

Aanvraag**Financiering****Titel**

For Richer and Poorer: tackling the enduring puzzle of prosociality

Aanvrager

Uw weerwoord is in bewerking

Dr. T.V. Pollet

Referentenrapport van referent 1**Assessment of the quality of the researcher****Vraag a**

a

What is your opinion on the past performance of the researcher (as demonstrated by publications and other relevant scientific achievements)?

Commentaar

In my opinion, the past performance of the researcher is outstanding: he gave a substantial contribution to the scientific literature in many fields, by publishing articles in high IF journals. His past studies are very innovative both in terms of content and methods (e.g., through the use of Bayesian Statistics). The researcher is also involved in many international research networks and has many international collaborations. He served as a reviewer for many journals and funding bodies. I also appreciate very much his experience in disseminating data in non-scientific outlet, such as blogs, social media and international press.

Vraag b

b

Does the applicant belong to the top 10-20% of his/her international peer group? The Vidi scheme aims at outstanding researchers only: the top 10-20% of his/her international peer group. Which scientific achievements or talents of the applicant show that he/she belongs to this top?

Commentaar

Although the applicant's activity is highly multidisciplinary, thus making it difficult to establish a "international peer group" serving as a comparison for his career, I have no doubt that his work can be placed in the highest 10-20% (considering the experience mentioned in the previous section).

Vraag c

c

To what extent is there sufficient evidence that the applicant has the ability to lead and supervise other researchers and support staff?

Commentaar

Based on the number of PhD students he supervised or co-supervised, the researcher seems to have all the competences required to lead and supervise a research group.

Assessment of the quality, innovative character and academic impact of the proposal

Vraag a

a

Please comment on the scholarly, scientific or technological relevance of the problem, as well as on the originality and challenging content of the proposal.

Commentaar

The project is very ambitious and challenging. The research questions hold promise for uncovering new factors explaining the remarkable variation in the degree to which people display prosocial behavior at many levels. The research project clearly identified the main gaps in the literature on prosocial behavior conducted through behavioral economic games and proposes a very original way to overcome those gaps. The project also proposes a very original way to contribute to the literature on neighborhood studies (e.g., by planning to expose participants to high and low-SES neighborhoods).

Vraag b

b

To what extent is the proposed method effective? Please comment.

Commentaar

The methods identified in the 7 studies look more than adequate to address the different research questions. Methods with different degrees of ecological validities are proposed, by making the overall methodological approach very rigorous and complete. The project also includes a wide variety of methods (experiments, cross national comparisons, longitudinal design etc.). Finally, methods that are widely used in research have been included in the project with a more effective approach (e.g., accounting for a two-steps decision model in the Dictator Game).

Vraag c

c

What are the innovative aspects of the proposal? Will the research break new ground by generating new concepts, a deeper understanding, new methods, etc.?

Commentaar

In my opinion, the project has the potential to generate a theory of the development of prosocial behavior adopting multilevel perspective. Such a framework, taking into account factors associated to prosocial behavior at the individual, neighborhood/city/county and country level is highly needed in the field of study of prosocial behavior/altruism/trust/social capital. I think that the project has the potential to create a shared multidisciplinary theoretical basis for future studies in the field. The methods proposed are also very innovative and up-to-date (e.g., Bayesian generalized mixed-modelling).

Vraag d

d

What is your opinion on its potential to make a major contribution to the advancement of scholarship, science or technology (academic impact)?

Commentaar

As clearly outlined in the project, by focusing on two key but understudied predictors of prosocial behavior (childhood socio-economic position and neighborhood socio-economic position), this project has the potential to contribute to a wide range of disciplines and research areas. Indeed, prosocial behavior is strongly related to civic engagement, generalized trust, empathy, social capital, collective efficacy and so on. I can easily see many ways in which the findings of this project will give important insights to all these research areas.

Assessment of the knowledge utilisation

Toelichting

In section 2B the applicant has indicated whether or not the proposed research is appropriate for knowledge utilization. If the candidate has indicated that knowledge utilisation is possible, please address questions a and b. If the candidate has argued that knowledge utilisation is not to be expected given the nature of the research proposal, please address only question c. If you agree with the applicant's explanation why potential for utilisation is absent you do not need to reduce the overall rating of the proposal.

Vraag a

a

What is your opinion on the described relevance of the results of the research?

Commentaar

I strongly support the necessity to have a better understanding of the roots of prosocial behavior, considering its relevance for individual and community's well-being. The researcher mentioned the potential application of the findings to phenomenon such as social inequalities and the refugee crisis. I certainly agree, but I think that the relevance of these studies is even stronger and holds promise for the development of new interventions and policies aimed at promoting mutual help at the local (e.g. neighborhood), national and international level in a society that tends to become more and more individualistic. Policies on sustainability and pro-environmental behavior would also benefit from a deeper knowledge of the roots of prosocial behavior.

Vraag b

b

Please comment on the effectiveness and feasibility of the proposed approach for knowledge utilisation.

Commentaar

The dissemination plan has an up-to-date approach including national and international press, podcasts, websites and social media (communication tools that look very familiar to the applicant,

who used them in the past in a very effective way). The idea to make the findings available to non-profit organizations (to be used for their fund-raising initiatives), in my opinion, is also very likely to have a positive impact on their activities, thus improving society as a whole.

Vraag c

c

Only answer this question in case the applicant argued that knowledge utilisation is not to be expected given the nature of the research proposal:

Commentaar

Knowledge utilization has been address.

Final assessment

Vraag a

a

How do you assess the entire application? Please give the final scoring for your assessment (A+/A/B/UF/U).

Commentaar

A+

Vraag b

b

Could you please summarize (point by point) on the strengths of the grant application focussing on the candidate, proposal and knowledge utilization?

Commentaar

- The project address an incredibly relevant topic in an innovative, rigorous and multidisciplinary way;
- It has the potential to gain a deeper understanding of factors associated to prosocial behaviour at multiple level;
- The proposed methods are very strong and adequate to answer the research questions;
- The dissemination and knowledge utilization plans are very effective.

Vraag c

c

Could you please summarize (point by point) on the weaknesses of the grant application focussing on the candidate, proposal and knowledge utilization?

Commentaar

I would have expected the examination of some social features of the neighbourhood (besides the structural ones), such as social cohesion, social capital, collective efficacy, trust and so on; however, I also appreciate the ability of the researcher in planning several studies focusing on a wide range of factors but at the same time having a clear and specific focus.

Referentenrapport van referent 2

Assessment of the quality of the researcher

Vraag a

a

What is your opinion on the past performance of the researcher (as demonstrated by publications and other relevant scientific achievements)?

Commentaar

The researcher is very competent in his field and has a good publication record

Vraag b

b

Does the applicant belong to the top 10-20% of his/her international peer group? The Vidi scheme aims at outstanding researchers only: the top 10-20% of his/her international peer group. Which scientific achievements or talents of the applicant show that he/she belongs to this top?

Commentaar

yet, I would say he belongs to this select group, based on his publications

Vraag c

c

To what extent is there sufficient evidence that the applicant has the ability to lead and supervise other researchers and support staff?

Commentaar

I cannot answer this question, but I know that Pollet is a very competent researcher

Assessment of the quality, innovative character and academic impact of the proposal

Vraag a

a

Please comment on the scholarly, scientific or technological relevance of the problem, as well as on the originality and challenging content of the proposal.

Commentaar

The topic is, has been, and will be relevant in the future. The proposal takes an original twist to the way prosociality had been studied in the past, but putting much more emphasis on the multilevel influences on prosociality than previous research

Vraag b

b

To what extent is the proposed method effective? Please comment.

Commentaar

There is not one method, but it seems to me that the various experimental methods proposed in the various subprojects are well thought through

Vraag c

c

What are the innovative aspects of the proposal? Will the research break new ground by generating new concepts, a deeper understanding, new methods, etc.?

Commentaar

The major innovative aspects are in my opinion the multilevel approaches in the various subprojects. Yes, there is a good chance that these projects will enhance our understanding of the separate and combined influences of childhood SEP, neighborhood SEP and country-level inequality. What I was missing here was some more theoretical underpinnings concerning the effects on each level, rather than just predicting effects. I also missed theoretical attention to the shifting salience effects that have been found to be very important for prosocial behavior (for example Bowles Science (2008); Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg, Science 2008). In the proposed subprojects there is some attention to the effects of shifting salience (due to changing neighborhoods) but no reflection on the underlying mechanisms. It would be advisable for Pollet to work such mechanisms into his overall approach, which would also allow him to theorize the level effects better (for example: childhood SEP is likely to be a proxy for chronic activation effects and self-regulatory abilities).

Because I believe that shifting salience effects can be fruitfully integrated into Pollet's innovative approach, I see no reason to diminish the overall importance of the proposal due to this criticism.

Vraag d

d

What is your opinion on its potential to make a major contribution to the advancement of scholarship, science or technology (academic impact)?

Commentaar

The major contribution will be in my opinion a combination of substantive and methodological advancements both related to the multilevel approach. The seven subprojects allow tracking the various influences, also in their relative importance. Generally, advancement in scholarship is related to advancement in critically tested theory, and therefore, the advancement will be even larger to the degree that the theory is worked out in more detail than it is at present.

Assessment of the knowledge utilisation

Toelichting

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Vraag a

a

What is your opinion on the described relevance of the results of the research?

Commentaar

The societal relevance of the project can be large exactly because the project disentangles the relative contributions of micro, meso and macro level factors. This knowledge is valuable for policy makers, especially with regard to the evidence on context effects (neighborhood, country level inequality) and path dependency effects (childhood SEP).

What should be reflected by the applicant, however, is that prosociality is in all subprojects measured by just one kind of prosocial behavior (donations in a dictator game). I would be advisable to reflect on the generalizability of this form of prosocial behavior to other forms of prosocial behavior, especially forms that take physical and mental effort (such as care for sick neighbors), perspective taking with regard to external effects (such as noise and smell) in neighborhoods, and forms that take restraint on personal advancement, such as abstaining from misusing power positions etc.

Vraag b

b

Please comment on the effectiveness and feasibility of the proposed approach for knowledge utilisation.

Commentaar

the plan for knowledge utilization seem to me to be adequated

Vraag c

c

Only answer this question in case the applicant argued that knowledge utilisation is not to be expected given the nature of the research proposal:

Commentaar

Only answer this question in case the applicant argued that knowledge utilisation is not to be expected given the nature of the research proposal:

Final assessment

Vraag a

a

How do you assess the entire application? Please give the final scoring for your assessment (A+/A/B/UF/U).

Commentaar

A+

Vraag b

b

Could you please summarize (point by point) on the strengths of the grant application focussing on the candidate, proposal and knowledge utilization?

Commentaar

In sum, the project deals with a highly relevant topic, it is well thought through, the various subprojects cumulate, the results promise to advance our understanding and be of help to policy makers. In addition, the PI is a very competent researcher. The chances that it will be successfully completed are high. There is thus much reason to grant this proposal.

Vraag c

c

Could you please summarize (point by point) on the weaknesses of the grant application focussing on the candidate, proposal and knowledge utilization?

Commentaar

The weakness of the proposal is that it is somewhat undertheorized, and that it pays as of yet too little attention to situational influence on prosociality (due to shifting saliences). Yet, I am very confident that the applicant is able to make the theoretical underpinnings more explicit the various subprojects and integrate shifting salience effects into the project as a whole

Referentenrapport van referent 3

Assessment of the quality of the researcher

Vraag a

a

What is your opinion on the past performance of the researcher (as demonstrated by publications and other relevant scientific achievements)?

Commentaar

The researcher is clearly very prolific, has an ambitious research agenda, and has built a broad network of collaborators and coauthors across the social sciences.

Vraag b

b

Does the applicant belong to the top 10-20% of his/her international peer group? The Vidi scheme aims at outstanding researchers only: the top 10-20% of his/her international peer group. Which scientific achievements or talents of the applicant show that he/she belongs to this top?

Commentaar

The applicants' publication record is quite impressive and he is certainly in the top 20% of his peer group. The range of topics he has published on is both a sign of his brilliance and curiosity, but may also be an obstacle to the depth of his substantive contributions.

Vraag c

c

To what extent is there sufficient evidence that the applicant has the ability to lead and supervise other researchers and support staff?

Commentaar

He has supervised and co-authored with a few doctoral and post-doctoral students.

Assessment of the quality, innovative character and academic impact of the proposal

Vraag a

a

Please comment on the scholarly, scientific or technological relevance of the problem, as well as on the originality and challenging content of the proposal.

Commentaar

The explanation of variability in prosocial behavior is a theme of great importance, and it has relevant theoretical and policy implications. The applicant is therefore after a central issue in the social sciences, and his research focus, on neighborhood and SEP effects, is innovative and has great potential. My greatest doubts concern the design, which is not particularly innovative, and likely won't lead to the expected results.

Vraag b

b

To what extent is the proposed method effective? Please comment.

Commentaar

I believe the research design is not fully capable of delivering the results the applicant claims he will be able to achieve. I see three major problems:

1\ N. As designed, I doubt the applicant would be able to come to any statistically valid conclusion at the neighborhood and national effect. There is no trace of power calculations, and the logic for choosing 5 to 8 major Dutch cities to assess "city variation in prosocial behavior" (Study 4) and 5 countries to assess cross-national variation (Study 1) is lacking. I am all in favor of multilevel and bayesian analysis, but this won't substitute a smart design strategy.

2\ the applicant does not acknowledge various problems of selectivity that would inevitably affect his estimates and his assessment of the relative effect of various variables at different levels. For instance, how does SEP, past and present, affect neighborhood mobility? There is a vast literature, mainly in Sociology (see for instance Sampson and the Moving to Opportunity debate) that would make anyone skeptical of the type of causal conclusions the applicant intends to draw.

3\ In addition, the applicant would rely on a single measure of pro sociality, the DG. In most cases, this would be played online by opportunity samples. There is valid concern about the quality of the instrument using on-line respondents. Moreover, these respondents are not representative of the entire population. This is a serious concern, especially when aiming at comparing neighborhoods and countries.

Vraag c

c

What are the innovative aspects of the proposal? Will the research break new ground by generating new concepts, a deeper understanding, new methods, etc.?

Commentaar

The theory is clear, and the author points out an important gap in our current explanation of prosocial behavior.

Vraag d

d

What is your opinion on its potential to make a major contribution to the advancement of scholarship, science or technology (academic impact)?

Commentaar

The theory is great but the execution is weak. The applicant seems smart, and probably will work out some of the design flaws, but I am a bit worried about some aspect that have been fully ignored.

Assessment of the knowledge utilisation

Toelichting

In section 2B the applicant has indicated whether or not the proposed research is appropriate for knowledge utilization. If the candidate has indicated that knowledge utilisation is possible, please address questions a and b. If the candidate has argued that knowledge utilisation is not to be expected given the nature of the research proposal, please address only question c. If you agree with the applicant's explanation why potential for utilisation is absent you do not need to reduce the overall rating of the proposal.

Vraag a

a

What is your opinion on the described relevance of the results of the research?

Commentaar

The research results won't be directly applicable, but the topic is very relevant, and would likely lead to important developments.

Vraag b

b

Please comment on the effectiveness and feasibility of the proposed approach for knowledge utilisation.

Commentaar

The applicant seems very active in promoting the diffusion of his results in the media

Vraag c

c

Only answer this question in case the applicant argued that knowledge utilisation is not to be expected given the nature of the research proposal:

Commentaar

not applicable

Final assessment

Vraag a

a

How do you assess the entire application? Please give the final scoring for your assessment (A+/A/B/UF/U).

Commentaar

Between A and B

Vraag b

b

Could you please summarize (point by point) on the strengths of the grant application focussing on the candidate, proposal and knowledge utilization?

Commentaar

Prolific and bright candidate
Very important topic and very clear theory

Vraag c

c

Could you please summarize (point by point) on the weaknesses of the grant application focussing on the candidate, proposal and knowledge utilization?

Commentaar

the research design is not sufficiently thought out

Overall

Overall weerwoord

Maximum aantal woorden voor de toelichting over alle referentenrapporten 1300

Afzien van weerwoord false