

**FORTE!**

Swedish Research Council for  
Health, Working Life and Welfare

# Research excellence, relevance, and impact: A funder's perspective

Stella Jacobson, Head of Unit, Forte

# What is excellence in research?



”Excellence only matters when it makes an impact – when we use our excellence, our resources, and our talent to create a positive impact on society.”

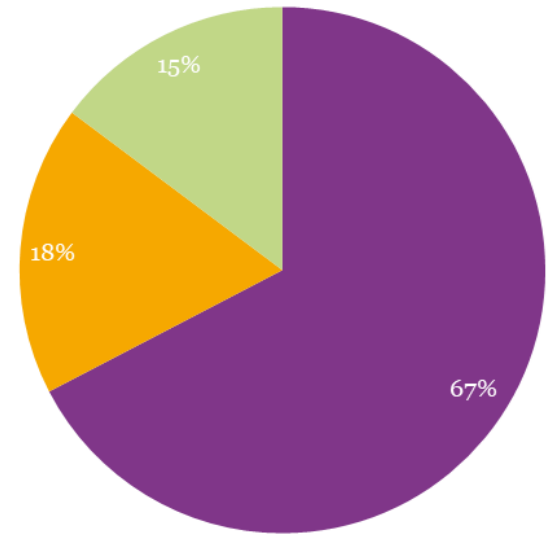
Christine Nellemann, Provost Technical University Denmark  
22 September 2025, conclusions on MCAA 2025.

# Forte propose a broadened definition

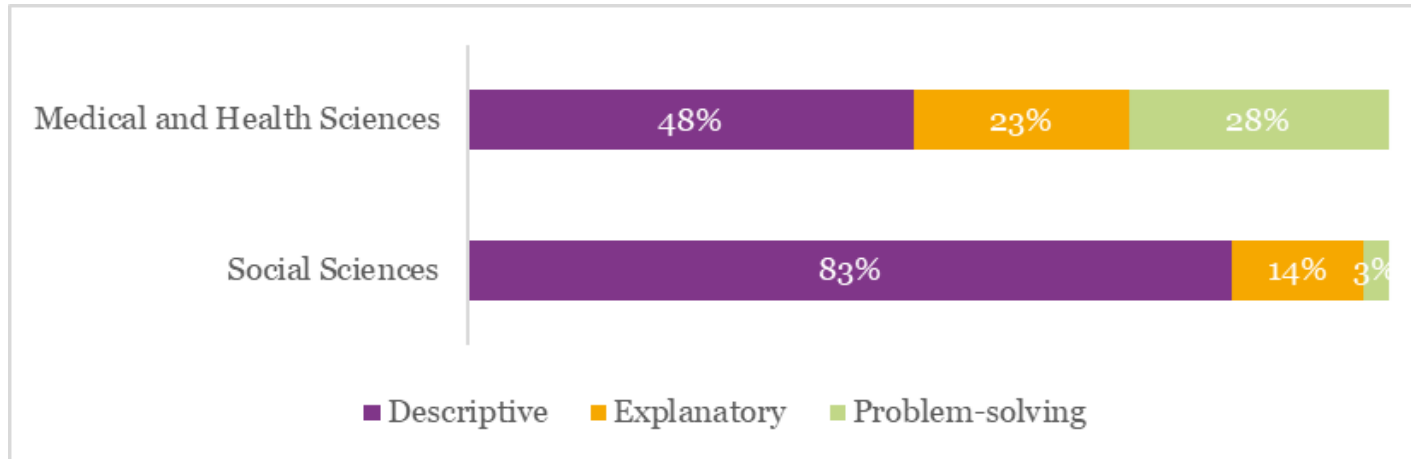
Excellent research is capable of:

- posing and answering **relevant questions**,
- is **scientifically outstanding** in relation to other research within the same or adjacent fields
- and also makes a tangible contribution to **solving** current and future societal challenges, improving the quality and efficiency of the welfare system, and/or enhancing the competitiveness of business and industry.

# Different types of research differ between research areas



■ Descriptive ■ Explanatory ■ Problem-solving



# How good is the scientific quality in social intervention studies in Sweden?

- Methodological quality has improved, but also newer evaluations have shortcomings
- More research training is needed in evaluation methods
- 3 factors to boost high-quality evaluations:
  - Stronger methodological skills
  - Access to funding
  - Motivation to carry out evaluations

**FORTE:**

Forskningsrådet för  
hälsa, arbetsliv och välfärd

**SVENSKA EFFEKT-  
UTVÄRDERINGAR AV  
BETEENDEMÄSSIGA,  
PSYKOLOGISKA OCH  
SOCIALA INSATSER**

1990-2019

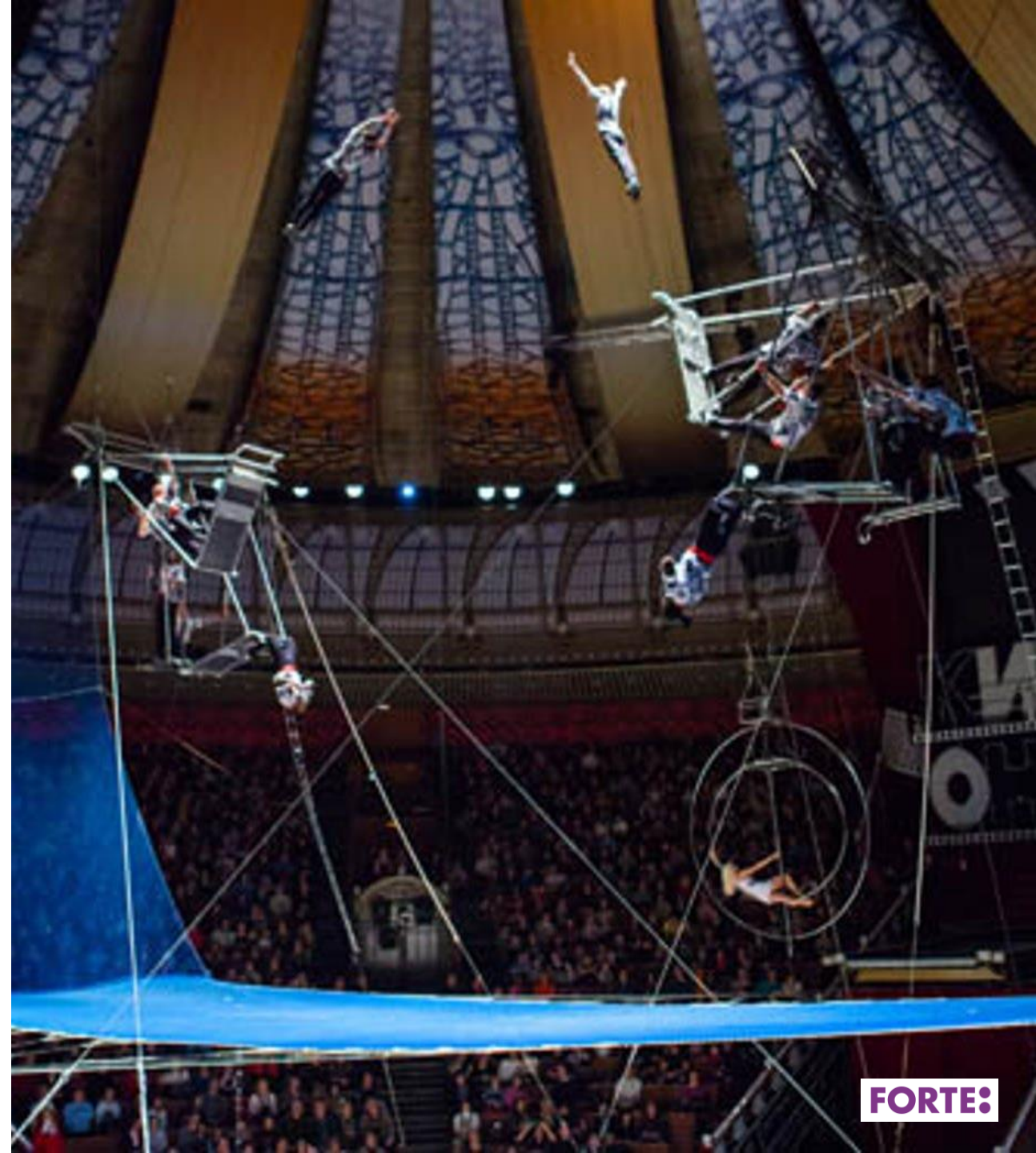
**FORTE:**

# Utilisation of research findings and impact

- Utilisation goes beyond dissemination – it requires collaboration, co-creation, and context-aware strategies
- Early dialogue with relevant stakeholders increases the likelihood that the research will lead to actual change and implementation in society
- Communication is a tool, but impact means learning, evidence-based decisions, and changed practices
- Specific skills and resources needed
- Forte promotes utilisation by identifying societal challenges and requiring clear plans for impact in funded projects

# Co-production to stimulate to ensure higher relevance in research

- The goal of the co-production is to enhance the quality, relevance and impact of research
- Forte always asks for, and sometimes requires, collaboration between research and society
- To meet the requirements for collaboration, applicants must demonstrate that:
  - The research questions is prioritized by the group being studied
  - The outcome measures are important to the group being studied
  - Relevant stakeholders are included in the research process and costs for co-production should be included in the project's budget



# Concluding remarks

- We propose a broadened definition of excellence that also includes research's contribution to society outside the academic sphere.
- It is important to reward research that may not be classified as “excellent” in the traditional sense but is essential for meeting society's knowledge needs.
- There is a need for more research with a problem-solving approach, especially within the social sciences field and social interventions.
- Co-production is an important approach to ensure research's relevance in practice-oriented research.