

Successful Research while living in the Work/life Collision: *What's Possible?*



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Academic work holds many pleasures

- Autonomy
- Fun, social exchange, intellectual growth
- Decent pay (if secure)
- Chance to pursue interests
- Relatively safe, secure (!) environment...
- Opportunity to affect world, students
- Travel and international engagement



Work/life for academics is changing

- More teaching (hours, numbers and levels)
- More admin tasks, less admin support
- More research (quality, quantity, publications, research income)
- Higher level performance expected



These changes mean

- Longer hours
- More intensive hours
- Sometimes more travel demands
- A broad range of skills (teaching, admin, management, research)
- Strong competition between academics (continuing a long tradition)
- A 'performative' environment
- With negative changes, a culture of complaint?



Amidst all this change...

many aspire to a life

- More women
- More academics with responsibility for dependents
- More wanting a meaningful life
- And some balance in life
- Decline of the male breadwinner, with back up female partner
- Even successful academic women, often adopt the masculinist 'main earner/back up carer' model
- Academics go home to problems with the plumbing...

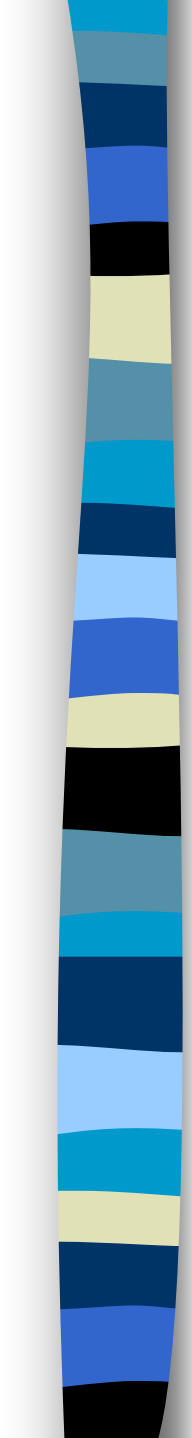


A work/life collision that is shared

- But with specific features for academics' work
- which is what sociologists call 'greedy' - without boundaries
- And the parts that academics often find the MOST satisfying - research - are often the MOST squeezed
- Research comes AFTER all other obligations. It fits in the gaps and fissures.

Like others, most academics
cannot rely on the work
'helpmate'





Doing Research in the face of time poverty: Five possible responses

1. Work longer hours
2. Work more intensively, more efficiently
3. Get more resources
4. Lower standards
5. Do less, but higher quality

Consider these in turn



1. Work longer hours,

- Most active researchers do this
- Weekends, evenings, holiday
- Upside: it can definitely increase research capacity
- Down sides:
 - it can kill or impair you
 - your partner won't like it (if you manage to find/keep one)
 - It may mean delaying relationship formation
 - Your kids or other dependents will notice. They will not like it
 - Past an optimal point, there is declining marginal productivity



2. Work more intensively, more efficiently

- Most active researchers do some of this
- Eliminate social life at work (meet outside your office so you can control when you/they leave...etc)
- Be a poor workplace citizen (don't wash the tea dishes, help co-workers with computer problems or take your turn to bring cake for morning tea)
- Confine meetings to a single day; cut travel time
- Specialise in a narrow field, or on specific issue
- Get synergy between own research and supervision and/or teaching
- Read economically and in a controlled way
- Control email, phone



3. Get more resources

- Most active researchers do some of this.
- Really successful ones do a lot.
 - More or less ethical practice: Some pay people to write their papers, exploit juniors, others work with postgrads and RAs
- Grants
 - Small amounts of money are sometimes much more helpful than large sums which require a lot of management
 - Grants with teaching relief, fellowships, RAs
- Research assistance
 - Small, large, industry, community org funds/grants
 - Reallocation of staffing \$\$ to buy shared dept research support
- Collaborate. Reciprocal high trust research partnerships. Synergy with supervision.



4. Lower standards

- Won't suit everyone
- Do 'good enough' research
- and 'good enough' teaching, supervision, partnering, parenting, etc etc...
- Sometimes 'quality' aspirations (in teaching, research) are a cloak for insecurity and deferral.



5. Do less, but higher quality

- Makes sense in view of RQF
- Target best international journal in field for best work
- Go part-time...but don't tell anyone
- Means refusing a lot of lesser opportunities, requires discipline, long waits.
- Means being Anglo- or US-centric.

Seven Keys to Research Success And Seven Hazards





Seven Keys to Research Success

1. **Decide what you want:** To be a professor?
To be a good researcher with prospects and a life?

This decision is shaped by:

- institutional supports and dominant cultures

- family and household location

- personal preferences

- level of household and relationship support

- level of purchased support

- Prospects for change?



Keys to research success

- 2. Passion:** Work on issues that provoke personal passion. Most powerful, efficient fuel. Drives the best work. May mean turning down someone else's idea that could result in an easy publication point.
- 3. Connect to those bodies that share your passion:** if someone/some organisation cares about what you're doing, you'll do it better, faster, with more satisfaction. The sense that it matters to others creates momentum.



Keys to research success

- 4. Focus:** maintain focus on a day-to day, week-to-week, yearly and longer term basis. Work to goals. Don't let the urgent override the important.
- 5. Resources:** Get resources that increase your capacity - it can no longer be done through more efficient longer hours alone.



Keys to research success

6. Know yourself:

Know your own habits of avoidance or inefficiency ('I read too much', 'It has to be perfect', 'I read all my email as it arrives', 'I hate writing alone').

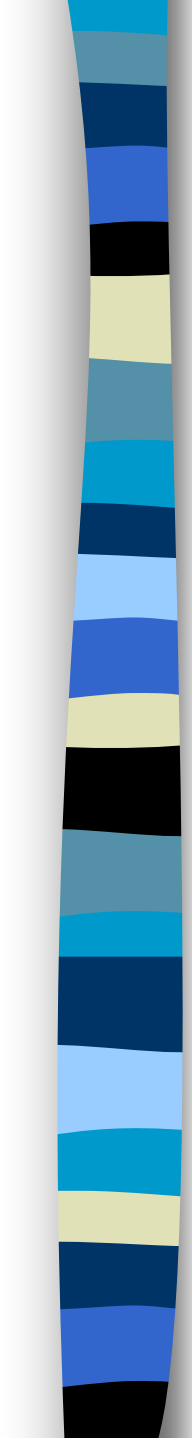
Deal with them.

What rewards works for you? Apply them.

Deal with competitiveness and insecurity directly.

If you know that you whinge as cover for inaction, then get over it and get on with it

If you actually don't like writing or research and your job demands it, then you are in the wrong job. Consider changing.

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- Set up supports and deadlines to work to:
 - With colleagues, around conferences, with collaborators elsewhere.
 - Writing group? Don't have to share terrain.
 - Control your diary - what you accept, like requests to work outside your area. Say 'no' more.
 - Learn from mistakes...



Keys to research success

7. Get synergy

- so that one project relates to another
- seminars, speaking that links to collaboration
- close relationship between supervision and own focus
- teaching related to research
- avoid relationships that don't work or get out of them
- Know your publication target and aim strategically
- 'make every presentation a publication'



Six Main Hazards

1. **ARC success:**

- ‘the dog that caught the car’: what now?
- Researcher or research manager?

2. **Consultancy success:**

- As for ARC success above...
- Drive a truck through focus?
- Fewer or more strings?
- Smaller sums sometimes better than large

3. **Over-suggestibility:**

- Why don't you research/write/talk about this?

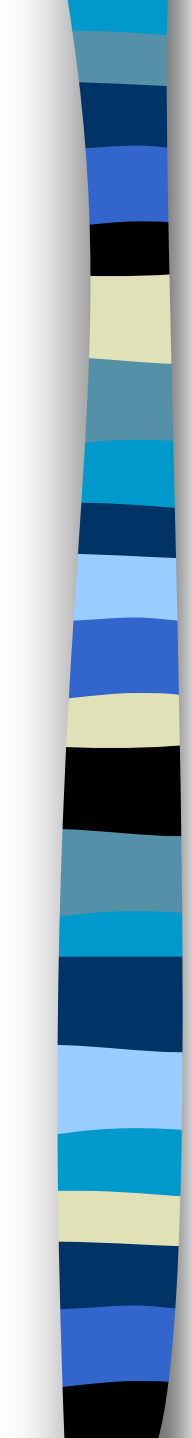


4. **Losing focus**

- 'I have 10 (20, 30) years to go, what do I want to achieve?'
- Leaking effort versus taking control

5. **Blurred boundaries** between home and work

- Technology invites this
- Preoccupation spills onto significant others
- Create ritualistic, clear barriers and boundaries

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6. Don't let a work/work cycle drive out a work/life cycle as work overwhelms other sources of life...

We need new 'do-able' models of research