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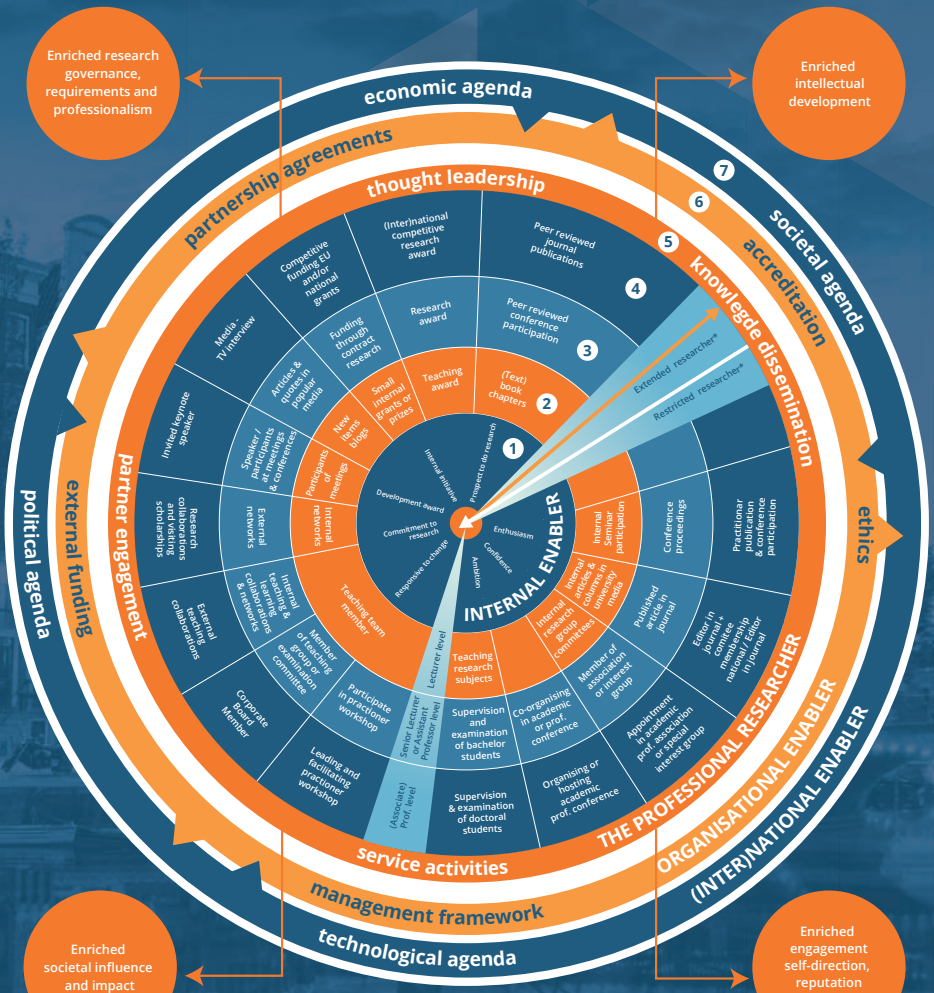
Towards a practice-oriented and scholarly-active culture:

The Research Career Wheel



Workshop Guideline

Creating Tomorrow

Introduction

The Researcher Career Wheel (RCW) is a career development tool that stems from research[1] on the challenges higher education institutions face in developing Faculty staff into more professional researchers. Faculty staff that develop into more professional researchers enrich the delivery of their subject matter, contributing to a research-informed academic curriculum and potentially making novel knowledge contributions to academic fields.

The RCW framework is designed to help early-career scholars, those who are currently doctoral students, senior researchers and assistant professors, think through the challenges they face in their academic researcher development and define actions to overcome them. This condensed guide provides an overview of the RCW and an example case of its use during an academic career development workshop.

1 ***Evans, L. (2013) The professional status of educational research:*** Professionalism and developmentalism in 21st century working life, ***British Journal of Educational Studies***, 61 (4), 471-490.
Evans, L. (2015) Enhancing the quality of research in Europe: Theoretical perspectives on and guiding principles for researcher development.
In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi & P. Scott (Eds.) *The European Higher Education Area*: Between critical reflections and future policies: Part II, pp. 583-602, Dordrecht, Springer. (Also in Springer Open Access: http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0)

The RCW

As a developmental concept, the RCW shows different routes along which research careers can develop within institutional and societal frameworks. Starting with the intrinsically motivated individual at the heart of the wheel, one's career grows outwards via different lines: from being a lecturer to assistant professor level through to associate and full professor levels. The wheel also points out some internal and external enablers that support career growth from a 'restricted' to an 'extended' research professional. These numerous and individual-oriented enablers offer a starting point of discussion on career growth: where do you stand and where does your organisation stand?

The Research Career Wheel illustrates how increased research quality can be achieved by developing the internal enablers first, helping researchers increase confidence and develop expertise with mentoring and encouragement from experienced teacher-researchers.

The development of internal support is subsequently mapped to external enablers (conferences, presentations, funded fellowships, etc). Formal external bodies thus provide recognition of this professional development and this helps teaching-oriented universities such as universities of applied sciences to actively promote a culture of academic development. The RCW helps identify different activities and the next steps that enable growth and development.

Case example

The academic research career development workshop was held in spring 2021 during an internal research conference at a Dutch higher education institution. The 90-minute workshop was held entirely online and consisted of six participants that were all early stage doctoral candidates. The participants were required to submit a motivation and sample work when registering for the workshop.

They expressed the following expectations:

- Gain knowledge about becoming a researcher
- Connect with and be inspired by research colleagues
- Learn how to integrate research into teaching
- Insight into career possibilities after completing PhD
- Improve academic writing

The information we collected during the registration was used to determine the goal and design of the workshop.
The design of the workshop included pre-workshop preparation and the interactive 90-minute online workshop.

Goal

We focused the topic of the workshop on becoming a researcher and connecting to other researchers. Therefore, the primary goal was to raise awareness about institutional and peer support for research career development. Secondly we aimed to foster individual researcher reflection on their own research journey.

Pre-workshop preparation

One week prior to the workshop, each participant received information about the workshop and the required preparation (appendix 1). We asked the participants to review the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and select descriptors to complete two exercises.

The first focused on building confidence and the second on identifying areas of development by plotting descriptors on an interest-capability matrix (appendix 2).

Online workshop

We incorporated a high level of interaction into the online workshop to avoid sending too much information and to encourage peer interaction.

The first 30 minutes established a common ground and a safe environment. We began by sharing our own personal research journeys and emphasizing that the journey is highly individual and requires much intrinsic motivation. We then had the six participants briefly introduce themselves.

We used interactive polling to get a better understanding of the participants views on academic research skills and impact (figure 1 and 2). We closed the first part with a short introduction to the Research Career Wheel.

In the second 30 minutes of the workshop, we divided the participants into three breakout rooms to further discuss the interest-capability matrix and the links to the RCW.
The moderated discussion helped the participants to understand their own internal enablers (intrinsic motivation) and areas of improvement in relation to academic research output indicators (*figure 3*).

For the final 30 minutes, we returned to the main room for plenary sharing of insights.

We triggered the 'shareback' with the following questions:

- What insights did you gain about your interests or capabilities?
- What is challenging for you in developing a research career?
- Do you recognize your level of career ambition in the wheel? Why or why not?
- What support do you need in your research development?
- What is your one take-away from the workshop?

Insights on research career development, internal and external support for hard skills – such as academic writing, data analysis – is fundamental to research career development; however peer support from direct colleagues and mentoring from senior researchers are highly valued and motivating for early stage research career development.

What skills do you think are necessary for a successful academic research career?

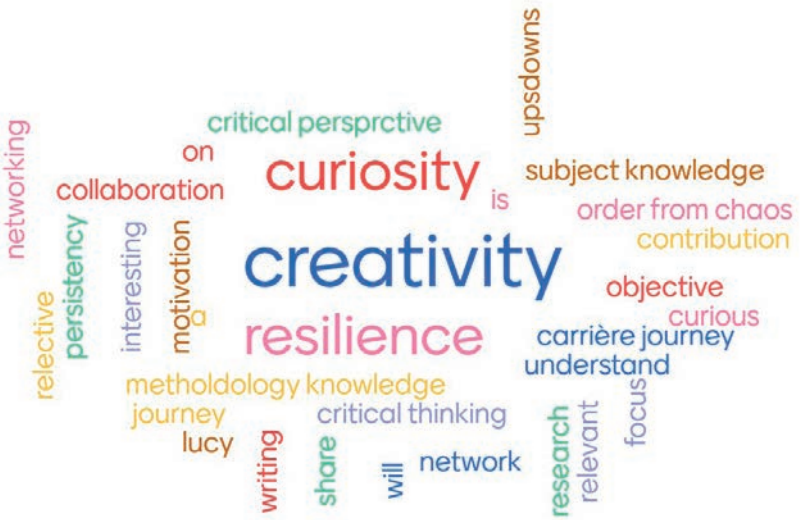


Figure 1. Skills needed for research careers

What academic results are necessary for a research career?

Figure 2. Results needed for research careers

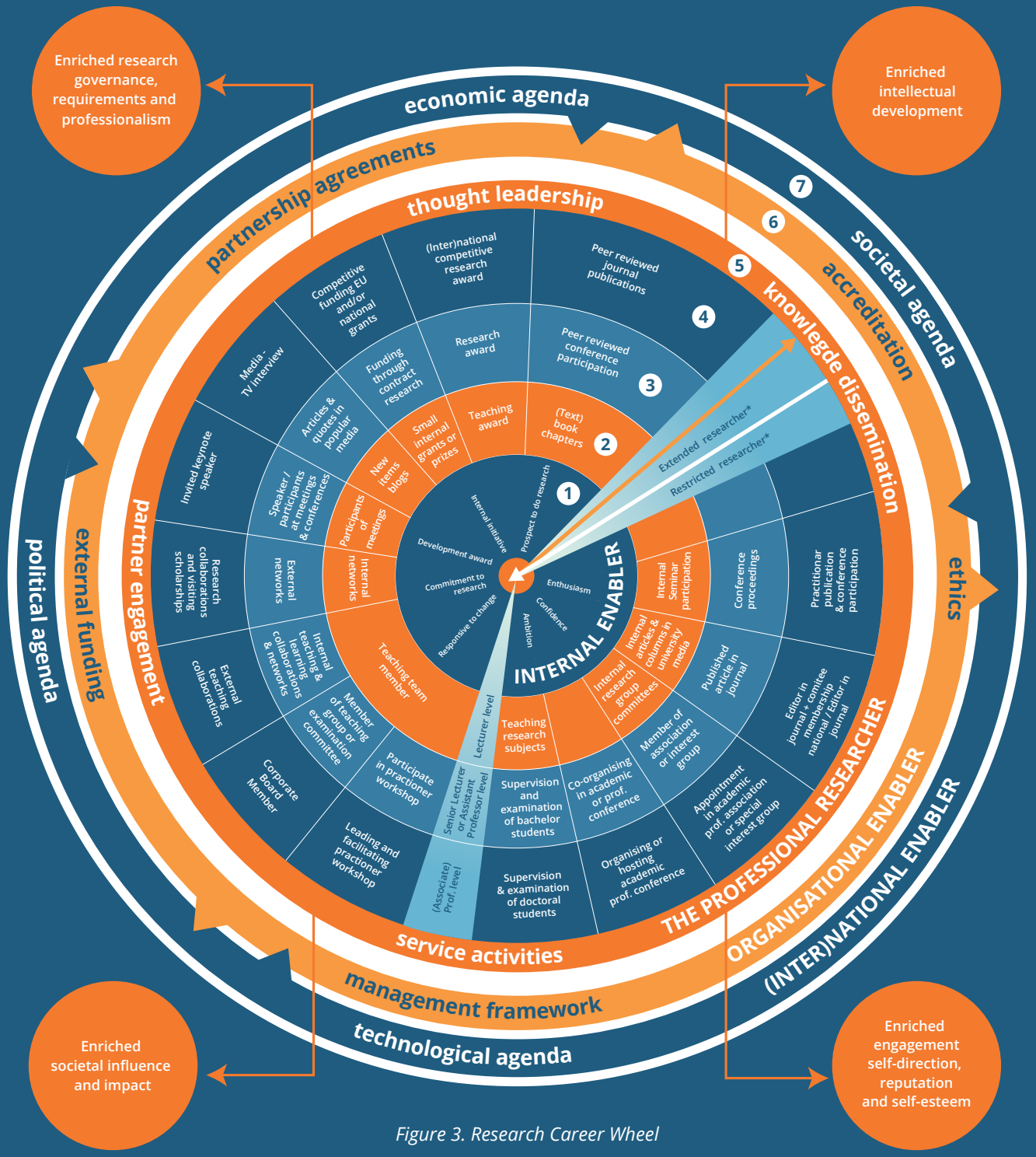


Figure 3. Research Career Wheel

How to read the wheel

The Research Career Wheel illustrates how increased research quality can be achieved by developing the internal enablers first, helping researchers increase confidence and develop expertise with mentoring and encouragement from experienced teacher-researchers. The development of internal support is subsequently mapped to external enablers (conferences, presentations, funded fellowships, etc). Formal external bodies thus provide recognition of this professional development and this helps teaching-oriented universities such as universities of applied sciences to actively promote a culture of academic development. The wheel helps identify different activities and the next steps that enable growth and development.

Appendix 1.
Example of workshop instructions

Instructions for workshop preparation

Based on the information that you submitted, the workshop will focus on recognizing your own capabilities and interests and identifying areas of development. This allows each participant to focus on their own researcher development. To get the most out of the workshop, we ask you to do some homework to gain more insight into your capabilities and interests. We estimate the homework should take 1 hour.

Homework

1) **Mapping your capability development**
   Using the pdf version of the Researcher Development Framework from Vitae (RDF), please indicate:

For Domain A and B only:

- Your phase of development for each RDF descriptor (or capability).
- Please indicate your development phase by highlighting (or circling) the text.

For 1 RDF descriptor in A and 1 RDF descriptor in B:

- Please use the STAR framework to provide evidence of your development phase.
- You can do this in a separate Word document, or in a comment in the pdf. It does not need to be extensive.

The STAR framework:

- *Situation:* Explain a context or situation related to the descriptor/capability.
- *Task:* Explain what you were trying to achieve, what needed to be done in that situation.
- *Action:* Explain the action(s) you took and why you took that specific action.
- *Results:* Explain the outcome of your actions and show how it connects to the task.

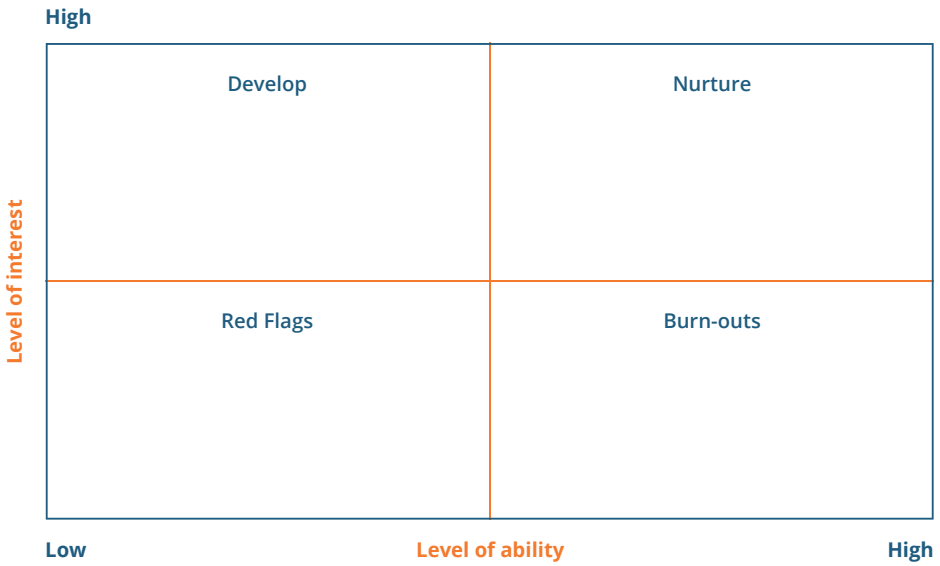
2) **Identifying your interests and capabilities**
   Using the Interest-Capability matrix (PPT document), please plot each descriptor/capability from RDF Domain A and Domain B. Reflect on the following:

- Do the capabilities in the 'develop' and 'nurture' quadrants support your research ambition? How?
- Do the capabilities in the 'red flags' and 'burn-out' quadrants hinder your research ambition? How?
- Are there any unexpected insights in your matrix? What and why?

STAR Framework

A STAR framework is a tool to help you 'articulate evidence'. This is an important skill for researchers and useful in any situation when you need to justify or defend conclusions. You are applying this technique to your capabilities, but it can also be used when you need to defend your research findings and implications.

Appendix 2.
Interest-Capability matrix



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