

Reflections on a Scientific Career

Behind the professor's CV

I am extending my deepest gratitude to the contributors of this volume. In an edited book it is the contributors that make the difference; in this case that is certainly true. A number of my colleagues have commented on the document in various stages of the process, and provided useful and constructive tips. Thank you Mattias Jacobson, Thommie Burström and Arno Kourula for your comments. I would also like to thank the great scholars who have provided their reflections on academia, and their choices within it, outside of this book. They provided the impetus for the book and for my own personal choices. Among these scholars are my great academic role models: Professors Anders Söderholm, Timothy Wilson and James March. Lastly, I find my greatest gratitude for my family. They keep my passion at bay when it threatens to go too far, as well as lift that passion when it seems to escape me.

Markus Hällgren, Älvsbyn, 12.08.2014

Markus Hällgren (ed.)

Reflections on a Scientific Career

Behind the Professor's CV



Copenhagen
Business School
Press

Markus Hällgren (ed.)
Reflections on a Scientific Career
Behind the Professor's CV

1. edition 2014

© CBS Press 2014

Cover: SL grafik (slgrafik.dk)

Typeset: SL grafik (slgrafik.dk)

ISBN trykt version: 978-87-630-0322-3

E-ISBN: 978-87-630-0334-6

CBS Press
Rosenørns Allé 9
1970 Frederiksberg C
slforlagene@samfundslitteratur.dk
www.cbspress.dk
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage or retrieval systems – without permission in writing from CBS Press.

Content

CHAPTER 1

Scholars' Experiences	7
<i>Markus Hällgren</i>	

CHAPTER 2

A Rough Guide for Post-Doctoral Researchers	17
<i>Stewart Clegg</i>	

CHAPTER 3

Read, Write and Get it Right	33
<i>Lars Strannegård</i>	

CHAPTER 4

Building Academic Success through <i>Fun</i> and <i>Relevance</i> ...	43
<i>Anders Söderholm</i>	

CHAPTER 5

Leadership in Context: Notes on Sharing Visions as a Key for Transformational Academic Leadership	55
<i>Jonny Holmström</i>	

CHAPTER 6

Paddling Furiously under the Surface: Micro-strategies for the Labour of an Academic Research Career	65
<i>Samantha Warren</i>	

CHAPTER 7

Seize Chances, be Courageous and Trust your Mentors and Intuition	85
--	----

Bente Elkjaer

CHAPTER 8

From Theory Boy to Practitioners' Darling	99
---	----

Alf Rehn

CHAPTER 9

Career Fulfilment: The Journey to Tenure and Beyond	109
---	-----

Daniel Robey

CHAPTER 10

A Scholar's Quest.....	125
------------------------	-----

James G. March

CHAPTER 11

From Being a New Ph.D. to Becoming a Scholar	129
--	-----

Markus Hällgren

CHAPTER 1

Scholars' Experiences

Markus Hällgren

The purpose of this book is to give aspiring academics the opportunity to reflect upon their actions while pursuing and making choices for, and in, their academic career. This book is pertinent to any scholar, but above all to those who have newly become Ph.D's and decided to pursue an academic career. On one hand the choices new Ph.D's will make at the beginning of their careers will have an effect on their development for many years to come. On the other hand, inexperience is known to contribute to less informed decisions, due to lack of imagination or understanding of the alternatives. Making deliberate and informed choices in the beginning could, therefore, potentially have an impact on the future. For example, by making deliberate choices the aspiring scholar can avoid getting bogged down in activities that they do not want to pursue and that raises more or less impenetrable barriers to becoming a scholar. What these activities are obviously differs between individuals.

This book is a result of my own thoughts, experiences and battles with a career in academia. Having had my public viva, and successfully defended my dissertation, I was not sure about what to do next. I knew I wanted to become a scholar but the steps were not clear to me and I was not sure what my alternatives were. Since becoming a scholar I have examined a few books on academic career building but found them to above all to target doctoral students (Strannegård 2003) and/or post docs in the natural sciences (e.g. Dee 2006; Feibelman 2011. See Frost and Taylor 1996; Rehn 2006 for exceptions). I realized that there was little information about how an academic career in social sciences in general, or a business school in particular, could be crafted. Therefore, with inspiration from *The Four hour workweek* (Ferriss 2007), I emailed a number of senior scholars that

I knew and trusted, and some that I barely knew or did not know at all, to get their views and input. Most importantly, in these emails, calls and encounters I tried to give a brief explanation of my situation and where I wanted to go and I highlighted the fact that I would value their input on how to think about it (which I really did!). The response I got was overwhelming. The response ranged from a few sentences and a good luck, to a page or more, long informal discussions, and even a few half-serious job offers – all with and from scholars more knowledgeable than I will ever be; from less known to Ivy league universities, and geographically from east to west and north to south. I can with some confidence claim that the advice I received, and later situated and implemented, has helped me. The simple rationale and motivation for the book is that I would like to offer others a similar opportunity.

A step towards, or from, a cynical view on becoming a scholar

The content of this book is pertinent because of the increasing pressure and instrumental pursuit of publication, the so-called Publish or Perish paradigm. This ever-growing change of academia has tremendous consequences for an academic career, see for example Prasad (2013). In Prasad's autobiography he sheds light on the advice he received from people around him in terms of what topics to pursue for his dissertation, the consequences for possible outlets, and the overall subsequent selection of future employer – and, by extension, the alternatives for an academic career. In Prasad's case he was advised to focus on more mainstream questions in order to be able to get a position at well-known North American universities. Prasad eventually ended up pursuing less mainstream topics and finding a position at a European university. The advice, choices and alternatives therefore had a significant impact on his career. There is no reason to believe that the choices one makes as a new Ph.D. are any less important than the choices as a doctoral student. Prasad's narrative also has something to communicate about the entire academic society. Someone without the right publications, in the right place, will have a hard time securing not only any financing for their research but also a position at even a less recognized university. Publications and the line of research are thus important. What one should

not forget, however, is that academia also has a responsibility towards mankind that is not best served through publications alone. A single focus on pushing publications for the sake of publications thus takes a bit of the soul out of what a scholar are there for. The Publish or Perish paradigm is frequently debated and I do not need, or want, to reiterate it here. However, what I do hope to show with this book, and the selection of authors, is that there is much more to academia than the simple instrumental way of viewing success and accomplishment in the bleak light of the Publish and Perish paradigm.

That said, resources are scarce and there isn't enough funding for everyone that wants to do research or go into teaching at a university level. There is therefore a need to assess how to separate between aspiring scholars. But, the point is, this assessment does not have to, and does not always, rely only on the Publish or Perish paradigm. When you as a reader go through the chapters of this book you will see that there is much more to becoming scholar, securing a position and maybe research funding. Therefore, as a counter-point to the Publish or Perish paradigm, I hope that this book will contribute to reflections about what a scholar is, and what the alternative routes are to becoming that. The book contributes to the message that there are other mechanisms than mere publishing to create a successful scholar (whatever that is).

On that note, the life of a scholar consists of several parts, ideally balanced but rarely so; teaching, research and service to the community and/or administration. The texts in this book touch upon these themes in different ways but it should be noted that most attention has been paid to research activities. With very different balances, and with the intentional imbalance noted, this also implies that the texts should be understood as life stories from which reflections can be extracted if properly situated and applied but not as an objective general truth and solution.

People might view the idea of the book and its content as an instrumental, egoistic, narcissistic and individualistic approach to becoming a scholar. That is, contributing to the same (Publish and Perish) paradigm it hopes to provide a counter-point or at least reflection upon. I am the first to agree that the book appears *instrumental* if one only applies insights from the stories for individual advancement without considering the beauty of the job; *egoistic* if one uses the reflections to use others and position oneself better on their expense; *narcissistic* if one comes to believe in one's own

superiority to others because of some short-term vanishing, and temporary successes, and *individualistic* if one does not see the big picture and how one is merely a part of a larger scholarly puzzle found in society – the university, department and the group. The point is, the book and the content is none of the above, and it is your responsibility to use the ideas brought forward in order to become a good, organizational academic citizen.

From individual to group

Society and the academic world generally single out one scholar as responsible for scientific breakthroughs. The Nobel prize in the various disciplines, for example, generally recognizes one or two individuals. Interestingly, what is forgotten is that in most, if not all, cases these individuals are part of a laboratory and a community that contributes to the same end. Great research is thus, contrary to the general belief and display not made by individuals. Scientific breakthroughs come from scientific environments. The common denominator between the authors of the texts are that they are not merely scholars, they are individuals that have, in one way or another, moved mountains and created research environments where people strive and prosper. Developing a research career thus includes developing research environments. It is therefore about building relationships, and creating opportunities for others. Publications are part of, but far from the only piece, of that puzzle. Without others the individual scholar has limited chance of becoming a true scholar. The group provides reflections, hard work and input into the thought process. A Scholar therefore takes responsibility for others too.

The point is that the texts in this book could be viewed as an individual's take on collective efforts, where you as an individual play a significant role by what you do, what you say and how you behave. Colleagues and children are in that sense similar. Colleagues do not do as you say, they repeat what you do. If you care for the community, they will too. If you do not care, neither will they. Besides the importance of recognizing that the scholarly effort is a collective effort of teaching, research and community service alike – and increasingly so the more senior you become – it is important to note that having reflected upon which goals one wants to pursue and accomplish, how to get there is not necessarily the same as be-

ing instrumental or egoistic. It is about clarifying your opportunities and what you want to become. However, in assessing and defining what goals you want to pursue you need to assess how the goals fit into the general picture of a prospective organization or group that you would like to belong to. If you are at a department, or within a research community that do not share your values nor have any interests in your long-term goals then you should probably sit down and ask yourself if it is worth the effort. The reason is simple, if you want to excel, if you want to truly become a scholar, you need to be in a setting that stays positive to the long-term developments you have in mind. If you are not in such a setting your aspirations will work against you, and you will start receiving the way too common de-motivational comments of 'why bother'. Have no doubts in your mind that you will receive such comments, or come across people that are unwilling to change, because there are always those that strive to maintain the status quo, or comments about how instrumental your approach may seem – which will also most likely come, since aspiration and some kind of success unfortunately often foster envy.

Of course there is nothing wrong with being content with what you have and do, and seeing the job as a way to make ends meet. This text is however directed towards individuals that strive for that little extra, that want to make a difference not only in their lives but in others lives too. The idea behind the book is about giving reflection to actions that otherwise run the risk of becoming unfocused, imprecise and in the long-term lead to frustration, since the scholarly life becomes one of survival rather than one of beauty and appreciation of the work itself.

That being said, life is complex and, more importantly, every life and every situation is unique. It is thus not a book with ready-made answers on what choices to make, but rather reflections from senior academics on their career. A word of caution is therefore needed – the texts in this book reflect a part of the life story of the authors and *their* choices. The reader of the book should therefore use the texts as points for reflection rather than as off-the-shelf advice to apply to their own situation. I have personally found many of these, and similar advice, very helpful as a reflective starting point.

This is thus not a traditional book about life in academia. This book offers insights into the academic career building of the recent Ph.D. holder, in terms of how to strive, survive and perhaps prosper in the harsh, painfully frustrating, loveable and sometimes rewarding, environment that academia

offers. This book gathers professors from different disciplines, countries and contexts, brought together through a passion for research. The book provides their unique reflections on career building and personal experiences, giving insights into how the system works. While every chapter is free-standing and should be read as such, the value lies in the combination of the chapters and I would therefore like to encourage the reader to approach the reading in that way. In the final chapter I try to highlight some common themes and provide a bit of provocation, with reasoning and disclaimers.

Let me introduce the authors and their chapters:

The Chapters

Stewart Clegg is a professor in management at UTS Business School in Australia. His chapter elaborates on the first few steps in becoming a postdoc researcher, putting emphasis not only on the importance of writing and how to write, but also on the importance of meeting and interacting with people to going from an apprentice, to a journey man, and finally a master within academia.

Lars Strannegård is professor in management and Vice-president of Stockholm School of Economics, Stockholm, Sweden. Similarly to Clegg, Strannegård discusses the importance of reading and writing while he also stresses the importance of critique and the social aspects of doing research.

Anders Söderholm is professor in management and vice-chancellor at the Mid-Sweden University in Sweden. In his chapter he gives the reader a recipe for success, easily summarized in the sentiment 'fun + relevance = success'. He elaborates on the recipe and provides the reader with some advice to grow with.

Jonny Holmström is professor in Informatics at Umeå University in Sweden. Similar to Söderholm he stresses the importance of the research environment and issues regarding the crafting of a research environment from the perspective of different organizational entities.

Samantha Warren is a professor in management at the Essex Business School, University of Essex in the United Kingdom. Her narrative starts earlier than previous contributors, she takes the reader on the journey from when she decided to go into academia to the furious paddling of staying afloat while looking gracious above the surface. Her entertaining story goes into the micro-level of how a career is crafted on a daily basis.

Bente Elkjaer is professor in learning in organizations and working life at the Department of Education, University of Aarhus in Denmark. Elkjaer's chapter is similar to Warren's in terms of how the narrative is crafted and the point of departure. As the narrative will show, their path is however quite different. From a very personal point of view she writes about how she became a professor by essentially seizing opportunities while being courageous and taking chances while listening to the reflections of her mentors and trusting her own intuition.

Alf Rehn holds the Chair of Management and Organization at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. Rehn's story is quite different from the others, proving once again that there is no one set path to follow. As such his career is somewhat of an oddity, first becoming full professor at a very young age and later combining it with a professional speaking career. In his chapter he reflects on what got him to that position and the main advice may be that an academic career does not necessarily have to involve only traditional scholarly work.

Daniel Robey is Emeritus Professor of Information Systems at Georgia State University in the USA. Again, his chapter is different from some of the previous contributors in that he focuses upon long-term commitment to academia. Professor Robey's chapter reminds the aspiring academic that there are other values in life than work, which is the difference between mechanical 'success' and 'career fulfilment'. To prosper and develop a sustainable academic career the latter values should be nurtured.

James March is Professor Emeritus at Graduate School of Business, Stanford University in the USA. March's chapter highlights that it is more about academia than the pure instrumental pursuit of paper. In his chapter, written when he'd officially retired from his position at the Graduate School of

Business at Stanford University, he reflects on the beauty of research and the quest of becoming a scholar.

Passion!

I have argued that this book has sprung out of an idea to provide reflections upon the choices and alternatives one has when becoming a scholar. It is indeed true but on a deeper level this book comes out of a sincere and deep passion for academia. This is also the common theme that binds the contributors together. Many people would consider such passion wrongly directed, even insane. On one hand the job is not the most well-paid job there is (but certainly good enough), the hours are not necessarily short, it can be very frustrating, the tasks are certainly not simple and being a scholar is hardly the best pick-up line in the bar. As a matter of fact, my family and friends would ask two questions: Firstly, how in the world could I end up in academia? – the person with the firm belief that project manager at an advertising agency would be the ideal job. Second, and maybe more importantly, am I insane? To the first I would answer ‘I really do not know’, and to the second, ‘probably’. On the other hand, research is not about money, short hours, having a simple life, nor about flashy titles. It is about that deep passion. To live and prosper in academia one has to have passion for what you do. Personally, this has brought me to new heights, more specifically Mount Everest base camp. Read these chapters while asking yourself – what is my passion and how am I going to get there?

References

- Dee, P. (2006). *Building a successful career in scientific research: a guide for phd students and postdocs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feibelman, P. J. (2011). *A PhD is not enough!: a guide to survival in science*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ferriss, T. (2007). *The fourhour workweek*. New York: Random House.
- Frost, P. J., and M.S. Taylor (1996). *Rhythms of academic life: Personal accounts of careers in academia* (Vol. 4). London: Sage Publications.

- Prasad, A. (2013). Playing the game and trying not to lose myself: a doctoral student's perspective on the institutional pressures for research output. *Organization*, Forthcoming.
- Rehn, A. (2006). *The Scholar's Progress: Essays on Academic Life And Survival*. Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse.
- Strannegård, L. (2003). *Avhandlingen: Om att formas till forskare*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

CHAPTER 2

A Rough Guide for Post-Doctoral Researchers

Stewart Clegg

Introduction

I have been an academic for 40 years and in that period writing has become a very large part of my life. It wasn't always so but it slowly grew to become my central life activity, in part as the demands of different jobs in a career dictated. As that career unfolded it increasingly involved an intense engagement with the work of others: as journal editor; co-author; editor; supervisor; journal article and book reviewer, and occasionally, when time permits, reader. Not being based in large US graduate schools, where the rich ecology and high degree of formalization leads to a more extensive and specialized division of labour, I have probably ranged more freely over a wider campus of approaches and ideas than might otherwise have been the case. I mean this literally: I have worked in an interdisciplinary School of Humanities; been a Professor of Sociology, as well as of Organization Studies and Management. I have held appointments in Europe and Australia, and been a visiting professor in Latin and North America and Asia as well as Europe. Often, in these appointments, rather than being one of a large professoriate all able to follow specialist interests, I have been most of the professoriate, with all the responsibilities for a wide-ranging cohort of graduate students that such relative isolation entails. Based on this experience I have sought to distil some tips in this rough guide for post-Doctoral Researchers.

You, the Reader

The person that I have in mind has been institutionally legitimated in their choice of topic, approach and analysis, and has proceeded to full Doctoral status, been in the field, collected the data, and written it up. Who should be the examiner(s) has been discussed with your supervisor(s). The day comes when the examination occurs and your fate is determined. Hopefully you will pass with flying colours and no more will be expected of you – the apprenticeship is complete. Perhaps there will be a few critical points raised that you will still have to address and the final day of release will still be a few months down the line. While completion and examination feel like the end they are but a new beginning.

When you have finished, obviously, it is a great release. The burden of the past years has been lifted. You have actually done it – the thesis has become a ‘practical accomplishment’ in the real sense – it is over. You are now a post-doctoral researcher. Probably, you are searching for that all-important first teaching job or Post Doctoral position. Getting it will bring a great many new responsibilities and tasks ... but there is still a lot of unfinished Ph.D. business. The Ph.D. is behind you – you are now a ‘Doctor’ But is the Ph.D. done with? Not really! Now you have gained that all-important Ph.D. designation you have to think about getting published – and that means you have to write, write, and write some more.

If the thesis has been written with publication in mind, with either a strong narrative lending it the quality of a monograph, or composed as a series of discrete journal articles, its eventual publication may already be in mind and thus be easier.

From thesis to publication

A Book?

The thesis that you have already written should, in principle, be of publishable quality. That is what makes a Doctorate. The easiest way to turn what is written as a thesis into a publication is probably to think of it as a book. When I wrote my own thesis I realized that its being of publishable

quality was the criterion of its success as a Ph.D. Believing in insurance I had managed to get a publishing deal for the thesis as a book with a prestigious series under the control of a famous professor before I had finished it and submitted it for examination. I did this because I thought that if I had a contract to publish a book in a highly reputable outlet based on the thesis then it would be pretty difficult for the examiners to fail the thesis.

Most publishers will be quick to advise you that a good thesis does not necessarily make a good book. The thesis is very genre specific. Small steps have to be clearly elaborated in a strict logical progression. Books are different – if they are not then they can be rather boring – too ‘thesisy’. A book made from a thesis will probably be subject to quite considerable editing, especially of the methodological and ethics approval protocols, data appendices, and questionnaire construction, for example.

From thesis to journal articles

I probably wouldn’t recommend following the thesis to book strategy today. In contemporary circumstances the value of the book is increasingly under question. Given that the research evaluation exercises that are increasingly being imposed on national research contexts are framed in terms of a ‘science’ model in which the journal article is regarded as the ‘normal’ medium of communication, you may want, for career considerations, to focus on papers rather than books. In doing so the thesis is still going to be your starter.

Increasingly in some institutions this is explicitly recognized by virtue of allowing what are called professional Ph.D.s – where three or four peer-reviewed papers that have been published in recognizable quality publications are packaged with an overall connecting essay that demonstrates how these separate papers are all part of a larger and integrated pursuit of knowledge. However, for the majority of new Doctorates the challenge will be translating the thesis into publication.

Some academic supervisors assert that any passable thesis will have at least three papers in it: the literature review as a positioning essay, the analysis, findings and discussion as a central contribution, and a paper drawn from the thesis’ conclusions which sketches out – and then follows up – the recommendations for further research.

From outtakes to publication

It is not just what you wrote up, however, that should be a lead for further papers. There is also those ideas toyed with that were dispensed with during the rigors of the thesis writing process. For most academics, the first substantial writing that they will do is probably their thesis. It may well be not only their first shot but also their best shot: the most substantially empirically rich material they will do by themselves. There are several important lessons to be learnt. Never throw anything away – ideas that don't work where and when they were first drafted may come in useful elsewhere. As a Post-Doctoral researcher you may well have the opportunity to follow up those leads that had to be abandoned during the Ph.D. process. Half-baked ideas, incomplete fragments, and grand proposals – these can all be dusted off. If you can't make them work as stand alone pieces you may choose to collaborate with others who may be able to make something else out of them.

If you are going to use past ideas as a fresh stimulus you have to be able to find them. If you constantly add to and change the single file on which you are working you will never be able to do this. Get into the habit, if you have not cultivated it already, of always filing drafts with an easy version/date retrieval system so that you can know where in a sequence any particular piece belongs. Each time you re-enter into the text you are creating save it with a new file number or some other method of knowing where it fits in the sequence.

The famous Swiss film director, Jean-Luc Godard, once said that his films had beginnings, middles, and ends – but not necessarily in that order. Your writing will probably have the same structure and will probably eventually be arranged in that order, but that does not mean that it is written that way. Usually, one writes the first chapter or the abstract last. It makes more sense – how do you know what you are going to say until you have written it?

When something is written, it exists; it *is* already, it is in the *past tense*, denoting a product not a process. It is much better to think about writing rather than what is written. Writing is a practice that should be practiced. By this I mean that good writing takes time, effort and skill that can only be developed by training yourself. Just as you would not expect to become an excellent dancer or footballer without a great deal of practice so it is with writing.

I have been writing all my life, since being a schoolboy, and for a long time I have tried to make it a daily habit. A day that passes without writing something seems like a wasted day. Everyone will have different techniques but I find that I rarely plan in advance what I will write in detail – I find the very act of being in control of the keyboard a sufficient stimulus. I find out what I want to say by trying to say it in words – using my fingers on the keyboard and with my eyes on the screen.

The ideas may come from anywhere. Sometimes they are given by some random lyric, quote or film. Other times they are more systematically random. C. Wright Mills (1959), in his wonderful essay on ‘Intellectual Craftsmanship’, talks of the importance of keeping fragments of ideas, diary notes, observations, and jottings as sources for later inspiration. Erving Goffman kept photographic notes of images observed, paintings, films, posters, and adverts, which then became the basis for his inspired *Gender Advertisements*. Christopher Isherwood (1939), the novelist, opened his famous account of Weimar Berlin, with the proposition, “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking”. Sometimes the image or idea will capture your attention even though, not thinking, you do not know at that moment what it will be, become, or lead to. The journey that an idea can launch is rarely well signed at the outset.

Handling reviewers

At the outset all intellectual journeys are a plunge into the unknown – if they were not they would hardly be intellectual but simply a following of directions, much as a driver might obey a SatNav system. Intellectualism is not premised on obedience of remote control. Instead, it entails risk taking, adventure, and innovation, pushing back frontiers of personal and institutional knowledge. It only becomes a journey with clear directions in the reconstructed logic of the ‘normal’ book or journal article. Such artefacts are written under remote control. The controllers are editors and reviewers. Having followed your sketch of the journey that you have taken they will impose signposts on it. All journeys benefit from clear directions, they will insist. Follow a map that unfolds predictably: through introduction, literature review, data collection and methods, analysis, discussion and implications, conclusion. All journeys everywhere end up with the same signposts.