

## **PhD Holders and Career Management**

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Despite the research-driven economy and policy makers incitations to develop more activities in the fields of research and innovation, PhD holders' professional situations remain globally unsatisfying. Whilst they should be sought after for their specific skills useful to work and their abilities to react in complex environments, early stage researchers still encounter difficulties to find appropriate positions and valorise their doctorate.

Many reasons explain this paradox by the nature of the labour market itself: insufficient R&D and innovation culture, size and financial health of companies. But, above all is the lack of mutual knowledge linked to many prejudices, both avoiding successful encounter and recruitment.

Studies show that, once hired, PhD holders usually prove their effectiveness and are well appreciated for the specific skills they acquired through their doctoral education. For the lucky ones, who have been hired for a qualified and rewarding position, career management is usually equivalent to those who applied for jobs such as executive managers or experts. In academia, if it exists, it can take different shapes, depending on whether it is provided by institutions or by actors of the scientific community.

According to us, career management of the early stage researchers is a crucial topic. Academia is not intended to recruit all PhD holders she has produced and a large majority of them will enter non academic organisations. However, most of them are not prepared to enter new worlds and hold other positions. On their side, organisations are also not prepared to welcome these highly qualified professionals and take benefit of their skills.

Yet, there are needs and both parts complain: recruiters because they cannot find the ideal candidates and candidates because they do not manage to get recruited.

Our experience shows that, if well prepared, PhD holders find positions not only rewarding but also strongly linked to their personal profile and therefore fulfilling. In this framework, PhD holders' career management relies on anticipation and awareness. Vocational projects must be evolved and drawn out from the first year of the doctoral training. During the 3 or 4 years, the doctoral candidate can explore quietly the world of work and the new opportunities, develop his/her professional network, follow appropriate training and acquire sought after skills and competences. Then, at the end of his/her doctorate, the early stage researcher is ready to apply successfully for suitable positions at well targeted organisations. This ideal situation implies understanding supervisors and cooperation.

Concluding remarks: To improve the preparation of PhD candidates for key positions, in or outside R&D, all kinds of organisations must be considered as worthwhile investing in. Investments of scientific and research communities promote the value and professionalism of universities and their contributions to face tomorrows' challenges.