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## Article

# The VHB-rating 2024: More than just another rating

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# The VHB-Rating 2024—more than Just Another Rating

Jutta Geldermann  · Christian Koziol · Thomas Volling

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**Abstract** The VHB (German Academic Association for Business Research) has released a new rating for publication media, known as VHB-Rating 2024. Even though there was agreement that the previous rating required renewal, specifying the rating terms with regard to the needs of all scientific commissions of the VHB was a challenging process. The aim of this paper is to review the fundamental discussion on journal ratings, outline the VHB’s objectives for the new VHB-Rating 2024, describe the negotiation process leading up to finding a solution, explain the solution found and its implementation and critically discuss the rating results.

**Keywords** Journal evaluation · Quality assurance · Stakeholder participation · Discipline-Specific criteria · Multi-Dimensional assessment

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In preparing this paper, we utilized DeepLTranslate, DeepLWrite, and Chat GPT academic cloud to enhance the quality of our English language.

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## 1 Introduction

Journal ratings hold significant importance within academia. They can make a valuable contribution to quality management by providing insights into the (perceived) quality of scientific publication outlets, thus offering guidance for journal editors and publishers. They also reduce search costs (Rasheed and Priem 2020) and serve as an orientation for researchers, particularly in the early stages of their careers, aiding in manuscript submission decisions and the development of profile-building publication strategies (Aguinis et al. 2020). While intensively and controversially discussed, journal ratings are also employed in the evaluation of research performance, with approaches ranging from assessing individuals to groups, entire institutions, disciplines, or even countries. Despite the intense debate regarding the validity and use of ratings (Hudson 2024; Fernandes et al. 2025; Osterloh and Frey 2015), they are firmly established in the academic world (Serenko and Bontis 2024).

Globally, there exists a plethora of different ratings for academic publication outlets (Clermont and Dyckhoff 2012). For instance, the “Journal Quality List” provides an overview of eleven ratings in the field of business research (Harzing 2024). Additionally, numerous other ratings exist, such as the Journal Citation Reports, Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR), CiteScore, and Eigenfactor Score. These ratings vary in their objectives, methodologies, disciplinary focus, and scope of evaluation. Objectives range from measuring influence (e.g., CiteScore), prestige (e.g., SJR), and scientific quality (e.g., VHB-JOURQUAL) to making absolute statements about relevance (e.g., FT50). Methodologies employed are diverse, from automated citation analysis, institutional surveys, or expert opinion to meta-analysis, or combined approaches (Serenko and Bontis 2024; Harzing 2024). Some ratings are specific to certain fields like business research (e.g., FT50, VHB-JOURQUAL) or take a broad, interdisciplinary approach (e.g., CiteScore, SJR). The scope of evaluation often focuses on journals, but some ratings also include different types of publication outlets (e.g. SJR) or consider individual papers (Scopus). The initiators of these ratings are often scientific societies (e.g., Chartered Association of Business Schools, VHB), but include publishers (e.g., Elsevier), commercial institutions (e.g., Clarivate Analytics), and individuals (e.g., SJR) as well.

The VHB-JOURQUAL is one of the established journal ratings in the field of business research. The VHB (German Academic Association for Business Research) serves as a representative body for business research in German-speaking countries. It is organised into 18 scientific commissions (SCs), each dedicated to particular disciplines within the field. The SC are self-organized based on distinct academic specializations, with some boasting memberships exceeding 400 individuals. As the primary centres for scientific activity within the VHB, the SC exemplify the diverse and multifaceted nature of business administration disciplines (see also Table 1).

Since 2003, the VHB has published its own rating, the VHB-JOURQUAL, which is based on a methodology originally developed by marketing scholars (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). The focus is on the discipline-specific assessment of the scientific quality of business research journals by VHB members. Overall, three editions of the rating and two updates have been released, with the latest being the VHB-JOURQUAL 3 from 2015.

**Table 1** Resulting subratings in the VHB-Rating 2024 for the 18 scientific commissions

Scientific commission	Short	Sub-rating	Media type	Metric	Scale	Symbols
Accounting	ACC	1	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Banking and Finance	BaFi	2	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Business Taxation	BT	3	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... C
Philosophy of Science and Ethics in Economics	SEE	4	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
International Management <sup>a</sup>	INT	5	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Logistic <sup>a</sup>	LOG	6	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Marketing <sup>a</sup>	MARK	7	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Operations Research <sup>a</sup>	OR	8	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Production Management <sup>a</sup>	PROD	9	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Public Business Administration <sup>a</sup>	PBM	10	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Service Management <sup>a</sup>	SeM	11	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Strategic Management <sup>a</sup>	STRAT	12	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Sustainability Management <sup>a</sup>	SuM	13	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship <sup>a</sup>	TIE	14	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
University Management <sup>a</sup>	UM	15	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Wirtschaftsinformatik/Information Systems <sup>a</sup>	WI	16	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Human Resource Management <sup>b</sup>	HRM	17	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Organization <sup>b</sup>	ORG	18	Scientific journals	Scientific quality	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Accounting	ACC	19	Scientific journals	Contributions from science to practice	Ordinal	*** ... °
Business Taxation	BT	20	Scientific journals	Scientific quality legal-normative	Ordinal	A ... C legal-normative
Strategic Management	StM	21	Scientific journals	Practical relevance	Ordinal	5 ... 1

**Table 1** (Continued)

Scientific commission	Short	Sub-rating	Media type	Metric	Scale	Symbols
Wirtschaftsinformatik/ Information Systems	WI	22	Scientific journals	Relevance to WI/IS	Nominal	a ... f
Accounting	ACC	23	Commentary	Quality of commentary	Ordinal	a ... c
Business Taxation	BT	24	Commentary	Quality	Ordinal	a ... c
Wirtschaftsinformatik/ Information Systems	WI	25	Proceedings	Scientific qual- ity	Ordinal	A+ ... D
Wirtschaftsinformatik/ Information Systems	WI	26	Proceedings	Relevance to WI/IS	Nominal	a ... f

<sup>a,b</sup>Joint database

After over nine years, a renewal of the VHB-JOURQUAL 3 was necessary to reflect changes in the academic landscape and to account for the diversification of research methods and areas of study within the 18 SCs. This involved updating the journals considered and accounting for current perceptions of quality. At the same time, significant criticisms and weaknesses of the existing rating needed to be addressed. The most important requirements were:

1. The strict distinction between different types of publication outlets was to be reconsidered, with conference proceedings no longer listed in journal catalogs.
2. Other forms of research output besides journal articles were to be included through separate catalogs.
3. The narrow focus on overall scientific quality was to be expanded by evaluating additional distinguishing features.
4. Discipline-specific differences in quality perception were to be made visible.

Addressing these requirements necessitated a fundamental reconceptualization, culminating into the VHB-Rating 2024. As a discipline-specific, media-spanning, and differentiated rating, the VHB-Rating 2024 introduces significant innovations to meet the changed requirements. It is also the result of an intensive consultation process within the German-speaking business research community.

The present contribution discusses the VHB-Rating 2024 and its emergence. We describe the methodology and approach in designing the new rating and discuss its implications and impacts in the broader context of business research. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: In Sect. 2, we review the experiences with various journal rankings and describe the intensive process to develop the new VHB-Rating 2024. The implementation of the recent version of the rating is found in Sect. 3. The results of the rating are discussed in Sect. 4. Section 5 gives a critical reflection and Sect. 6 concludes.

## 2 Previous Ratings and Criticism

Journal rankings can be classified into two types: (1) The *objective approach* uses an objective measure, e.g., citation-based metrics, to determine its impact. The oldest and most popular one is the Journal Impact Factor (Garfield 1972), now provided by Clarivate's Journal Citation Reports, which is based on citation data from the Web of Science. It is calculated by dividing the citations each year by the total number of articles published in the previous two years. (2) The *subjective approach* relies on the view of experts about the quality of a journal, as with the VHB Ratings.

Since 1999, the “Journal Quality List” (Mingers and Harzing 2007) has compiled journal rankings from various sources through a rigorous statistical process. The most current 71st edition from 2024 (Harzing 2024) comprises eleven journal rankings in the broad area of Economics, Finance, Accounting, Management, and Marketing and covers about 800 journals.

In order to have a journal rating specifically for the German-speaking area, the VHB has taken the initiative to develop various ratings since 2003. The next section provides an overview of the development from JOURQUAL to JOURQUAL 3.

### 2.1 Development of JOURQUAL Ratings from 2003 to 2015

In 2003, the VHB started its initiative to create a journal rating for the German-speaking business research community. The first release of the journal ranking was developed in an independent initiative, in which 651 VHB members assessed 1695 international, mostly English and German-language business journals, based on academic quality and the rigor of their peer review process using a non-anonymized online questionnaire (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

The second edition of this rating, JOURQUAL 2 (JQ2), was the result of a subsequent survey in 2008. 1011 scholars evaluated 1633 journals. In 2010, 173 more journals were added and assessed by 848 participants in order to update this rating to the JOURQUAL 2.1 (2011). The surveys remained non-anonymized to prevent strategic biases (Schrader and Hennig-Thurau 2009).

From 2003 to 2011, these journal ratings were based on a weighted average of two factors: the perceived quality of a journal's articles and the rigor of its review process, forming the “VHB-JOURQUAL Index.” Both were rated on a weighted 10-point scale. The weighting considered factors such as the number of individuals familiar with a journal's peer review process, the evaluators' expertise—measured by their publication history in top-tier and international journals—and the number of ratings received. A journal needed at least 10 ratings from VHB members to be included in the ranking.

JOURQUAL 3 (JQ3), published in 2015, introduced a significant change. The ranking now focused on a single overall assessment of a journal's “scientific quality,” merging previous distinctions between article quality and review process (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2015). The survey, based on evaluations from 1100 VHB members providing 64,113 journal ratings altogether, aimed to reflect the perceived scientific quality of journals within the German-speaking academic community. Scientific quality was now defined as the degree to which a journal advances business admin-

istration as a scientific discipline, integrating the collective insights and experiences of the scholars involved. This version of the ranking was based on the median of a five-point scale, ranging from A+ (“Outstanding, world-leading journal in business administration or its sub-disciplines”) to D (“Journal in business administration or its sub-disciplines”).

## 2.2 Usage of JOURQUAL and Consequences

The JOURQUAL rankings have been seen as key drivers in the growing internationalization and research focus within German business administration, helping guide scholars on where to submit their manuscripts (Schrader and Hennig-Thurau 2009; Waldkirch et al. 2013; Eisend 2011; Fernandes and Walter 2022; Fraser et al. 2023).

However, a first consequence of these ratings covering a high fraction of relevant academic journals for the German-speaking business research community was that they have also been used as a tool for evaluating the research performance of tenured and non-tenured professors, postdoctoral researchers, and doctoral students.

A second consequence of the VHB ratings was that the *Handelsblatt*, a leading German-language business newspaper that has published an economist ranking since 2006, adopted these ratings for the first time in 2009 to create a business administration ranking. This ranking was based on a bibliometric analysis, assuming that a researcher’s performance can be measured by the weighted count of their publications in recognized academic journals. A contentious debate arose within the VHB leading to an appeal urging members not to participate in the *Handelsblatt* ranking (Dilger 2013; Schläpfer 2012). The reason for this is primarily because a university teacher can hardly be evaluated by just one dimension, i.e., an aggregated score for journals in which he or she published his or her articles.

The non-intended use of rankings is not unique to the German academia. It relates very well to the general critics of journal rankings, which will be discussed in the following.

## 2.3 General Critics

Not only the consequences of inappropriate use of journal rankings but also the quality of journal rankings themselves is the subject of intense debate (e.g., Albers 2009; Osterloh and Frey 2015; Lemke et al. 2021; Frey and Rost 2010; Rost and Frey 2011). Much of the discussion focuses on the methods used to translate multiple characteristics of journals into a ranking relevant score as well as the tools available to improve those methods.

Further criticism addresses the use and impact of journal rankings. It is important to clarify that a journal’s ranking is no suitable measure or guarantee of the quality of individual papers published within it (Osterloh and Frey 2020; Cuellar et al. 2024). Empirical research shows that two-thirds to three-quarters of published articles are overvalued by these criteria, while frequently cited articles published in lower-ranked journals are often undervalued (Osterloh and Frey 2020).

Although journal rankings are published primarily to assist academics in targeting papers in journals of an appropriate standard (Mingers and Harzing 2007),

they are often used for evaluation purposes (Doyle and Arthurs 1995; Jones et al. 1996; Scheidegger et al. 2023; Adler and Harzing 2009). Critics argue that rankings dominate academic governance, shape careers, and may cause negative side effects (Osterloh and Frey 2015). Mingers and Willmott (2013) show how reliance on rankings, like the Association of Business Schools (ABS) ‘Journal Guide’, can narrow research focus and harm scholarship. Rafols et al. (2012) highlight how rankings disadvantage interdisciplinary research in evaluations. Fernandes and Walter (2022) show that accounting professors, particularly in taxation and financial accounting, tend to publish for a German audience, reflecting their focus on German law and regulations. This may explain why they publish less frequently in highly rated international journals, unlike their marketing or operations counterparts, who appear more often in such outlets. These findings align with Jones et al. (1996), who observed similar trends among UK accounting academics with limited publications in US journals.

As bibliometric measurements and journal rankings become increasingly pervasive in academia, shaping incentives and influencing how academics allocate their time and efforts, international (e.g. DORA 2012; CoARA 2022) and national scientific organizations (e.g. German Science and Humanities Council 2022; DFG 2022; DORA 2024) have taken a more active role in the ongoing debate and pledge for a responsible use of quantitative indicators in research assessment.

Academic research is only one part of the wide range of tasks performed by university teachers. Other services provided by academics—including teaching, self-governance and service to the research community, knowledge transfer and policy advice (‘third mission’)—are an important part of the output and must be taken into account when assessing the performance of academics and institutions. For these reasons, the Executive Board of the VHB has deliberately and repeatedly spoken out against the ranking of individuals based on journal rankings. With the new VHB-Rating 2024, the VHB paves the way for conscious, responsible decisions regarding rating of journals, conference proceedings, and commentaries. At the same time, the VHB is committed to an interdisciplinary, compatible assessment of knowledge gain based on fair, qualitative criteria. This is why the VHB-Rating is complemented by a white paper to point out the importance of reading instead of counting respective publications—especially when evaluating the research achievements of individuals (VHB 2024). Any evaluation of research performance based on standardized procedures and averages leads to simplifications and thus to a narrowing of the field of vision.

## 2.4 Objectives and Scope of the VHB-Rating 2024

This debate led to the development of the VHB rating 2024. The main objective behind the VHB-Rating 2024 is to reveal the quality of publication outlets from the perspective of the German-language business administration community. These insights are intended to particularly provide early-career researchers with the advantage of leveraging assessments from experienced experts.

Moreover, the rating provides guidance on where to submit research articles and/or comments. In comparison to other objective ratings, both the specific view

within each SC of the VHB and the consideration of specific aspects for the German-speaking community are taken into account.

Recognizing the diverse requirements for a suitable rating across the individual disciplines of business research, a decentralized approach was implemented. This approach centers on the creation of SC-specific sub-ratings, delegating responsibility to each VHB SC for evaluating

1. the types of publication outlets (i.e., journals, conference proceedings, and/or comments),
2. the publication outlet list,
3. the metrics to be evaluated and
4. the decision about participation in a joint rating together with other SCs.

This flexibility paves the way to address concerns associated with a simple rating system for all business research journals, which relies on a single, overarching list with only one evaluation dimension.

## 2.5 The Path to the VHB-Rating 2024

At the 2018 VHB Annual Conference in Magdeburg, it was decided to initiate a new edition of the aging JQ3. All 18 SCs were invited to join a “Rating 4.0 Working Group”. After ten in-depth and dynamic discussions, the group developed a conceptual framework for a VHB Rating 4.0. The primary goals of this initiative were to offer clear guidance on paper submissions, particularly for early-career researchers, and to ensure transparency regarding the perceived quality of business-related publication outlets. The proposal also centred on the disciplinary diversity within the academic community. Additionally, the working group envisioned the VHB as a pool of experts whose scientific evaluations will enhance the organization’s ability to position itself as a credible, visible, and competitive authority on publication outlets, thereby fostering incentives for improving scientific output.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional annual conference could not be held in person as usual, so that a virtual general meeting was conducted in the spring of 2021. During this meeting, the proposed rating concept was met with considerable criticism, as several unresolved issues remained. The discussions focused on three key topics:

1. The definition of procedures to facilitate joint sub-rating amongst multiple SCs.
2. The definition of sub-rating-specific evaluation categories besides ‘scientific quality’.
3. The determination of sub-rating-specific types of media outlets to be included in the respective sub-ratings, e.g., conference proceedings for the SC Business & Information Systems Engineering or legal commentaries for the SC Business Taxation.

To address these issues, a more formalized approach to further consultations was established under the leadership of the VHB board and in close coordination with the Advisory Board, representing all 18 SCs. The plan included a three-part work-

shop during summer 2021 focusing on the following aspects: framework conditions, publication cultures in business research, integration of international ratings, and the further development of the conceptual rating framework, resulting in an expanded and modified compromise solution. The “one-text method” (Fisher et al. 2011) was applied to produce a consistent and comprehensible decision-making template. This draft was elaborated within nine months and was sent to Advisory Board members four weeks before the VHB Advisory Board meeting, which took place in person on November 4, 2022 for the final vote.

The earlier workshops in 2021 and 2022 ultimately demonstrated that a consistent solution satisfying all the justified expectations of all SCs was not achievable due to inherent contradictions. In the language of Operations Research, one could say that no dominating alternative existed—i.e., no option that is at least as good as all others and superior in at least one criterion. This complex decision scenario necessitated the use of explicit problem-solving methods (PSM) and a structured voting procedure. After an extended period of intense and, at times, heated discussions, it seemed the main result might simply be to conclude the debates. However, the strong desire for a comprehensive framework that could be adapted to the needs of the SCs ultimately prevailed. Therefore, three options were formulated:

1. The VHB takes an active stance against journal ratings, aligning itself with several initiatives opposing the use of metrics (e.g., German Science and Humanities Council 2022; DFG 2022)
2. The VHB coordinates a survey tailored to the specific requirements of each SC, with each SC being responsible for its own sub-rating. A committee, appointed by the VHB’s Executive Board and Advisory Council, would ensure compliance with agreed-upon conventions.
3. The VHB refrains from coordinating future rating initiatives.

Since the last option is essentially a fallback in case neither of the first two options secures a majority, it was not included in the vote.

At the Advisory Board meeting in November 2022, a process was followed similar to party conventions, allowing for proposed amendments to the suggested procedure to be introduced into the discussion and put to a vote. In total, approximately 20 votes were conducted during the roughly three-hour meeting, resulting in a compromise that was ultimately acceptable to all SCs.

Contrary to the usual practice in academic voting, where proposals are typically approved, some votes explicitly asked for rejections. Furthermore, the majority of “yes” or “no” votes determined the outcome, while abstentions were not counted.

Finally, the Advisory Board agreed upon a compromise based on Option 2. Accordingly, the VHB decided to implement a comprehensive rating initiative designed to adequately address the diverse landscape of publication outlets by leveraging specific quality metrics tailored to the requirements of individual SCs. The VHB coordinates the implementation of a survey-based data collection process, ensuring a structured and consistent methodology. The results are intended to be disseminated through a shared platform based on SC-specific sub-ratings. Each SC decides:

1. whether to participate in the rating initiative,
2. which sub-ratings to engage in, meaning which types of publication outlets (e.g., journals, commentaries, etc.) to evaluate according to which criteria (e.g., scientific quality, impact, etc.), and
3. whether to conduct the evaluation alone or jointly with other SCs.

Clear terms have to be used for the designations of the categories for each sub-rating; the categories A+, A, B, etc., remain reserved for the scientific quality of scientific journals.

### 3 Implementation of the Rating

#### 3.1 Organizational Structure and Decision-Making Process

Even with the Advisory Board's decision on the framework conditions of the rating, numerous detailed questions still needed to be addressed during the implementation of the rating process. Hence, an appropriate project structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities was established to manage the process effectively. In particular, the following five groups were involved:

1. *VHB office*: The VHB office took care of the required administrative support by inviting participants, providing anonymous codes to all members entitled to vote, and ultimately publishing the final rating.
2. *Scientific Committees (SCs)*: Each of the 18 SCs was responsible for the definition of their sub-rating/s, the choice of media in their catalogs, the evaluation criteria, the representation of the rating results, and the release of the ratings.
3. *Rating working group*: A working group consisting of seven members covering various SCs and different views was initiated. Its purpose was to design the general process for the pre- and main survey, to determine the dates and deadlines for the SCs, and to make suggestions for the presentation of the rating results.
4. *Steering Committee*: The steering committee, consisting of the board of the VHB and all heads of the 18 SCs, oversaw monitoring the rating process, allocating the financial resources, ensuring quality standards, and making final decisions based on proposals of the working group.
5. *IT service provider*: The framework for the required technical implementation, comprising the pre- and main surveys of all SCs and the provision of survey data to the VHB office, was managed by the IT service provider QUESTIONSTAR.

This organizational structure allowed for an effective separation between operative processes, such as those conducted by the VHB office, the Rating working group, and the IT service provider, on the one hand side, and politically-oriented processes such as those within the SCs and the Steering Committee, on the other hand side.

### 3.2 Technical Framework

From a technical perspective, a flexible and scalable solution for the intended rating that also meets the high requirements for the confidentiality of personal data and inputs was required. This was implemented with a customized web application having the following eight core functions:

1. *Personalized invitation and confirmation*: Establishment of rights management according to individual SC-affiliations (at most three SCs), mandatory confirmation of the acknowledgment of the evaluation guidelines, and truthful information by participants.
2. *Integrated data management*: Creating a common database with SC-specific catalogs for different types of publication outlets.
3. *Suggestion option for new outlets*: Possibility to anonymously suggest outlets for catalogs; automatic import of bibliographic data via Application Programming Interface (API) based on the online ISSN (e-ISSN).
4. *SC-specific evaluation logic*: Consideration of SC-specific criteria and scales (nominal (mode value), ordinal (median value)) in survey and evaluation functions.
5. *Rating option*: Possibility to anonymous rate publication outlets; following the principle that one person has got at most one vote in each (joint) sub-rating.
6. *Pause and modification option*: Ability to halt, resume, and modify evaluations at any time during the evaluation period.
7. *Final confirmation*: Mandatory and binding confirmation and submission of assessment.
8. *Interfaces and evaluation functions*: Key figure calculation, quality assurance, and preparation of results.

As a result, three use cases (UC) for generating sub-ratings were supported (Fig. 1):

1. *Independent evaluation of the quality of scientific journals at the SC level (UC 1)*. The SC is free to define its own, unique journal list. Participants vote independently of other sub-ratings, allowing for the possibility that the same publication outlet may be rated differently by an individual in distinct sub-ratings.
2. *Joint evaluation of the quality of scientific journals (UC 2)*: The SC is free to define its own, unique journal list. All votes are aggregated among the joint sub-ratings, resulting into a uniform rating result for each journal. Participants' inputs are therefore only required once for the entire set of joint sub-ratings and are recorded in the common database with simple weighting. Sub-ratings are generated by filtering the database according to the SC-specific journal lists.
3. *Possibility to conduct further sub-ratings (UC 3/UC 4)*: SCs are able to define independent sub-ratings for further types of publication outlets (e.g. conference proceedings) and criteria (e.g., impact). The same rules apply as in UC 1. The data is collected and evaluated independently.

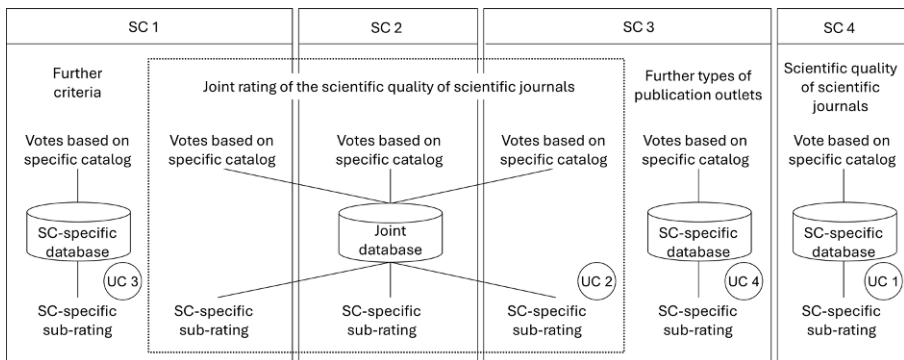
In all use cases, the results are provided separately on the level of SC-specific sub-ratings. Within a joint rating approach, a given journal is assigned the same category in every catalog in which it appears. However, differences may exist between unrelated sub-ratings, allowing for the consideration of discipline-specific characteristics.

From the user’s perspective, the following situation may occur (Fig. 1). Suppose a person is a member of four SCs: SC 1, SC 2, SC 3, and SC 4. The person decides to participate in the ratings of SC 1, SC 2, and SC 4 (upper limit of 3 SCs). Assume that SC 1 and SC 2 form a joint rating for the evaluation of scientific journals (UC 2). If journal ABC is listed in the catalogs of all four SCs, the person can vote independently twice: once for the joint rating using the catalog of SC 1 or that of SC 2 and once for the independent sub-rating of SC 4 (UC 1). Assume that the user has opted for using the catalog of SC 1. The vote is then transferred to the common database and incorporated into the determination of journal ABC’s overall rating, which appears in the SC-specific sub-ratings of SC 1, SC 2 and SC 3. This approach guarantees that user evaluations are considered throughout the entire joint rating, regardless of whether they have explicitly voted for each participating catalog.

As a result of the coordination process, the sub-ratings shown in Table 1 were defined. It should be noted that the inherent flexibilities were utilized in full.

To shorten the project duration, an agile software development process was employed. Functionally reduced prototypes were repeatedly developed by the IT service provider QUESTIONSTAR according to the requirements of the working group and subjected to several test phases. The working group members served as initial testers (inner circle), while broader testing phases were conducted with the steering committee (extended circle). Feedback was incorporated into the improvement of the solution. Based on this approach, it was possible to generate rapid feedback and, at the same time, to ensure comprehensibility, functionality, and usability. Based on the collected data, key figure calculations were performed using Python. Database and spreadsheet programs were used for the evaluation and presentation of results.

The user interface of the main survey is depicted in Fig. 2. Users can navigate between the sub-ratings using the drop-down lists. Depending on the chosen sub-rating supplementary information is provided on the quality metric used (pop up),



**Fig. 1** Overview of supported use cases (UC) for a user that is member of for scientific commissions (SC)

Please select the Scientific Commission and the catalog you wish to use to evaluate the publication media.

Scientific Commission:  Catalogue:

Entries: 75  
You evaluate  
**Scientific Quality<sup>®</sup>**: together with [INT, LOG, MARK, OR, PBM, SeM, STRAT, SuM, TIE, UM, WI]  
Note: Click on a field in the table button to sort the list accordingly.  
[Overview of the functions](#)

Please evaluate only the publication media that you regularly engage with.

eISSN	Title ↓	Scientific Quality <sup>®</sup>
1572-9338	Annals of Operations Research Springer	<input type="radio"/> A+   <input type="radio"/> A   <input checked="" type="radio"/> B   <input type="radio"/> C   <input type="radio"/> D   <input type="radio"/> N/A   <input type="checkbox"/> Not serious   <input type="checkbox"/> Not scientific
1872-9088	Annual reviews in control Elsevier	<input type="radio"/> A+   <input type="radio"/> A   <input type="radio"/> B   <input type="radio"/> C   <input type="radio"/> D   <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A   <input type="checkbox"/> Not serious   <input type="checkbox"/> Not scientific
0307-904X	Applied mathematical modelling: environmental social and engineering systems Springer	<input type="radio"/> A+   <input type="radio"/> A   <input type="radio"/> B   <input type="radio"/> C   <input type="radio"/> D   <input type="checkbox"/> Your evaluation has been saved

**Fig. 2** User interface (main survey), translated into English

the general usage of the survey (linked file), and any linked sub-ratings. All inputs are transferred to the database in real-time and are confirmed to the user. For the analysis, only those inputs were considered that were explicitly confirmed by the user upon completing the survey.

### 3.3 Survey Process

The survey process consisted of two stages. In the first step, each SC had the opportunity to have its members suggest publication outlets to be included into the catalogs (pre-survey). In a second step, the main evaluation took place (main survey).

#### 3.3.1 Pre-survey

According to the basic principles of the rating, the SCs were free in their decision about the number and content of their respective catalogs. The VHB office provided the catalogs from JQ3 as a basis. As the VHB-Rating 2024 does not foresee a separate sub-rating in the area of general management (GM), it was left to the SCs to include journals from JQ3's GM catalog to their SC-specific catalogs.

To finalize the catalogs, the SCs used different approaches. Three out of 18 SCs followed an analytical approach to identify relevant media and delegated the responsibility for creating the catalog to a committee. 15 SCs, however, followed an empirical approach. For this purpose, basic catalogs were compiled by each SC.

Members could supplement these catalogs. The pre-survey was conducted from September 26 to October 8, 2023. With the help of the provided online tool, the members could review the catalogs and suggest further publication outlets. 296 participants suggested in total 1176 journals, 51 proceedings, and 37 commentaries. The feedback was evaluated by the SCs and considered in defining the final catalogs using a rigorous, multi-stage quality assurance process.

The creation of a standardized database comprising all catalogs proved to be challenging. As far as possible, an API was used to retrieve standardized bibliographic information based on ISSN user input. This ensured uniform labeling and description. However, this procedure was not possible in all cases due to manual user input. Therefore, manual corrections were required to a considerable extent. After finalization, there were 18 SCs with 27 catalogs, containing an average of 180 publications.

### 3.3.2 Main Survey

The main survey took place from January 20, 2024, to February 12, 2024. All regular members of the VHB were eligible to participate. These are experienced researchers who have at least completed a doctorate in business administration. A total of 1175 participants took part in the survey. Of these, 1137 people completed the survey, which corresponds to a participation rate of 53% of all eligible VHB members. Thus, there were slightly more participants overall than in JQ2 of 2008 (1011 responses) and JQ3 of 2014 (1100 responses). The opportunity to participate in multiple sub-ratings was used intensively. On average, each person participated in 2.3 sub-ratings. Taking joint ratings into account, it was still 1.9 different sub-ratings. 91% voted on at least two sub-ratings.

In addition to the actual evaluation of the publication outlets, participants could also mark media outlets as non-scientific or unserious. To ensure a sufficiently broad evaluation, an overarching quorum was defined. The prerequisite for including a particular publication medium into the results was votes from at least 5% of the invited persons of an SC and at least ten responses from the participants of a joint rating.

In total, the survey yielded more than 112,000 data points, which were used to calculate the key figures according to Table 1. In very few special cases, in which a clear category could not be determined based on the median value (i.e., median between two categories), it was up to the SC to assign a category. As a default rule, the better category was suggested. To provide information on the robustness of the assessment, the proportion of votes with the assigned category or better was evaluated. Due to the use of the median for classifying the media outlets, values between 50 and 100% were possible for this figure, with higher values signaling a higher robustness of the assigned rating. For nominal categories, the mode value of the responses was evaluated (i.e., the most frequently chosen category). In case of ambiguity, the final decision was made by the SC.

Based on this foundation, the SCs formed the final sub-ratings. As a result, more than 1500 journals, proceedings, and commentaries were evaluated. Of these, 1209 media were included in the final sub-ratings. Compared to earlier ratings, this

represents a significant expansion (JQ2: 742 media with  $\geq 10$  responses, JQ3: 861 media with  $\geq 10$  responses).

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Sub-ratings and Publication

The results of the sub-ratings were compiled into tables and published on the VHB's website <https://www.vhbonline.org/en/services/vhb-rating-2024>. These results were supplemented by further comments on the rating initiative and the specific sub-rating from the VHB and the individual SCs. They were also made available to other websites, such as the Open Access Network's oa.finder (<https://finder.open-access.network/>).

Three types of visualizations of the ratings were created at the request of the SC. The default view is shown in Fig. 3. Displayed are the scientific quality ratings for scientific journals of the SC Production Management (sub-rating 9, left), and the practical relevance ratings by the SC Strategic Management (sub-rating 21, right). Please note that both lists have been significantly abbreviated here for the sake of clarity.

Specific visualizations were developed for the SC ACC and SC WI (Fig. 4). Both are examples of multi-dimensional ratings. The former (SC ACC) uses an integrated view of the sub-ratings for scientific quality and practical relevance of scientific journals (sub-ratings 1 and 19). The latter (SC WI) incorporates the assessed relevance to the discipline (sub-rating 21) to organize the list of quality ratings (sub-rating 16).

### 4.2 A Detailed Look at the Results

The distribution of the scientific quality of scientific journals across all sub-ratings is presented in Fig. 5. Across all catalogs, the category A+ was assigned to 6% of the listed journals (the highest category), the category A to 15%. The remaining categories account for about 80% of the listed journals. It is important to note that these numbers suggest an overrepresentation of the A+ and A categories, as journals

a						b					
Title	ISSN	Rating	Votes $\geq$ rating [%]	Publisher	Link	Title	ISSN	Rating	Votes $\geq$ rating [%]	Publisher	Link
Management Science	1526-5501	A+	80	INFORMS	<a href="#">Link</a>	Harvard Business Review	0017-8012	5	75	Harvard	<a href="#">Link</a>
European Journal of Operational Research	1872-6860	A	83	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>	MIT Sloan Management Review	1532-8937	5	58	MIT	<a href="#">Link</a>
Production and Operations Management	1937-5956	A	79	Wiley	<a href="#">Link</a>	Business Horizons	1873-6068	4	62	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
Journal of Operations Management	1873-1317	A	74	Wiley	<a href="#">Link</a>	Journal of Business Venturing Insights	2352-6734	4	55	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
INFORMS Journal on Computing	1526-5528	A	70	InformS	<a href="#">Link</a>	Academy of Management Discoveries	2168-1007	4	53	ACM	<a href="#">Link</a>
OR Spectrum	1436-6304	A	64	Springer	<a href="#">Link</a>	Journal of Management Studies	1467-6486	3	77	Wiley	<a href="#">Link</a>
Discrete Applied Mathematics	1872-6771	A	60	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>	Leadership Quarterly	1873-3409	3	77	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
Health Care Management Science	1572-9389	A	56	Springer	<a href="#">Link</a>	Strategic Organization	1741-315X	3	77	SAGE	<a href="#">Link</a>
Decision Support Systems	1873-5797	B	93	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>	Academy of Management Perspectives	1943-4529	3	76	ACM	<a href="#">Link</a>
Decision Sciences	1540-5915	B	89	Wiley	<a href="#">Link</a>	Strategic Change	1099-1697	3	76	Wiley	<a href="#">Link</a>
Computers & Operations Research	1873-765X	B	88	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>	Strategy Science	2333-2077	3	76	INFORMS	<a href="#">Link</a>

**Categories**  
A+ outstanding and world-leading journals in business administration  
A leading journals in business administration  
B important and respected journals in business administration  
C recognized journals in business administration  
D other academic journals in business administration

**Category**  
5 very high practical relevance  
4 high practical relevance  
3 medium practical relevance  
2 low practical relevance  
1 very low practical relevance

**Fig. 3** Scientific journals, SC Production Management (a, scientific quality) and SC Strategic Management (b, practical relevance), both selected excerpts

Title	ISSN	Scientific quality		Contributions from science to practice		Publisher	Link
		Rating	Votes & rating [%]	Rating	Votes & rating [%]		
Accounting Review	1558-7967	A+	87	**	53	American Accounting Association	<a href="#">Link</a>
Journal of Accounting Research	1475-679X	A+	83	*	79	Wiley-Blackwell	<a href="#">Link</a>
Management Science	1526-5501	A+	82	**	54	INFORMS	<a href="#">Link</a>
Journal of Financial Economics	1879-2774	A+	81	*	77	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
Journal of Accounting and Economics	1879-1980	A+	79	*	73	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)	1948-0989	A+	76	*	79	Academy of Management	<a href="#">Link</a>
Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)	1930-3815	A+	73	*	82	Cornell University Press	<a href="#">Link</a>
Academy of Management Review (AMR)	1930-3807	A+	68	*	77	Academy of Management	<a href="#">Link</a>

**Categories**

- A+ outstanding and world-leading journals in business administration
- A leading journals in business administration
- B important and respected journals in business administration
- C recognized journals in business administration
- \*\*\* Contributions from science to practice of outstanding
- \*\* Contributions from science to practice of very high relevance
- \* Contributions from science to practice of high relevance

	Title	ISSN	Rating	Votes better or equal than rating [%]	Publisher	Link
Wirtschaftsinformatik or Information Systems Journals	MIS Quarterly	2162-9730	A+	78	University of Minnesota	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Information Systems Research (ISR)	1526-5536	A+	72	INFORMS	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Journal of the Association for Information Systems (JAIS)	1536-9323	A	87	AIS	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Journal of Management Information Systems (JMIS)	1557-928X	A	85	Taylor & Francis Group	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Information Systems Journal (ISJ)	1365-2575	A	81	Wiley	<a href="#">Link</a>
	European Journal of Information Systems (EJIS)	1476-9344	A	78	Taylor & Francis Group	<a href="#">Link</a>
Wirtschaftsinformatik or Information Systems Journals	MIS Quarterly Executive (MISQE)	1540-1979	B	75	Indiana University Press	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Electronic Commerce Research and Applications (ECRA)	1873-7846	C	74	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
	International Journal of Knowledge Management (IJKM)	1548-0658	C	67	IGI Global	<a href="#">Link</a>
	International Journal of Electronic Business (IJEb)	1741-5063	C	65	Inderscience	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Journal of Information Technology Teaching Cases (JITTC)	2043-8869	C	62	SAGE	<a href="#">Link</a>
	HMD Praxis der Wirtschaftsinformatik	2198-2775	C	59	Springer	<a href="#">Link</a>
Journals with or at the interface to Wirtschaftsinformatik or Information Systems	Proceedings of Mensch und Computer (MundC or MuC)	1533-7979	C	57	IGI Global	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Wirtschaftsinformatik und Management (WiM)	1867-5913	D	100	Springer	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Management Science	1526-5501	A+	80	INFORMS	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Data & Knowledge Engineering (DKE)	1872-6933	B	76	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Journal of Service Management (JOSM)	1757-5826	B	76	Emerald	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)	1573-7551	B	73	Springer	<a href="#">Link</a>
Wirtschaftsinformatik or Information Systems	Information and Software Technology	1873-6025	B	72	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
	IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering (IEEE-TSE)	1939-3520	B	72	IEEE	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Journal of Cleaner Production	1879-1786	B	71	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>
	Operations Research Letters (ORL)	1872-7468	B	70	Elsevier	<a href="#">Link</a>

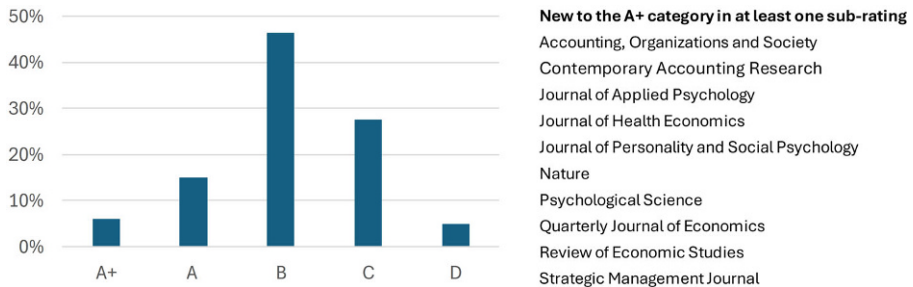
**Categories**

- A+ outstanding and world-leading journals
- A leading journals
- B important and respected journals
- C recognized journals
- D other academic journals

**Fig. 4** Scientific journals SC Accounting (top) and Wirtschaftsinformatik (bottom), both selected excerpts

might be listed in multiple catalogs. This is particularly true for high-quality journals. A detailed analysis reveals that while the A+ rating was assigned 139 times across all sub-ratings, it was only given to 32 different journals. Each A+ journal is therefore listed on average in 4.3 catalogs. Nevertheless, we see an increase in those journals compared to JQ3, which lists only 22 journals in the A+ category. Notably, all newly added journals are highly renowned international publication outlets (Fig. 5).

In general, the ratings appear to be very consistent with previous ratings. The SC MARK’s rating provides a good example of this. Table 2 lists all its journals in the A+ category. The JQ3 catalog included only four A+ journals, whereas the VHB-



**Fig. 5** Distribution of quality categories of scientific journals (all sub-ratings)

**Table 2** VHB-Rating 2024 vs. JQ3 (SC Marketing)

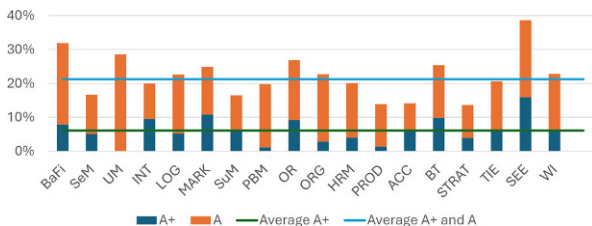
Title	VHB-Rating 2024	JOURQUAL 3
Nature	A+	Not included
Science	A+	A+ (GM)
Academy of Management Journal	A+	A+ (GM)
Journal of Marketing	A+	A+
Journal of Consumer Research	A+	A+
Journal of Marketing Research	A+	A+
Management Science	A+	A+ (GM)
American Economic Review	A+	A+ (GM)
Administrative Science Quarterly	A+	A+ (GM)
Econometrica	A+	A+ (GM)
Marketing Science	A+	A+
Academy of Management Review	A+	A+ (GM)
Organization Science	A+	Not included
Psychological Science	A+	Not included
Journal of Political Economy	A+	A+ (GM)
Strategic Management Journal	A+	A (GM)
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	A+	Not included

GM General Management

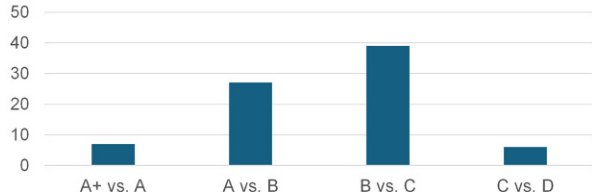
Rating 2024 counts 17. However, eight of them were previously listed in the General Management (GM) catalog. Of the remaining journals, four were newly added. Only one journal, the Strategic Management Journal, received a higher rating than in JQ3. This phenomenon can be observed for several sub-ratings. Due to the inclusion of GM journals, there generally is a greater number of top-tier journals. There are no indications of systematic bias or inflated ratings. The most notable change is the expansion of the B category, which has more than doubled in size compared to JQ3. However, this is not surprising given the increasing specialization within the disciplines and the large number of new outlets in business research.

It is interesting to note that significant differences exist between the sub-rating structures. Figure 6 shows the proportions of journals in the A+ and A categories for each SC. The proportion of A+ journals varies between less than 2% (SCs UM, PBM, and PROD) and more than 15% (SC SEE). A closer look reveals well-founded reasons for these differences. Firstly, the ratings differ fundamentally in their focus. This is reflected in the length of the respective journal lists. While the two shortest sub-ratings include only seven and 44 journals, respectively (SCs UM, SEE), the

**Fig. 6** Frequency of scientific journals by SC (refer to Table 1 for a complete listing of SCs)



**Fig. 7** Distribution of varying ratings; depicted is the number of journals rated in different categories across the sub-ratings



longest ones include 189 and 199 journals (SCs TIE, SeM). In addition, there are differences in disciplinary culture. Accordingly, the number of A+ journals already varied significantly between the sub-ratings in JQ3. These differences were further amplified by the optional integration of General Management journals into the SC catalogs.

Generally, there is a high level of internal consistency. Differences in assessment between the sub-ratings occur in 7.5% of the results only. These differences arise when a particular journal is listed with different categories in different sub-ratings. At most we see differences of one category. Figure 7 shows the corresponding frequency distribution. Most differences exist in the transition from category A to category B and from category B to category C. Journals of the category A+ and D show the highest level of consistency between the ratings.

We hypothesize that different assessments are based on differences in the specific relevance to the various managerial disciplines. This is exemplified by the evaluation of the Journal of Business Ethics, which is included in six independent databases. The journal is classified as Category B in three databases by a total of eight SCs (BaFi, BT, SeM, INT, MARK, SuM, STRAT, TIE). In three further databases it is classified as Category A by four SCs (ACC, HRM, ORG, SEE). The differences are well in line with the variance that exists between different ratings as documented in the “Journal Quality List” (Harzing 2024). The discipline-specific perception of scientific quality becomes also evident in the rating of the SC SEE (Table 3). There is a complete consensus between the current rating and the JQ3 results for the A+ category. The picture is more nuanced in the A category. Approximately half of the journals have been consistently rated as category A in JQ3. However, two journals were not previously included in the SC SEE’s sub-rating and have been newly added to this category. The remaining half of the journals were rated as A for the first time. Notably, these journals were previously rated in JQ3 jointly with other SCs. The SC’s original assessment was thus compounded (and possibly overruled) by other evaluations. Although this is not a definitive conclusion about general relationships, the example demonstrates the advantages of differentiated ratings. Through separate assessments, SCs are able to explicitly express their discipline-specific perspective in the quality evaluation.

## 5 Limitations

Given the general discourse on journal ratings and the diverse set of stakeholder requirements, it is inevitable that some expectations will remain unfulfilled. In this

**Table 3** Philosophy of Science and Ethics in Economics (*SEE*), scientific journals, category A+ and A

Title	Rating	JQ 3
Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)	A+	A+
American Economic Review	A+	A+
Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)	A+	A+
Academy of Management Review (AMR)	A+	A+
Journal of Political Economy	A+	A+
Management Science	A+	A+
Science	A+	A+
Organization Studies	A	A (HRM)
Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)	A	A (GM)
Academy of Management Annals	A	A
Journal of Management (JOM)	A	A
Journal of Management Studies	A	A
Business Ethics Quarterly (BEQ)	A	B (SEE, ACC, SuM)
Journal of Business Ethics	A	B (SEE, ACC, SuM)
Business & Society	A	B (SEE, SuM)
Academy of Management Perspectives	A	B (GM)
Journal of Business Research	A	B (GM)

section, we will discuss potential limitations of the VHB-Rating 2024 which are identified and explained for the purpose of transparency.

It is important to note that the VHB-Rating 2024 is inherently subjective in nature, as it is based on the assessments of over 1100 voting members from the 18 SCs. Accordingly, the final scores come from individual opinions rather than an objective (quantitative) evaluation. While the incorporation of expert assessments and the structured survey methodology enrich the VHB-Rating 2024 with contextual and nuanced information beyond the scope of pure (bibliometric) data analysis, the potential for rater bias remains a concern. This bias can manifest in multiple forms, including (but not limited to) affiliation bias, status quo bias, and disciplinary bias. To minimize the influence of conscious or unconscious biases, a certain minimum number of votes must be included in the rating. This is why the VHB-Rating employs absolute and relative quorum values to determine the inclusion of publication outlets. In addition to that the rating is grounded on transparent guidelines that users had to acknowledge prior participating in the rating process. To mitigate the effect of outliers and to ensure a more representative assessment, the rating uses the median value rather than the mean and gives the final decision to include rating results into the catalogues to the SCs. The fundamental challenge that the size of the SCs varies and that the sub-ratings are therefore partly based on a relatively small number of votes remains fundamentally unchanged.

It should be emphasized that even though the rating covers a huge number of publications, there is no claim to completeness. There are reasons for why an SC might prefer to focus on the core publication outlets so that less widely used and more interdisciplinary outlets may not be captured in this case.

Some users of the rating have a latent desire to compare different publication outlets both within a sub-rating and across sub-rating boundaries. When designing the VHB-Rating 2024, it was deliberately ensured that a unique translation of scores of publication outlets across rating boundaries is neither suggested nor desired. This is because of individual characteristics and research attitudes of each SC so that a publication for a researcher of a specific scientific community might have a higher importance than the same publication for a researcher being primarily active in a different academic environment. As expected, differences between the sub-ratings are evident in the results. However, these differences are very nuanced and confined to at most one category (Sect. 4.2). Overall, this leads to a remarkably consistent picture.

More than that, the rating by design employs ordinal scales. This introduces two significant limitations. Firstly, it is neither intended nor valid to equate a publication in a highly rated outlet (e.g., A or A+) with a higher quantity of publications in outlets with lower rating (e.g., B or C). This mandates a qualitative assessment when determining the overall publication performance of individuals or groups, considering the quality, impact, and significance of the research. Secondly, the category assigned to an outlet such as B or C does not provide any indication on how close the assessment is to a better (or a worse) category. To address this limitation, the VHB-Rating entails additional information about the percentage of votes being at least as good as the final category. This key ratio implies the fraction of votes with a worse outcome and gives some idea about the potential for even better votes. It therefore helps to contextualize the results, providing a more complete picture of the outlets' standing.

## 6 Conclusions

At the outset of the development of the new VHB-Rating 2024, a fundamental question emerged: Why invest significant time and effort into creating a new rating. The decision of the VHB was driven by the intention to create a new type of rating which would allow for a discipline-specific, multi-dimensional approach in both the publication outlet catalog and the evaluation criteria. This makes it more than just another rating.

In conclusion it turned out that the VHB-Rating 2024 proved to be an extremely fruitful initiative for the VHB and the research community that goes beyond the actual assessment. There is even hope that the VHB-Rating 2024 may be a role model for similar scientific communities to evaluate their journals and other publication outlets. In this paper, we have looked at this from three perspectives:

1. From a technical perspective, we explained the complex challenges for the software (in particular, the quality assurance procedures) to be used for the surveys. The established software solution allows for low-effort repetition.
2. From an organizational perspective, the VHB-Rating 2024, in which 18 scientific commissions were involved, required a thorough project structure for a sophisti-

cated participation process. Ultimately, the insights from the project contributed to self-discovery.

3. From a political perspective, the new rating counteracts nitpicking, yet provides qualified orientation, and fertilizes discussion process.

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**Author Contribution** All three authors equally: concept, drafting, writing.

**Availability of data and material** On further request.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** J. Geldermann, C. Koziol and T. Volling declare that they have no competing interests.

**Ethical standards** *Ethics approval and consent to participate:* Not applicable. *Consent for publication:* All three authors consent.

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