Career paths of academic researchers:

BUSINESS

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Entrepreneurial Studies - Louise

After completing a postgraduate diploma in European Studies followed by an MSc in Entrepreneurial Studies, Louise held one research contract for one year before moving to her current job as a marketing manager for a European industrial supplies company.

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO CONSIDER OPTIONS OUTSIDE ACADEMIA?
My contract was coming to an end so I needed to consider a range of options - in and out of academia. The idea of more job security really appealed - most of the companies I looked at did not work on just yearly contracts. I wanted to move into a job with prospects.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE TRANSFERABILITY OF YOUR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE?
I had developed various skills - in particular negotiation and communication - through my contract research work - and looked forward to applying these in a different environment. The transfer of my knowledge I saw as a positive challenge. In the event, the main skills I am now using are mathematical pricing and analysing data, as well as communication and linguistic skills.

COPING WITH THE TRANSITION
It took me a few months to make the transition - a time consuming process involving applications and time off for interviews. I looked for vacancies in newspapers, on the internet and through agencies, plus I used the University Careers Service and the vacancy bulletins they produced. My main concerns were about being unemployed and forced into accepting call centre work (something I could easily do because of my linguistic skills). Overall the whole process was challenging but I was able to integrate into my new work environment very quickly.

THE APPLICATION & INTERVIEW PROCESS
The jobs I applied for required either a CV or an application form and my interviews were mainly skilled based. Actually I found that the business interviews were less pressured with a more laid back approach compared with the intensive academic panel set up. I wasn't asked why I wanted to move out of academia. Generally I was pleased to be moving on and felt positive about things.

YOUR CURRENT JOB AND FUTURE PLANS
In my academic contract I really enjoyed liaising with people and now meeting customers is still the most enjoyable aspect of my work. The work environment I'm in is faster moving and dynamic and I am working with people mainly with industrial backgrounds. I still use my writing skills extensively (production of brochures and pamphlets), and my understanding of the marketing process is invaluable. Not using reference and textbooks to back up my knowledge is quite a challenge and I do miss the library being on hand! My current work environment is much more free, much less 'ivory tower' and I see my progression over the next few years in terms of gaining status and taking on extra responsibilities within the company. I believe there is more room for promotion within the business sector and have not maintained my academic contacts as I would not seek to re-enter academia.
HINTS AND TIPS

· Be flexible. Look at what the different environments (university and business) have to offer. Weigh up the pros and cons for you.
· Be open minded and prepared to try different things in order to build a range of skills that will make you more marketable.
The Competences displayed by Contract Research Staff who make a successful transition from one career to another

1. COMMUNICATION

1.1 Making an impact
- writes to provide evidence of suitability
- writes concisely and unambiguously, with a variety of layouts to help the reader
- presents self effectively in interviews and presentations with the intention of demonstrating strengths for the post
- asks questions to ensure the post and organisation are appropriate for the candidate
- articulates constraints (such as geographical limitations) effectively

1.2 Networking effectively
- networks with people who can influence
- uses a wide range of sources of information, both print and electronic
- builds relationships with named people in careers services or recruitment agencies
- asks questions of careers/recruitment staff to ensure that they understand what is sought and what will be suitable
- scans the environment by asking questions, visiting appropriate web sites and listening to people who might have an idea about the future

1.3. Persuading
- uses well reasoned arguments in applications, interviews and presentations
- is thoroughly prepared for application and interview - having researched the organisation and its environment and being fully self aware
- provides a range of examples of achievements which used relevant key skills

2. COGNITIVE

2.1 Positive/analytical thinking and use of judgement
- positive thinker, when things go wrong, looking forward and putting effort into next attempt
- sees potential in things which are not immediately obviously suitable
- uses judgement to assess the suitability of a post in relation to key skills, preferences and potential
- analytical thinker in identifying own strengths, key skills from experience in the present and previous positions and relating them to requirements of new posts
- makes timely decisions to take action (or not)

2.2 Lateral/creative/conceptual thinking
- lateral thinker, in looking far outside the expected posts in seeking a change - systematically assembles and presents relevant data about self and links it to qualities required for posts
- makes connections between unrelated fields of work and the application of key skills
- innovative in seeking posts and presenting oneself as a candidate
- uses initiative to make self known to people who can help

2.3 Political/Collaborative thinking
- strategic thinker, planning the 'campaign' for finding a new career
understands the political implications of situations and events by being sensitive to the environment in which an organisation is operating and to interview questions or answers to candidate’s questions
· collaborates with colleagues, friends and advisers who can give advice or feedback to help the process of changing career

3. SELF DEVELOPMENT

· undertakes voluntary work/work shadowing to get experience to help in decision making
· uses mentors to support transition
· gets additional qualifications to help transition
· has an ongoing personal development plan which is regularly updated

4. SELF MANAGEMENT

4.1 Positive/enthusiastic
· realistic about how long things will take and expectations
· has energy
· is enthusiastic - talks with passion/sees a positive side to everything/does things does with good spirit even when they are not preferred tasks
· responsible - works to standards expected/meets deadlines/has pride in work and self

4.2 Persistence/stamina
· persistent in making applications despite disappointments
· stamina to keep making consistently high quality applications and attend and make an impression at interviews whilst still maintaining standards in current duties and responsibilities

4.3 Flexible/open-minded
· flexible, in listening to feedback which requires action not previously thought of and in applying for posts which had not appeared appropriate formerly
· open minded in applying for a range of posts which require key skills but will need a lot of new learning as well
· inquisitive about what the world outside academia has to offer
· does not dismiss anything

4.4 Self confident and self controlled
· talks objectively about strengths, needs for development and achievements - with evidence
· self aware - has a list of everything to offer an employer, backed by evidence for previous performance (at work or elsewhere)
· objective - looking at things as they are - without bias from past experience
· adaptable, being willing to try new things which are necessary to progress in the direction required to fit a career plan
· assertive
· self controlled when facing anger, disappointment, frustration and able to vent these emotions quickly and then move forward positively
· has a clear vision for self
· insightful - knows how to build a positive reputation
5. DRIVE TO ACHIEVE

- immerses self in finding knowledge about new career field
- proactive in seeking new opportunities
- uses external resources to help achieve goals
- pays attention to detail