

# Press Release

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## ESMT professor awarded with Nelson Prize for work on crowd science

Henry Sauermann, associate professor of strategy at ESMT Berlin, has been awarded with the 2018 Richard R. Nelson Prize for his research on “crowd science”. The term refers to scientific projects that actively involve the general public in the research process and are typically organized via online platforms—ranging from discovering new planets to collecting data on bird migration to solving math problems. Due to the reliance on non-professional contributors, crowd science is also known as “citizen science”.

The prizewinning paper, co-authored with Chiara Franzoni from Politecnico di Milano, is particularly relevant in face of the growing momentum of crowd science in recent years. Governments and funding agencies in Europe and the United States actively encourage crowd science efforts and such projects have resulted in many top tier peer-reviewed publications. Sauermann’s study, published in *Research Policy* in 2014, was the first to introduce crowd science to the management and economics field and to provide a conceptual framework to understand and classify such projects. The researchers identified openness in participation and the open sharing of intermediate results as key characteristics that distinguish crowd science from “traditional” science.

“Within the crowd science landscape, however, there is a wide range of different approaches,” stressed Sauermann. “We classified the projects along two main axes: skill requirement and task complexity.” While some projects like “Galaxy Zoo” recruited over 250,000 volunteers who had no specific scientific background and worked through a seemingly endless amount of space images, others are more confined to experts. On “Polymath”, for example, skilled professional and hobby mathematicians discuss and find solutions to math problems individual scientists would not be able to solve.

As the crowd is a valuable but low-cost resource of labor and knowledge for professional research teams, crowd science is particularly interesting to funding agencies, the authors argue. In addition to yielding a higher return on investment compared to traditional science, the projects also provide “greater benefits for the general progress of science” through the open disclosure of intermediate results, which can spur subsequent innovation. In follow-up research, Sauermann and Franzoni have quantified some of these benefits, demonstrating the potential of crowd science to accelerate the progress of science.

The Richard R. Nelson Prize is awarded every two years for the best article in either *Research Policy* or *Industrial and Corporate Change*. It includes an award of \$2,500. For the 2018 prize, articles from the 2013-2017 period were considered.

### More information:

C. Franzoni, H. Sauermann. Crowd science: the organization of scientific research in open collaborative projects. *Res. Policy*, 43 (2014), pp. 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2013.07.005>

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