

Part-time researcher skills workshop

Making progress:
avoiding defeatism and self-sabotage

Facilitator manual

Vitae resources: developing the
skills and careers of researchers

Vitae is supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK),
managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation
and delivered in partnership with regional Hub host universities

Part-time researcher skills workshop – making progress: avoiding defeatism and self-sabotage

These workshop materials have been developed for Vitae. The programme and materials have been designed and developed by Dr Heather Dalgleish, Dr Gerard Hall, Dr Tristram Hooley and Dr Kate Mahoney.

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Making progress: avoiding defeatism and self-sabotage

(90 minutes)

Purpose

This session is designed to give participants some guidance on avoiding defeatism and self-sabotage so that they can make better progress.

This session allows participants to:

- discuss their working practices and consider how constructive they are
- learn about the physiological basis of stress and consider typical symptoms
- consider strategies to deal with stress and negative thinking.

Process

A discussion and exercise based session led by the workshop facilitator.

Structure

Introduction	5 mins
Paired exercise looking at self-sabotage and making progress	20 mins
Physical and mental symptoms of stress: fight or flight response	15 mins
Reflecting on the balance of activities in their life	5 mins
Techniques for managing stress	5 mins
Scenario exercise: ANTS and MATHS	20 mins
Achieving progress	10 mins
Formulating a plan	10 mins

Resources

Making progress: avoiding defeatism and self-sabotage PowerPoint slides

Flipchart

Flipchart pens

Data projector

Detail

Time	Slide	Facilitator's notes	Resources/additional comments
5 mins	1 – 2	<p>Slide 1 and 2 – learning outcomes Introduce the session and explain that it is going to try and offer some practical advice for people who are feeling negative about their PhDs.</p> <p>Talk through the learning outcomes.</p>	
20 mins	3 – 5	<p>Slide 3 – self-sabotage Introduce the idea of self-sabotage. The trainer can point out that this is often something that we do without really being aware of it. So the first thing to do is to try and work out whether you ever do things that make your own life more difficult.</p> <p>Slide 4 – When do you self-sabotage? Ask participants to consider this in pairs and make a list of the sorts of things that they do that are self-sabotaging. Do not take any feedback from this activity, rather you should combine the pairs again and move on to slide 5.</p> <p>Slide 5 – progress Ask them to think about the issue of making progress. In particular, it is looking for specific examples of when participants have felt that they were making progress and other examples of when they felt they were not.</p>	<p>You can run the feedback for this activity in a variety of ways depending on the kind of responses you get.</p> <p>One way would be to start with the positive and to ask the groups whether there were any common times that they all recognised as times when they were making progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are these? • Why do you feel as if you are making progress? • Why don't you have more of these moments? <p>Then you can move on to the negative and ask whether there were any common times when they were all not making progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do these generally happen at a particular time or in a particular place? • Do you generally push through them or give up? • Is there any way that you can stop them happening?

Time	Slide	Facilitator's notes	Resources/additional comments
15 mins	6 – 8	<p>Slide 6 – the fight or flight response Allows you to make the point that what is being described is stress. When we are faced with a difficult problem and we find it difficult to make progress we are experiencing stress.</p> <p>Introduce the fight or flight response as the physiological basis of stress.</p> <p>Explain that stress has a physiological basis that is rooted in what is often called the 'fight or flight' response. Wikipedia has a good summary of this which can be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight_or_flight (see additional comments for further information).</p> <p>Slide 7 – stress: physical symptoms Introduce a range of ways that this commonly manifests physically.</p> <p>Slide 8 – stress: mental symptoms Show how stress can manifest mentally.</p> <p>Give the participants time to read these slides and encourage them to think about whether they exhibit any of these and whether they are linked to their PhD/work/life balance.</p>	<p>Fight or flight In prehistoric times when the fight or flight response evolved in humans, fight was manifested in aggressive, combative behaviour and flight was manifested by fleeing potentially threatening situations, such as being confronted by a predator. In current times, these responses persist, but fight and flight responses have assumed a wider range of behaviours. For example, the fight response may be manifested in angry, argumentative behaviour, and the flight response may be manifested through social withdrawal, substance abuse and even television viewing.</p> <p>Although the emergency measure of the stress response is undoubtedly both vital and valuable, it can also be disruptive and damaging. In most modern situations, humans rarely encounter emergencies that require physical effort, yet our biology still provides for them. Thus we may find our stress response activated in situations where physical action is inappropriate or even illegal. This activation takes a toll on both our bodies and our minds.</p>
5 mins	9	<p>Slide 9 – balance of activities in your life A brief activity to ask the participants to think about the balance of their lives. Ask them to divide up the 168 hours in the week into three categories (routine activities, work and play).</p> <p>Go round the group and get a sense of the spread of answers in each of the</p>	

Time	Slide	Facilitator's notes	Resources/additional comments
		<p>three categories.</p> <p>Click on slide to suggest the ideal number of hours in each category.</p> <p>Ask for comments on the division of this.</p> <p>Talk about how far you can reduce the routine activities and the play categories. Suggest that while this is sometimes necessary it is probably not sustainable.</p>	
5 mins	10	<p>Slide 10 – stress management: physical</p> <p>This slide makes a few suggestions on how to deal with stress on a physical level. Make the point that many of these have a potential impact on how the week is divided up.</p>	
20 mins	11 – 13	<p>Slide 11 – stress management: physical</p> <p>Invite participants to respond to this scenario. Give them a couple of minutes to jot ideas down and then go round the room and write them all up on the flip chart.</p> <p>Ask them to talk about how they actually feel – anxious, angry, frightened etc.</p> <p>Slide 12 – common problems</p> <p>Highlight some typical feelings that lie behind the problems that postgraduate researchers have in producing work and feeling happy with it.</p> <p>Slide 13 – dealing with negative thoughts</p> <p>Introduce a technique to deal with this.</p> <p>When you feel negative about a task write your negative thoughts down. You can call these Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs).</p> <p>Next, try and look at the statements that you have written analytically and</p>	<p>Materials required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flip chart and pens <p>Additional information:</p> <p>ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts) is a term used in cognitive therapy to describe the way that we can sometimes think negative things about ourselves (see for example http://cbtexplained.com/ants.php).</p> <p>Cognitive behavioral therapists will often focus on getting people to recognise and deal with ANTs as a way of achieving a more realistic perspective on the situation. See for example: www.anxietynetwork.com/hstop.html</p> <p>For a more academic treatment of this topic see for example, Harrell, Thomas H., Ryon, Nancy B., 'Cognitive-behavioral assessment</p>

Time	Slide	Facilitator's notes	Resources/additional comments
		<p>dispassionately. Try to accompany each with a More Accurate Thought (MATH).</p> <p>For example: ANT – I feel like my work is terrible and my supervisor will think that I am an idiot.</p> <p>MATH – My supervisor has probably seen lots of PhD level work. I've always performed quite well academically. I have no reason to think that my work is particularly bad.</p> <p>Work through some of the ideas that the postgraduate researchers come up with in this way.</p>	<p>of depression: Clinical validation of the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire'. 'Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology. Vol 51(5)', Oct 1983, 721-725.</p> <p>Kearns, H., Forbes, A. and Gardiner, M. (2007) 'A cognitive behavioural coaching intervention for the treatment of perfectionism and self-handicapping in a non-clinical population. Behaviour Change, 24(3), 157-172', which describes how this approach can be used with researchers in a non-clinical way.</p> <p>Kearns went on to develop the More Accurate Thinking Model (MATHs) for use in his training. (Presentation to Hugh Kearns (2007), 'Innovative approaches to self-management in PhD researchers: avoiding self-sabotage', presentation to the UK GRAD conference, www.vitae.ac.uk/cms/files/UK-GRAD-conference-report-September-2007.pdf)</p>
10 mins	14 – 17	<p>These slides suggest tips for achieving progress without facing too much stress.</p> <p>Slide 14 – dealing with performance anxiety This covers the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free writing – see the following link for further information http://web.mst.edu/~gdoty/classes/concepts-practices/free-writing.html • a three-draft approach helps to prevent you from expecting perfection first time and gives you a structured way to achieve a high quality result 	

Time	Slide	Facilitator's notes	Resources/additional comments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using a draft stamp can help you signal the status of the document to anyone who will be reading it • 'nail your feet to the floor' is encouraging you to set themselves a time to write. You should remain at your desk throughout this period, even if you are not being productive. Eventually, boredom will drive you to start writing. <p>Slides 15 and 16 – creating realistic plans and tips to help you achieve Provides some more practical tips.</p> <p>Slide 17 – measure of progress Suggest some useful and not so useful things to use as performance indicators. The key message is to use things that are real measures of progress rather than things that make you feel as if you have been working hard.</p>	
10 mins	18	<p>Slide 18 – make some progress Encourage participants to finish the session by making a practical plan as to how they will use the next day or half-day that they have available to study.</p>	



Incorporating the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD

About Vitae

Vitae is supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK) and managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation. Vitae's vision is for the UK to be world class in supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers.

- Championing the development and implementation of effective policy
- Enhancing higher education provision through sharing practice and resources
- Providing access to development opportunities and resources
- Building an evidence base to support the researcher development agenda

Vitae's work with higher education institutions

Vitae works with UK higher education institutions (HEIs) to embed professional and career development in the research environment. Vitae plays a major role in innovating, sharing practice and enhancing the capability of the higher education sector to provide world-class professional development and training of researchers. We do this both through national projects and through Hub activities.

The programme develops resources for use by trainers and others working with researchers, and provides opportunities for HEIs to share information and practice; develop ideas and approaches; and work collaboratively.

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