**Expanding your Expertise as a Social Science Researcher**

**Workshop aims**

1. Explore the notion of social science research ‘expertise’, including expert thinking, drawing on generalizations from the generic expertise literature
2. Examine how research expertise is learned, what scope there is for accelerating its development, and possibilities for your own further development as a researcher
3. Engage in a collaborative research design task that encourages the development and use of interactive and thinking skills embodied in research expertise
4. Plan a strategy for accelerating the further development of your research expertise along your desired trajectory

**Programme (10.00 to 16.30)**

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| 09.30 - 10.00 |  | Arrival, registration |
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| 10.00 – 11.30 | Session 1 (Aim 1) | The problematic nature of research expertise, including expert thinking |
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| 11.30-11.45 | break |  |
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| 11.45 – 13.00 | Session 2 (Aim 2) | Learning research expertise and scope for accelerating development |
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| 13.00 – 13.45 | lunch |  |
|  |  |  |
| 13.45 – 15.30 | Session 3 (Aim 3) | Thinking like an expert in practice |
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| 15.30 – 15.45 | break |  |
|  |  |  |
| 15.45 – 16.30 | Session 4 (Aim 4) | Implications for personal strategies |
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| 16.30 |  | Evaluation, finish and depart |
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**EXERCISE 1. INDIVIDUAL REVIEW:** **Taking stock of research expertise in your own experience**

*Complete this sheet on your own in a way that presents your achievements and interests in a positive light, while indicating where you feel there is room for growth. Although there will be opportunities for general comment, you do not have to share any of the information you write here.*

*But what is research expertise? We will be engaging with what a research expert is in the social sciences, and how we know one. So, for now, don’t worry about definitions. Work with your own intuitions: what the concepts mean for you.*

**Research expertise**

a) What constitutes research expertise in your area of enquiry? (e.g. think of someone you consider an expert. What are the characteristics that makes them so?).

b) Where are you along the pathway to acquiring extensive research expertise?

c) List up to three aspects of research expertise that you have already acquired to a significant extent.

d) List up to three aspects that you believe you still need to develop further.

**The learning process**

e) Identify one peak learning experience or turning point in your development as a researcher so far—why was it so powerful?

f) Your facilitators and inhibitors. *Some key factors that can help or hinder mid-career researchers in developing their research expertise are listed below. Many could be either facilitative or inhibitive for you.*

For each factor, indicate in the *second column* whether it is, for you, a:

**F** = facilitator, **I** = inhibitor, **B** = both, **N** = neither.

This relates to how the factor supports or impedes your ability to do good quality research

Indicate in the *third column* where the impact of this factor on your development as a researcher is:

**S** = significant impact on you, **M** = minor impact (leave it **blank** if the first column has **N**).

Use the comments column for ideas about converting inhibitors into facilitators, or for other notes.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Factor | F, I, B, N | S, M | Comments |
| Teaching and marking, including preparation |  |  |  |
| Postgraduate supervision |  |  |  |
| Administrative responsibilities unrelated to research |  |  |  |
| Administrative responsibilities creating chances to discuss research |  |  |  |
| Email communication with others |  |  |  |
| Quality of research facilities |  |  |  |
| Presence or absence of like-minded colleagues |  |  |  |
| The many different aspects of the job |  |  |  |
| Amount of time available |  |  |  |
| Working environment (noise, interruptions, spaces, etc) |  |  |  |
| Invitations to write research-based publications |  |  |  |
| Pressure and deadlines |  |  |  |
| Peer review feedback |  |  |  |
| How others do their own job (e.g. supporting or creating work for you) |  |  |  |
| Funding |  |  |  |
| Health and fitness |  |  |  |
| Commuting |  |  |  |
| Life outside of work |  |  |  |
| Personal capacity to concentrate, procrastinate, etc |  |  |  |
| Confidence |  |  |  |
| Planning and strategy |  |  |  |
| Level of subject knowledge |  |  |  |
| Others’ belief in you |  |  |  |

Do you see any patterns?

Are there any global changes that could have positive impact on how these factors affect you?

**EXERCISE 2. REFLECTION: Taking stock of your current opportunities for development**

* Do you have a research niche (area of expertise)? If not, would it work for you to have one?
* What was the quality of the research environment in your postgraduate and early career stages?
* What is your current research environment like? What would make it (even) better?
* Did you have good supervision as a student? Do you have a good mentor now?
* Have you had access to the research-related training that you need?
* What is the balance between positive experiences (successes) and negative ones (failures) in your career so far?
* Do you have sufficient chances to observe expert researchers in action?
* Does your research address users’ needs? If so, do you have regular contact with relevant users?
* Do you write about your topic in monographs or textbooks and/or teach about it?
* Do you collaborate with other researchers? Could/should you do so more?

**GROUP TASK: Collaborative research project design**

Other than the research done to inform this workshop, remarkably few studies have been conducted to investigate the nature of social science research expertise, either within particular social science disciplines or fields or across them. So there is great scope for further research in this area, some of which could have a positive impact on developmental opportunities for today’s mid-career researchers.

*1. Establish within your team what your combine knowledge and skills set is*

Briefly indicate to your team members what your (sub-)discipline or field is, and what sort of research methods and underlying theories are entailed in the work you do.

*2. Create the initial outline for a research project that harnesses the group’s knowledge and skills, to investigate some aspect of the nature or learning of research expertise in one or more of your respective (sub-)disciplines and fields.*

In developing an appropriate and effective method focus on the following:

* What are the most interesting research questions to ask, given what you jointly agree most needs to be found out?
* How might the set of methods and substantive knowledge areas that you jointly have be likely to *constrain* the options you consider?
* By recognising those tendencies to constraint, can they push beyond them, to think of additional approaches that might be taken?

In addition, be alert to how different people in your team go about the task, aiming to consider how you might expand your range of interactional styles.

*2. Prepare your report (you will have a maximum of 5 minutes to present it in plenary)*

Your report should cover the following areas, as appropriate:

* What will you do overall, in a few words?
* What core question(s) will you attempt to address?
* How (if at all) will you conceptually frame the project?
* What methods of data collection will you employ?
* What will your data look like and how will it need to be analyzed?
* What sorts of answers can you get from the data you stand to obtain?

**EXERCISE 3: Planning your personal strategy**

*How will you accelerate the ongoing development of your research expertise?*

* Your top priority goal(s) for further developing your research expertise along your desired trajectory over the *next few years*.
* Three things you could do *this week* to set things in train.
* Three things you’d like to achieve in the *next three months* or so, as steps towards your goals.
* Three things you need to prioritize in your medium-term planning, to sustain your trajectory towards enhanced research expertise over the *coming year*.