Ways to improve your research profile

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When I first started as an academic, many, many years ago, I remember chatting to a much older, wiser, senior member of staff who was very interested in my newness to the academic world. When he was asking me about my teaching and research interests, he said that he would give me some advice - the trick is to 'get famous'.

At the time I thought what a dumb thing to say, as I did not understand what he was actually saying. This was not advice to become a Kardashian of the academic community but being famous in a particular topic area can be extremely important for your career. By being 'famous' you would become the authority in a particular field; primarily through your research and writings, you would become known, not only in your school but also at other universities here and overseas.

Therefore, you would be the 'go to' person for a specific topic. If someone was thinking of who is the best person to ask about this topic? It would be you. Who would be the best person to mark a thesis on this topic? It would be you. Who would be the best person to review this article on this topic? It would be you.

So, from an obscure comment a profound idea was being expressed. At least this was more meaningful than just saying "publish or perish" (Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011). But then the question (or trick) is how do you become famous? Of course, it is more easily said than done. However, a major way is to be proactive in improving your research profile.

If you are to look at your research profile, what is it? Do you have one? Is there a topic or field that you have written about that other people know you for? If not, what would you like it to be?

As an early career researcher this can be a difficult question, or you may have a definite answer with an area which may not be perceived as being important by anybody else, or may not fit with the research focus of your school (Thomas 2009). This can be quite disheartening when you realise it.

After years of working in academia, publishing articles, and being disheartened, I have come up with ten points to help raise your research profile. I'd also like to thank the colleagues who attended seminars to help discuss and refine these. The points can be grouped into: (1) making the right choices, and (2) making the right connections.

1. Choose the Right Topic

Deciding on the right topic that you are going to be an expert in is extremely important. You must weigh up a number of questions to decide whether you have chosen the right topic. While it can be interesting personally, is it interesting for other people? So, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Is it a 'hot' topic? Does the topic hold interest for people now, or is it something that is developing for the future?
- Is it a topic that has enough interest? Not only for you personally, but will it be of interest to your colleagues, and academics internationally?
- Is it a topic that is of interest to journal editors? Are there any calls for papers in this topic? Has there been discussion about the topic in conferences, particularly in sessions in which you can meet the editors?
- Is it a topic that has a theoretical underpinning? A topic may be interesting, but it is also important for journal articles that there is a theoretical basis for the discussion of the topic.
- Is it a topic that can get a grant? This can also help you work out if there is enough interest in the topic. Obtaining a grant can be a valuable way to help build your research profile in a topic.

2. Choose the Right Projects

It is one thing to choose the right topic, it is another to choose the right project. There may be lots of potential areas to study within that topic but which specific project will be the one to help build your research profile? Some questions you can ask are:

- What project should you spend your time on?
- Is it your interest or someone else's? Often if it is based on somebody else's interest it can be harder for you to be motivated to go the extra mile for this project.
- Will it hold your attention/interest for a period of time?
- Is anyone else interested in this project? Similar to having the right topic that people are interested in, it is also good to think if your project is the right one in this topic area.
- Will the project attract any funding? Extra money from grants will help fund the project and can also provide you with good feedback from reviewers.
- Will external grant bodies be interested? Obtaining funding from an external body is usually seen better than obtaining internal University grants, especially Australian Research Council (ARC) or Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) Grants.

3. Choose the Right Co-author/s

While it can be nice to be seen as an independent thinker who can undertake large research projects and write articles by yourself, there are also valuable lessons to be learnt by being able to undertake research and write with other people, especially if your co-author already has a name in the topic area. It has been noted to me in academic recruitment that when looking at CVs, it is important to note whether the candidate has only written by themselves or only written with other people. Both situations have advantages and disadvantages. So, you should ask yourself:

- Can you write alone?
- Are there colleagues or international academics who are interested in your topic?
- What academic rank is the potential co-author? There are advantages in co-writing with a senior academic, however, you have to be careful that they're not using you without you getting any benefit for your work. Also cowriting with a fellow junior academic may cause problems if neither of you have the necessary skills to produce an academic article.
- What can the potential co-author bring to the study? You want to make sure that one person is not just doing all the work, so it is important to determine what skills in writing the literature review, or analysis they can bring to the paper.
- Can you work well with others? It is important to think about how you can work with the co-author/s, what skills are you bringing? Can you make deadlines? Can you take criticism?

4. Choose the Right Journals

The term "publish or perish" has already been mentioned, but an issue is where should you publish? To some institutions it is more important to achieve one publication in a top ranked A or A* journal than getting several publications in low rank journals – quality rather than quantity. Also, a growing issue is research impact, and a metric used to measure this is whether it is in a top journal. Some questions to ask are:

- What are the main journals for your topic? Are there any associated disciplines related to your topic?
- What rank is the journal?
- Does the journal have Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) recognition if it is in the business area?
- Is the journal classified as being in your area? For example, Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC) or Field of Research (FoR) Codes.
- Has the journal published articles in your topic? If so, make sure that you cite them in your article.
- What is the focus/image of the journal? Some journals in a particular field may be perceived as being more of an industry journal, or an academic or theory-based journal.
- Does it focus on qualitative or quantitative methodology? This can influence whether your paper would be of interest to the journal editor/s.
- Is the journal listed on websites like Google Scholar or Scimago? This can be a big help for measuring citations or showing evidence of impact.
- Can you meet/contact the editor? Sometimes it is good to email the editor to confirm whether your paper is suitable to be published in the journal. Also, some conferences have 'meet the editor' sessions where you can hear what the editors want from papers for their journals, as well as talk to them personally about your research area.

The first four points were about making the right choices in relation to your research topic and output. The following points relate to the importance of getting the right connections. While it is important to build contacts, it is also good to reflect on where those connections are and what type of connection would be helpful to you building your research profile.

5. Get Connected to your University

Depending on whether you are a PhD student, recent graduate, or early career researcher, you should be aware of what is offered by your University. It can be surprising what support your University can offer you to help with research projects and assist you in establishing your name in a particular research area. You should try to discover:

- What is the School, Faculty, and University doing to encourage quality research?
- Is there a newsletter? Research announcements? Sometimes a short article or information piece can be valuable in getting recognised at the University.

- Are there internal grants or seed funding that you can apply for?
- Are there seminars, workshops, or conferences that you can attend or even help organise?

6. Get Connected to a Relevant Assn./Group

Outside the University there may be an association or research group that you can contact that can assist you in developing your interest in that topic area.

- What is the most relevant association for you?
- Are there any special interest groups (SIGs)? These may be part of a larger association.
- What information or journals do they publish?
- What conferences do they run?

7. Get Connected to People

Once you have worked out who is who in the topic area, you should make yourself known to them. This can be daunting, but it can also be worthwhile.

- What are the main conferences? Are you prepared to travel and present at these conferences? Conferences can be a vital way of networking with people who have got the same interest in an issue as you, and where you can possibly meet future co-authors, or colleagues, or even mentors.
- Email people to make contact, ask questions, or remind them afterwards that you met them at the conference.
- Build connections for potential co-authors, reviewers, referees, and friends.

8. Get Connected Online

There are several ways to use the Internet to connect to other people online and build your research profile.

- What is your university profile page like? Can you add to it?
- Use social media to promote yourself and your research, such as Twitter or a blog.
- Are you on Google Scholar, ResearchGate and Linkedin? Make sure that these are open to the public so that people can contact you if they are interested in your research.
- Can you develop shortened versions of your findings for the media? You can try to publish opinion pieces or short articles for magazines or outlets like *The Conversation*.
- Build connections with journalists or media companies as they can contact you for a 'quote' to add to their story on the topic.

9. Get Connected to Family/Support People

Life is not all about work, so it is important to remember the people closest to you. It is not healthy to be so career or research focused that you forget those who support you no matter what. Some things to ask are:

- Who is your main support?
- How does your work affect your family life?
- How does your family life affect your work?
- Do you have a mentor?
- Or is there someone you can ask questions?

Personal relationships and your own mental health can suffer if these issues are ignored.

10. Get Connected to Yourself

In some ways this should be considered first. You should be sure to connect to yourself and what you really want to do, and what projects you are comfortable working on. If you are not happy personally then you can make yourself feel miserable about your work which can lead to further career and personal problems. Therefore, you should ask yourself:

- What are your real feelings about the research topic, projects, writing, analysis, etc?
- Are you comfortable with the current situation?
- What are your plans for the future?

These are just a few personal reflections on how to raise your research profile, and possibly reduce the disappointments that you might face in your academic career. It is important to remember that an academic's life is more than their research output. There is teaching, administration, and university service, as well as an opportunity to mix with wonderful people and students who can greatly enrich your life. I hope that this will at least get you thinking about your future career and potential opportunities, so that it will be a long and fruitful one.

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