YOUR CAREER: WHAT’S NEXT AFTER YOUR PHD/POSTDOC?

FLW RESEARCH DAY
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PHD IN NUMBERS

Humanities:

THE PHD FACTORY

The world is producing more PhDs than ever before. Is it time to stop?
Employment 3 years after PhD

Source: Belgian Science Policy Office, CDH Database 2013 - Data for Flanders
SECTOR OF EMPLOYMENT OF PHD GRADUATES UNTIL 10 YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

Source: Belgian Science Policy Office, CDH Database 2013 - Data for Flanders
WITH A PHD IN HUMANITIES …

My PhD allowed me to pursue opportunities in the short term in my choice of career

My PhD enabled me to be innovative in my job

If I could start my career again, I'd make the same choices

My PhD allowed me to bring additional benefits to the company/organisation in which I work

I had a clear view of the career opportunities I could pursue after my PhD

My PhD helped me to develop in the direction of my long term career ambitions

I was sufficiently prepared for a career outside academia

Source: Belgian Science Policy Office, CDH Database 2013 - Data for Flanders
WHY CAREER PLANNING?
• Do not ignore the facts …: reality check!
• A PhD or postdoc is a temporary job by default
• Academia is rather ‘inward’ looking: too much focus on academic careers
• Exploring your alternatives takes time: what’s your strategy?
• Labour market today: career management is a skill you’ll need anyhow (1 job in a lifetime does not exist anymore)
WHO AM I?
A PHD IN HISTORY WHO BECAME A PHD CAREER COACH …
MY CAREER

Master in History
Ghent University
(1995-1999)

PhD in History
FWO aspirant,
Ghent University
(2001-2006)

Postdoc in History (Ghent University)
(2009-2012)

Province of East-Flanders: policy advisor
(2000-2001)

United Nations (UN-ILO), Geneva
research officer
(2007-2008)

PhD career coach (HR Dept.)
(since 2012)
IN HINDSIGHT …

• A straight line? From humanities to human resources
• No! A ‘zig zag’ career (between academia and policymaking)
• I had no career plan … and discovered that life is full of (often unforeseen) opportunities
• I followed my heart and made a career switch
YOUR CAREER PLAN?
THE PLANS:

THE PLAN YOU TELL YOUR ADVISOR: "I'M GOING TO BE A PROFESSOR AT A MAJOR RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AFTER I GRADUATE."

THE REAL PLAN: LOOK FOR CAREER ALTERNATIVES.

THE SECRET PLAN: BECOME A BAKER/ROCKSTAR/WRITER.
"Dare to think!"

Not only in your research, but also about yourself and your own future
3 million dollar questions!!!

1) What do I want?
   (motivation, what gives me energy, values)
2) What can I do?
   (skills, competencies, strengths, qualities)
3) What is out there?
   (jobs, labour market, where to go)
HOW TO BUILD YOUR ACADEMIC CV?

• Present your work regularly → national and international networks

• Organize masterclass/workshops/conferences

• Collaborate with people inside and outside your group

• Publish your work: build an academic network

• Try to arrange some teaching
WHAT IF YOU DON’T WANT THIS?

• Stay calm

• Try to approach it positively: “What do I want”?

• Be open with your supervisor / network: talk to people

• See what your university has to offer (career coach, workshops, job fairs, …) or take external career coaching (loopbaancheques!)
WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU!
CAREER SUPPORT @UGENT

- Workshops & training courses
  ✓ Cluster “career management” (Doctoral Schools)
  ✓ Career Management for Postdocs (Postdoc Talent Management, DPO)
- Mentoring for postdocs (MenZa/MenTa)
- One-to-one career coaching for PhD students and postdocs
- Online career resources (e-tools and practical guides)
- Labour market events (“Job Market for Young Researchers”, 27 March 2018 – mark in your agenda!)
- Postdoc Community as a grass-roots organization/peer-to-peer support network
- Network of external career coaches (VDAB career vouchers)
EXERCISE: MY SKILLS

A non-academic career?
“Having a PhD is not a skill, it’s a degree”

Think of what a normal working day currently looks like for you.
- Which tasks do you regularly perform? What do you actually do?
- What are you good at?
- What do and what don’t you like in your current work?

Translate your PhD experience into skills & activities!
LEARN THE ‘SKILLS LANGUAGE’

Researchers Development (competencies & skills) Framework (Vitae, but there are many more instruments – check the internet!)
SET OF PHD SKILLS & COMPETENCIES

Analysis & Problem-Solving
- Define a problem and identify possible causes
- Comprehend large amounts of information
- Form and defend independent conclusions
- Design an experiment, plan, or model that defines a problem, tests potential resolutions and implements a solution

Interpersonal & Leadership Skills
- Facilitate group discussions or conduct meetings
- Motivate others to complete projects (group or individual)
- Respond appropriately to positive or negative feedback
- Effectively mentor subordinates and/or peers
- Collaborate on projects
- Teach skills or concepts to others
- Navigate complex bureaucratic environments
SET OF PHD SKILLS & COMPETENCIES

Project Management & Organization
• Manage a project or projects from beginning to end
• Identify goals and/or tasks to be accomplished and a realistic timeline for completion
• Prioritize tasks while anticipating potential problems
• Maintain flexibility in the face of changing circumstances

Research & Information Management
• Identify sources of information applicable to a given problem
• Understand and synthesize large quantities of data
• Design and analyze surveys
• Develop organizing principles to effectively sort and evaluate data
SET OF PHD SKILLS & COMPETENCIES

Self-Management
• Work effectively under pressure and to meet deadlines
• Comprehend new material and subject matter quickly
• Work effectively with limited supervision

Communication
• Prepare concise and logically-written materials
• Organize and communicate ideas effectively in oral presentations to small and large groups
• Write at all levels — brief abstract to book-length manuscript
• Debate issues in a collegial manner and participate in group discussions
• Use logical argument to persuade others
• Explain complex or difficult concepts in basic terms and language
• Write effective grant proposals
SKILLS OF PHDS USEFUL FOR THE EXTERNAL LABOUR MARKET

Fons Leroy, Managing Director at VDAB: “PhDs have a more holistic vision, and many organisations are looking for people who are highly educated and also have the competencies of the future, i.e. being able to think holistically, being critical, innovative, establishing links and thinking outside the box. These are competencies that can be found in PhDs.”

- PhDs have good research skills
- think analytically
- have large experience with writing reports
- can work independently
- have experience in giving presentations
- are quick learners
- have the ability to persevere in harsh circumstances
- are good problem-solvers
10 KEY MESSAGES FROM A CAREER COACH

1. “Stop and take stock”
   Step back from the rush of daily work once in a while – make time for this – take a helicopter perspective on where you are – **dare to think** (not only in your research but also about your future self)

2. “Know yourself”
   What drives you, what gives you energy, what do you miss in your current job? Know what you are good at.

3. **Follow your heart.** It’s as simple as that 😊.

4. “Dare to choose”
   Say Yes! No! – focus on YOUR priorities

5. “Develop a plan B (C, D, …) or … many plans A”
   Don’t have the tunnel vision that academia is the only track – “you do not drop out if you leave, you just move on with your life!” – take a broad horizon/there’s a world out there!
6. “Get off your ass” (the GOYA-principle)
   Don’t stay behind your desk or locked in the library, take advantage of every opportunity (e.g. skills training, go to conferences, build a network).

7. “Everyone needs supporters and facilitators – you too”
   Discuss not only your research, but also your career aspirations with supervisor, colleagues, friends – find yourself a supportive and challenging network

8. “Start early on”
   The end of your PhD or postdoc is too late!

9. “Dare to fail”
   “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. And fail better”
   (Samuel Beckett) Bad experiences help you to make good choices.

10. “Apply the 9 rules above”.
    Just do it!
DO IT! TAKE-HOME ASSIGNMENT

Ask 5 people who are close to you (supervisor, parents, partner, good friends, colleagues, …) **2 questions:**

1) What do you consider as my strengths/talents/things that make me stand out from the crowd?
   (= your special set of core talents and assets you can share with a future employer ...!)

2) In which (types of) jobs do you think I will flourish?
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Career Coach

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THANK YOU AND …
GOOD LUCK IN YOUR CAREER!