How to turn a research career into a success

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ECSS 2023 Early Career Researchers Workshop
About me

- BSc and PhD Computer Science, University College Dublin
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- Lecturer in Computer Science, Aston University, Birmingham, UK
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- Maternity leave [2014-2015]
- Assistant Head of Computer Science, TU Dublin
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Early Career Challenges

• Moving from being a researcher to being an academic is a very challenging time
  – You got the job because of your strong research
  – But your job has exploded in the diversity of tasks you need to undertake
  – Less focus on research
  – High teaching load
  – Administration tasks
Keep a focus on your research

• Block out protected time for research to maintain your researcher credentials

• Develop a clear research strategy for YOU
  – What is your vision for short/medium/long term?
    – Where will you be and what do you want to know in 5-10 years time?
  – What area you are going to do your research in?
  – How are you going to be successful?
  – What infrastructure do you need?
  – How will you manage your research strategy?
Some practical tips

• Networking
• Publications
• Grant writing
• Communication skills
• Be proactive
Networking

• Expand your network – don’t rely on your existing network
  – Get new ideas and inspirations
  – Meet new collaborators
  – Attend seminars/webinars/networking events
  – Join special interest groups on social media
Publications

• Publish from your PhD
• Get involved in other publications
• Use your network
• Every piece of research can produce a paper
  – You can write about theory, methodology, preliminary results, final results, and problems.
  – Prospective/review/opinion pieces
• PhD co-supervision
Grant Writing

• Become a grant writing expert
  – Take a course or get advice
    • Grant writing is a constant learning process
  – Understand the grant writing process
  – Accept any invitation to be part of the grant writing team/consortium
  – Ask to see examples of successful proposal
  – Understand the odds of success
Communication skills

• At every stage of your career, you can improve your communication skills
• Communication and communication media keeps changing
• Research communication keeps changing
  – Public facing, citizen science, engaged research
• Communication skills build confidence
  – Promote yourself
Say No to Imposter Syndrome

• When surrounded with other high achievers, it can be easy to compare yourself to them
  – Separate feelings from facts
  – Take note of your accomplishments
  – Stop comparing
  – Talk to others
  – Get a mentor

• Fake it until you make it!
Build Resilience

• You will encounter stresses, setbacks and disappointments

• Resilience is the capacity to adapt or recover from stressful situations
  – Building resilience doesn’t mean you’ll avoid stress. What it means is that you’ll be able to cope better and recover from stress more effectively.
  – You need to be able to adapt to often rapidly changing circumstances and to bounce back from disappointments and setbacks
Resilience

• Resilience is:
  – something which can be learned
  – weakened by isolation – build a support network
  – magnified by self-awareness
  – experiencing setbacks and learning behaviours, thoughts and actions that allow you to bounce back from these in a healthy way.

• Resilience is not:
  – putting up with unacceptable work conditions, discriminatory work practices, enduring harassment or bullying
Mistakes

• A huge mistake is not seeking mentorship *early on*
  – Formal mentorship programmes
  – Informal mentors
  – Look out for mentorship schemes and other programs designed to bring you into contact with academics in different stages of their careers
Mistakes

• Overcommitment
  – Only make commitments that will fit into your working week and only commit to things that will work for you
  – Overcommitment causes missed deadlines, paper deadlines, funding grant deadlines are easily missed
  – Become good at time management
Proactivity

• Take opportunities that put in front of you
  – Help you grow and learn
• Get used to feeling uncomfortable
  – The next time you’ll feel a little less comfortable
Look after yourself

- Brains work better in healthy bodies
- Control the controllables
- Don’t be a perfectionist
- You are only one person!
- You are more than your job