

Reflections on the CREATE workshop 2018

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There are numerous ways that people end up doing what they are doing. Some paths are chosen deliberately, other roads may appear by chance and it is just tempting or reasonable to follow them. Many people likely remember experiencing a mix of fortuity and structured goals striving when they appraise their career today. They look back at their achievements, lessons learned, good and bad decisions. But what about the beginning? What is “career”? What are my goals - I can name them, right? These are just some of the questions, this year's CREATE workshop “What do I want to be when I grow up - and how to get there?”, facilitated by Prof. Dr. Pilvikki Absetz and Prof. Dr. Brian Oldenburg, encouraged early career researchers to ask themselves.

I am Tobias Volk, a first year PhD student from the University of Konstanz, Germany. To my excitement, I was accepted as one of the EHPS CREATE grant recipients. Therefore, I had the chance to challenge myself with pondering over the questions addressed in the workshop and attending the conference afterwards. Otherwise this would not have been possible, and for that I am very thankful.

As a possibility for the group to break the ice, Sunday was dedicated to becoming acquainted with each other. The first challenge revealed, was to come up with three personal strengths another participant could tell the group about. The atmosphere and dynamic in the group were great from that first moment on. After this, more networking activities, like an extensive and fruitful

“speed dating session” took place. In the evening the group went out for dinner to one of Galway's countless pubs where we had the chance to continue former conversations or just chat in an informal and comfy setting. This brought the group closer together and set perfect preconditions for the following two days of the workshop.

Monday's schedule built on the questions we answered in advance to the workshop. We reflected on our skillsets and shared our thoughts with the others. I perceived these discussions as very supportive and understanding towards every member's thoughts, which especially helped because of the personal character of the topic. Many participants surely realized that they have more skills than they thought of before. Some skills that have been gained by working in academia seem not so obviously revealed at first glance. Taking this further, a later task required us to think of a way to sell these skills. Thinking of what you can do that others would pay for, elicited a lot of ideas for alternative paths outside academia. Because of the tough reality faced by PhD candidates and early career researchers regarding future job prospects at Universities, uncertainty about career planning seems to commonly linger in the young academic's mind. Further, this uncertainty seems partly to be fueled by a lack of information about alternative paths. It was great to see how many different ideas the groups came up with, combining the strengths of their members in attractive portfolios for potential companies. Also, a discussion about the meaning of “career” and the possible shapes of careers elicited some encouraging thoughts. “Career” often seems to be characterized in terms of achievement, monetary

rewards and straightly climbing up the ladder but there are also more descriptive dimensions to it and views more appreciative of changes of course that augment the term's meaning. The day was framed by presentations by the facilitators, giving insights in their careers and life courses which offered an exclusive opportunity to get first-hand advice from experienced personalities in health psychology.

The final day started with a revision of our goals and showed how planning for such goal repetition is necessary to stay in line with one's own aims. Further on, we examined our social networks, reflecting on existing bonds, which connections could be boosted or reinforced and where possibilities for establishing new contacts exist. We also addressed important current considerations around the use of professional websites and social media to present oneself and as platforms for networking. Besides websites like Research Gate, Twitter was the number one named service on the rise that was considered to help researchers connect with other researchers, in order to share ideas and information and access these from people all over the world. The session continued with elaborating on the potential companies where we could 'sell' health psychology skills, i.e. the task was to consider stakeholders and what offering our skills or services to potential customers could actually look like. One thing that became clear was, that for realization of such ideas, the importance of being open to interdisciplinary collaboration cannot be stressed enough. This emphasized the value of two-way knowledge exchange and collaborative networks between academics (not always just health psychologists) and people with competencies in various disciplines outside academia (e.g. practitioners, policy makers, commercial companies and NGOs).

At the end of the final day, the facilitators took time for answering open questions. One participant wanted to know what makes young health psychology researchers memorable in the eyes of more established health psychologists. I liked that

question particularly because it aims at a crucial part of networking at early career stages. Among advice on how to be remembered were demonstrating opportunities for collaboration and of course high-quality publications. As general advice, the facilitators recommended finding a mentor besides our supervisors, who we could meet regularly to consult with about career questions and to discuss our goals. From my perspective as a first-time participant, the workshop was just a great success. It perfectly prepared me for the conference as well, where I could draw a lot of motivation and ideas for my present and future research. Reaching the end of my report, I want to thank all participants, the facilitators and organization team, as well as the grant committee, who all contributed to make this workshop a fantastic experience. I highly encourage other young researchers to participate in next year's workshop. I am looking forward to seeing you there.



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