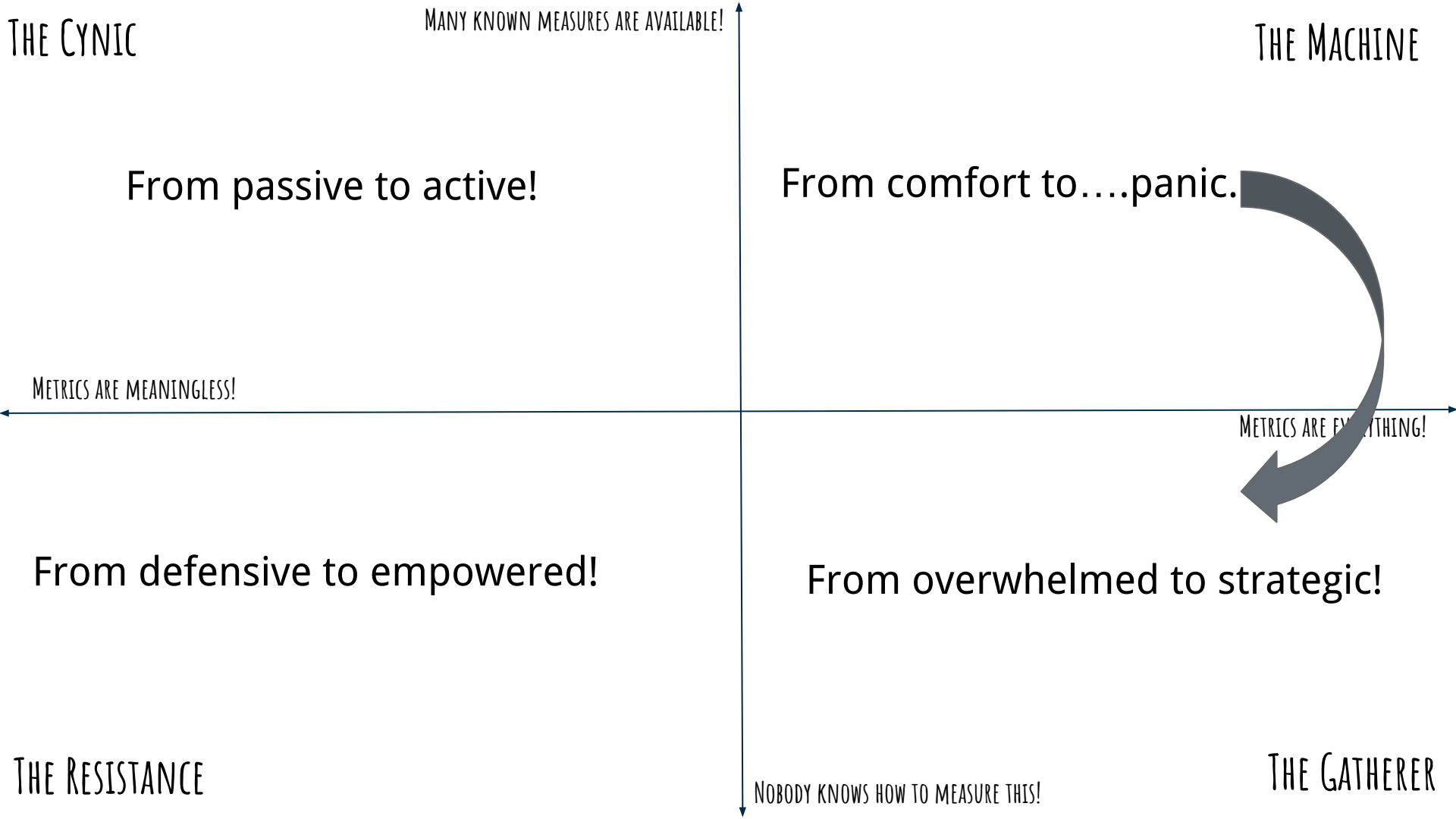
From defensive to empowered!

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OK. SO WHAT? GO NUTS!

- Does this framing resonate with you?
- Does the template for the conversation seem usable? Broadly applicable?
- What other feedback do you have?



THANK YOU, AND SAFE TRAVELS!