Leading young researchers and bringing excellence in teams: Challenges and good practices

Merve Zayim-Kurtay, PhD

Middle East Technical University

What do young researchers need?

Career mentoring	Collaboration-networking opportunities	Support

• Professional development
  • Research experience
    • Writing, publishing, public speaking
  • Grant application
  • Teaching
• Career counseling
	• Creating a research environment	• Emotional support
		  • Resilience
		  • Tailored approaches
		  • Fear-free environment
		• Knowledge-experience sharing
		• Role-modeling

EMPOWERMENT & INCREASED INDEPENDENCE →

But!..

Young researchers are less satisfied with their career perspectives than established and leading researchers in European HEIs (EC, 2017)

Challenges

- Lack of quality mentoring and support (e.g., Scaffidi & Berman, 2011)

  "In too many university departments, the experiences of younger researchers are left to the inclination of the head of their research group. Too often, there is no departmental culture of support and good practice in research mentoring" (Editorial, Nature, 2017)

- Disadvantages in science and underrepresentation

  *" scarcity of role models with common identity or background; **poor mentoring; lack of support networks;** biases in admission and recruitment processes"* (e.g., Mossoco, 2022, OECD Forum)

Challenges

- Bias towards senior researchers for funding and positions (e.g., Brück et al., 2010, p. 17)

  "in too many nations... senior scientists receive most of the resources available for scientific research, and young scientists rarely receive societal recognition for their work" (Brück et al., 2010, p. 17)

  "Today young researchers are often employed on temporary short-term contracts to help carry out specific research projects. This is to the detriment of academic independence, job security and sufficient social stability" (ERC President, Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, 2018)

Quality mentoring (Pommerening, 2021)
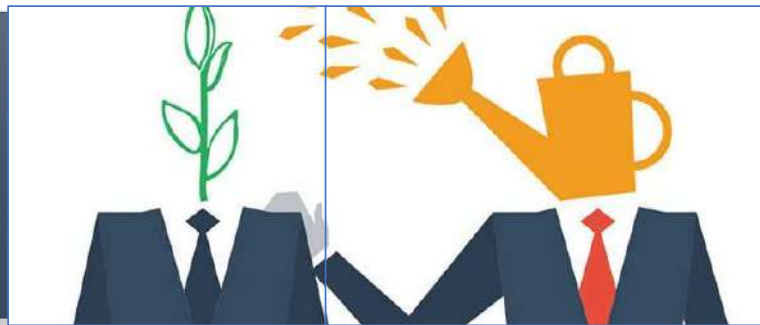
For researchers

- Greater satisfaction and lower isolation
- Higher self-efficacy
- Increased productivity
- Better integration to research community

For mentors

- Greater fulfillment
- Higher productivity
- Self-reflection and better leadership
- Skills transferable to administrative positions

Inclusive science and accomplishing diversity

- The inclusiveness of COST policy has been develop around gender, career stage (involvement of young researchers), geographical spread

- Diversity in terms of career stage, level of experience, skill set, and other sources of disadvantage (e.g., sex, SES, disability status, geography etc.) enables better problem solving, greater innovation, higher production, understanding of diverse groups (Swartz et al., 2019)

- Building the skills and empowering young researchers helps better addressing the SDGs of the United Nations (GYA, 2018)

Discussion questions

- What do young researchers need to succeed in today's higher education context?

- What are the challenges and enablers young researchers encounter in the process of creating their academic identity?

- What are the roles of leaders
  - to empower young researchers and improve their career prospects?
  - to create more inclusive research teams?