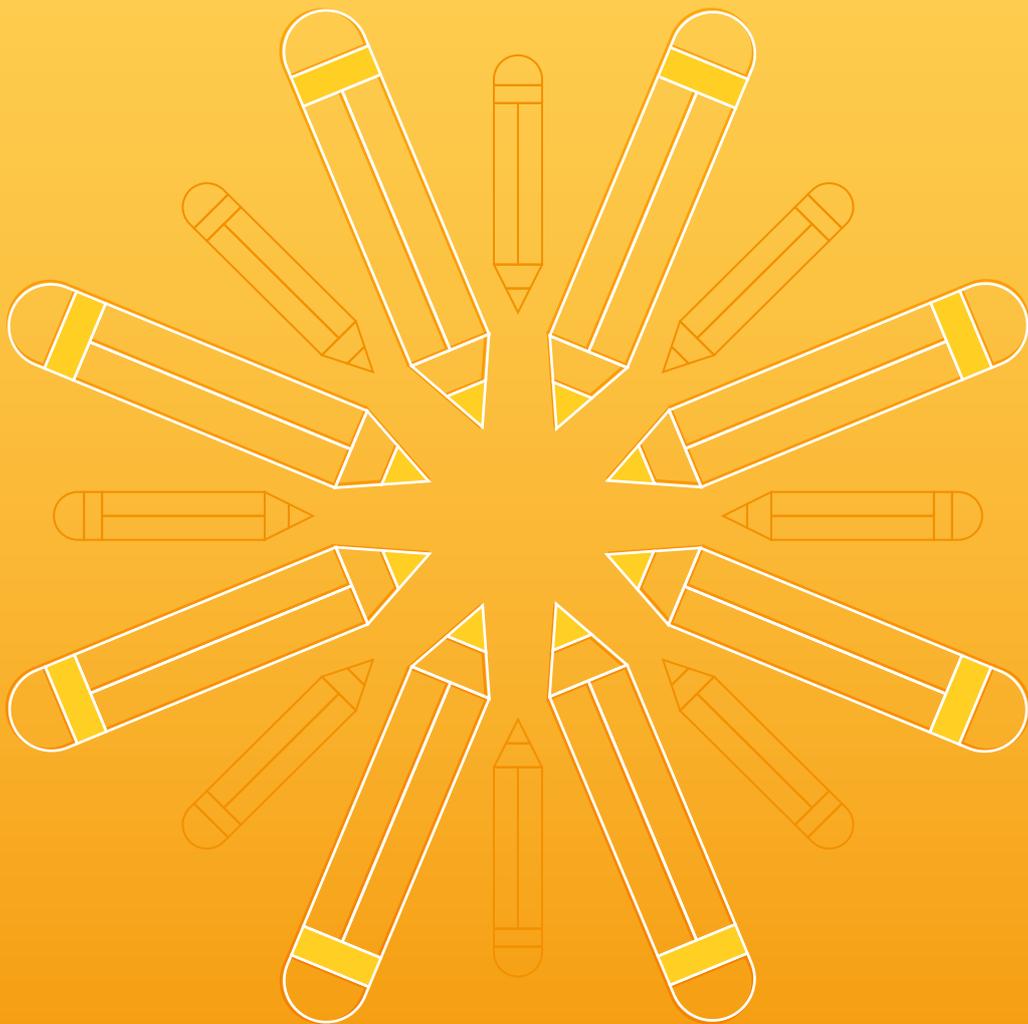


Wellbeing at work for grant-funded researchers

Elina Henttonen, Sikke Leinikki & Kirsi LaPointe



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STRENGTHENING AGENCY FOR WELLBEING AT WORK

The joys and sorrows of grant-based research

“I completed my doctorate with grants awarded for a full year, at best. Now I am working as a postdoctoral researcher on a grant. So, until now I have managed to acquire funding for my research. Still, I feel like I am some kind of a weirdo on the far edges of society instead of a well-educated expert in my field. Grants build exclusion.

(Pseudonym *Entering the labor market with a hat in hand*,
Helsingin Sanomat, 5.11.2018)

A grant refers to funding awarded for scientific research, arts or education (Katainen, 2017). There is no employment relationship between the grant recipient and the awarding institution. The vast majority of Finnish researchers have worked on grant funding at some point in their career. Research careers typically consist of fixed-term positions in universities or research institutions and grant-based periods in between – or vice versa.

Grants provide an opportunity to focus on meaningful research and practice academic freedom in deciding on the objectives, topics, and methods of research. Researchers working on a grant can also decide how and when they work. Of course, doing the research in itself brings the joy of gaining insights, and as the research work progresses, an understanding of one’s professional identity and scientific contributions deepens.

According to the project promoting grant-funded researchers’ wellbeing at work, carried out in 2016 by TJS Opintokeskus and MELA¹, the joys of grant-based research include the possibility to focus on one’s own research interests, feed one’s ambition, solve challenges and intellectual problems, and develop competence as well as the experience of doing meaningful work, building one’s future, networks, and partnerships, and offering long lunches in good company.

At the same time, grant-funded researchers face challenges and feelings of exclusion in their work, as the quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates. Most grant-funded researchers work at the margins of work communities, or outside them. The downside of freedom and independence are loneliness and lack of community and peer support.

1 Promoting Grant-Funded Researcher Wellbeing at Work -project was carried out by TJS Opintokeskus, a joint education and development organization of two Finnish confederations of unions for professionals, AKAVA and STTK, and by MELA, the social insurance institution for Finnish farmers and grant/scholarship recipients. The purpose of the project was to support grant-funded researchers and to develop and disseminate tools for them to enhance their wellbeing at work.

The daily work in grant-funded research can feel boundaryless and difficult to manage without official worktime or community. Getting started, organizing one's tasks, and setting boundaries between work and free time can prove challenging without the support of shared practices and routines. Moreover, adequate guidance in academic practices and in professional development are not always available.

As grant-funded researchers work without an employment contract, the responsibility for wellbeing at work or pension falls on themselves. Grant-funded researchers do not have access to occupational healthcare services nor do they have an employer, work community, or manager who would be in charge of their wellbeing. Often, they are also excluded from the wellbeing programs and training opportunities offered by their universities or research institutes.

There are no comprehensive statistics on the total number of grant-funded researchers. According to the Finnish Tax Administration statistics, in 2017 there were 673 grant recipients which is 681 people less than the previous year. However, MELA's 2017 statistics show there were approximately 6000 grant-funded researchers who had taken the MYEL insurance (statutory pension insurance for farmers and recipients for grants and scholarships). Moreover, their statistics indicate a slight increase in the number of grant recipients from the previous year (<http://tilastot.mela.fi/aikasarjat.php?id=38>). According to the Finnish legislation, the MYEL insurance is mandatory to all those grant recipients who are covered by the Finnish social security system and have received a grant from Finland. The grant needs to be awarded for a minimum of four months of scientific or artistic work in Finland and amount to a minimum of 1 300 euros, the equivalent of 3 900 euros in annual income (according to the 2019 rate).

Grants are very competitive: about every tenth applicant receives one. The unending application rounds take a toll on the applicants and cut down time from research itself. The chronic uncertainty and difficulty to plan ahead disrupts the focus on work and causes incessant worry about the future. These challenges became evident in a survey among the junior researchers of the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers (FUURT) to examine their labor market status, funding, as well as future prospects and career plans. It is important to note that a junior researcher is defined as a doctoral researcher or a postdoctoral researcher with a doctorate received within the previous four years. In other words, they are experienced professionals doing demanding work and often with families to support.

According to the survey, a fourth of the respondents (24 %) funded their research with a grant. Most of them (73 %) had used several funding sources, a fourth of them five or even more. In other words, many researchers, including the salaried employees at the time of the survey, had used or were going to use grants to fund their research at some point in their career. 30 percent of the respondents had experienced unemployment during their doctoral studies. Half of the grant recipients considered their grant insufficient. The survey also showed that the majority of the respondents were concerned about uncertain career prospects and almost half was considering to change careers.

It is no longer possible to delineate a clear, coherent research career path. Instead, researchers live in different realities and positions (Ylijoki & Henriksson 2017). Universities and research institutes have very different practices for including grant-funded researchers in the work and research community. At best, the grant-funded researcher is taken as an equal member of the community. More and more, however, they are considered outsiders (Katainen 2017).

Although grant-funded researchers contribute to university outputs in the form of publications, the institutions are not willing to cover the costs of their workspace and other resources, and may even charge them rent. In the aforementioned survey of junior researchers, 13 percent of grant recipients reported paying rent for office space, typically 1 500–2 000 euros per year. In addition to workspace, there is an issue with access to the resources necessary for conducting research: email, databases, laboratory facilities as well as membership in the work and research community in general.

In 2012, the Advisory Board for University Collaboration proposed the funding provided by domestic foundations to be included in the university funding model. In such a model, the livelihood and position of grant-funded researchers would be equivalent to those employed by the university. Moreover, personal grants would include compensation for universities to cover the costs incurred by the researcher. The model was not met with agreement, however (Tiitta 2018). Nevertheless, some foundations do award additional money to cover workspace costs, for example.

To summarize, the challenges of wellbeing at work for grant-funded researchers differ drastically from those on permanent or temporary employment contracts. The fragmentation of work, uncertainty, lack of community as well as difficulties in managing everyday work have an impact on the meaningfulness of work. These issues impede also the effectiveness of research, i.e. the creation of new knowledge and its utilization. It is therefore essential that grant-funded researchers are provided with customized support that takes into consideration the characteristics of their work and its conditions and offers tools to promote wellbeing and meaningful work.

The purpose of this workbook

This workbook is designed to enhance grant-funded researchers' professional development and wellbeing at work. Its purpose is to strengthen the agency of grant-funded researchers, that is their possibility and capability to influence their work, its conditions, and quality (Henttonen & LaPointe 2015; Korpiaho 2014; Räsänen & Trux).

The workbook offers support and practical activities to help create and sustain meaningful work, to manage daily tasks, and to leverage peer support. It includes concrete examples, reflection questions, activities on job crafting and professional identity, and advice on starting and running peer support groups. The workbook can be used as a self-study guide as well as a resource to organize peer support group activities and discussions.

Although the workbook is targeted towards grant-funded researchers, it can also benefit universities and research institutions by helping them identify the particular needs of grant-funded researchers and promote their wellbeing. Similarly, grant-awarding foundations can use the workbook to promote the wellbeing of grant recipients, prevent their burnout and, therefore, increase the effectiveness and impact of grant-funded work.

In Finland, researchers are categorized according to their career stage (doctoral candidate, postdoctoral, senior researcher), level of expertise (doctoral, independent researcher or academic director, distinguished researcher), funding source (grant-funded researcher, doctoral school or program candidate, project researcher, Academy fellow, ERC researcher) and the tenure track career system in universities. Some researchers working on grant funding prefer calling themselves independent researchers whereas others emphasize their affiliation with a particular research institute or scientific community.

Such categories not only classify but also rank researchers and create hierarchies. It is not our intention to define researchers based on their funding source as it is (only) one factor in defining their professional identity. However, acknowledging the source of funding allows us to address the unique and precarious position of grant-funded researchers with respect to meaningful work, wellbeing, and social security.

The structure of the workbook

The following chapters focus on strengthening the meaningfulness and positive aspects of research work and on addressing the challenges in work and its conditions together with peers.

The second chapter focuses on actions that individuals can take to promote meaningful work and wellbeing. The chapter shows how to craft work tasks, methods, and relationships and how to organize work, accomplish tasks, and foster wellbeing.

The third chapter introduces a more collective approach to wellbeing by focusing on peer support and joint change efforts. It describes how various academic work practices, including those related to grant-funded work, influence the experience of meaningfulness and wellbeing at work. In this chapter, the focus is on reflecting on how meaningfulness can be promoted by collectively developing work methods, practices and conditions. In addition, the chapter offers advice for starting and organizing peer groups to support the wellbeing of grant-funded researchers.

Finally, the fourth chapter is targeted not only to researchers but also to foundations, universities, and research institutions. We offer our take on the essential features of science policy to support the wellbeing of researchers working on a grant. Moreover, we propose an approach to enhance the wellbeing of grant-funded researchers that would combine the efforts of all grant-awarding foundations and other bodies that educate, support and handle their issues.

More information on the conditions, social security and taxation pertaining to work funded by grants can be found in the Finnish Union for University Researchers and Teachers (FUURT) guidebook Grant information for researchers.

https://tieteentekijoidenliitto.fi/files/2399/Grant_Information_for_Researchers_2017_.pdf

The MELA website offers information on social insurance for grant researchers.

<https://www.mela.fi/en/grant-and-scholarship-recipient>

The Aurora database compiles information on various sources of funding for science, arts, and culture and is available for everyone free of charge:

<https://www.aurora-tietokanta.fi/en/>

EVERYDAY WELLBEING AT WORK

What can I do myself?

This chapter introduces actions that an individual researcher can take to promote wellbeing and meaningfulness of work. It suggests how to modify work tasks, methods, and relationships to achieve a sense of organization, accomplishment, and wellbeing.



Activity: Meaningful work

Reflect back on your work during the past few weeks. Have you experienced a sense of meaningfulness in what you do? In what types of situations has this happened? Have you had moments when your work has felt meaningless or senseless? Why have you felt this way?

Most people find their work both meaningful and meaningless on a regular basis. These experiences are connected to the actual tasks as well the various relationships at work. Meaningfulness is also related to getting things done and achieving goals. Many practical arrangements, such as workspace, worktime and tools/technology, contribute to the sense of meaning. The fairness of compensation is also an important factor.

The meaningfulness of work can be conceptualized as a combination of three factors: *purpose*, *agency*, and *practices* (Henttonen & LaPointe 2015). *Purpose* is about experiencing one's work as being part of a greater whole. It is about pursuing aims that have a significance beyond one's own needs or desires and benefit other people or communities. Researchers often experience their work as meaningful exactly because of the important scientific, social, collective or ecological aims it serves.

Agency refers to the capability and possibility to influence one's work: its task, methods, and conditions. In general, the more one has control and influence over one's work, the more meaningful the experience.

Researchers working on a grant usually enjoy the possibility to determine independently how and what they work on. Freedom also poses challenges as the absence of necessary routines, supportive practices, and interactions with colleagues can make the daily work feel aimless and hard to manage. Therefore, *practices* that enable meaningful work are an important part of everyday life. Research, writing, collaboration, peer, and advising practices influence significantly how the day-to-day work flows.

Clarifying the sources and aims of meaningful work

Instrumental objectives – what is measured?

Research work is driven by a range of objectives. Some of them are clearly defined and measurable, such as the short-term goals used to evaluate, control, and reward work efforts. Study times and credits, project hours, publication volume, impact factors, department or university rankings – the list goes on.



Activity: Instrumental objectives

List all the elements of your work that are being measured (or would be possible to measure). Consider what is measured by whom (you, advisor, department, funding body, or somebody else) and how.

Few researchers do their work with the goal to maximize the number of publications. Nor do instructors teach just so that students can get credits and grades. These objectives are (more or less useful) means towards more significant ends. However, in universities the means tend to get mixed up with the ends. There is plenty of management talk on rankings, publications volumes, and classifications but less on the fundamental aims of research.

Fixating on narrow indicators and instrumental objectives creates a performance culture that leaves no space for discussing the meaning and aims of the research. Financial resources and funding based on performance metrics are, of course, preconditions for conducting research in the first place. Yet, such metrics are not sufficient aims for doing research or writing publications. It is therefore necessary to clarify the objectives and aims directing daily work.

Intrinsic aims: why is this work done?

Some of the aims in work are difficult to measure or even to put into words. Such aims are often the most vital aspects of the work that give it its purpose and significance. From the perspective of meaningfulness, it is important to try to identify and communicate these aims (for oneself and those who evaluate the work).

The best tool for clarifying the purpose is the *why* question. *Why* do I do research? *Why* do others do this work? *Why* is my work important? *Why* are the aims of my work significant and worth pursuing? The *why* can be replaced with *what for* in case the endless why questions provoke existential angst or feelings of guilt.



Activity: Intrinsic aims

The following activity is by Keijo Räsänen and Marja-Liisa Trux (2012) and requires a colleague as a partner. Tell your colleague about a specific time when you felt your work was meaningful. What happened, what did you do, who was there, how did you feel? Your colleague's task is to keep asking *why* questions related to this situation. For example, they may ask why the situation felt meaningful and, based on the answer, ask another why question. The why questions should be repeated until the final answer is something with intrinsic value, that is, a value that no longer needs a why. Then, switch roles and repeat the activity.

Research has a variety of aims: creating new knowledge and better understanding, education, increasing wellbeing, supporting policy, and solving societal, technical, or ecological problems. Researchers are usually adept at identifying the intrinsic aims of their work yet, in research communities these aims tend to get swallowed up by instrumental performance measures. For this reason, it is crucial that one elucidates the meaning and significance of one's own work and research.

Asking the why question is not a separate, one-time act but something that needs to be repeated in the day-to-day work. When grant applications, feelings of inadequacy, and conflicting demands are about to extinguish a sense of meaningful work, it is time for another why question.

Professional virtues: how to do good work?

Professional virtues are skills or characteristics needed to reach the intrinsic aims of the work. They are key elements of doing good work. In research, for example, meticulousness, honesty, critical thinking, and perseverance are commonly considered as core virtues.

In addition, individual researchers may have more specific personal and professional virtues related to the aims of their discipline or research. The practice of such virtues allows one to feel that the daily work is good and valuable in itself.



Activity: Professional virtues

Reflect on the types of virtues (skills, characteristics) you need to do your work well. How about perseverance, critical thinking, meticulousness, empathy, compassion, honesty, tenacity, helpfulness, independence, fairness, courage, or curiosity?

List the three most important virtues in your work. Next, consider whether the conditions of your work (funding, work environment, colleagues, resources, leadership) allow you to practice these virtues. What enables or constrains you to do your work well, in other words, practice your core virtues? Is it possible to do something about the constraints?

When instrumental values (what is measured), intrinsic aims (why the work is done) and professional virtues (how the work is done well) are aligned the work tends to feel meaningful and improves wellbeing. If leadership is focused on managing the instrumental objectives, however, the meaning of work may fade away. This may occur even when intrinsic aims are understood but there is no way to evaluate them.

Clarifying the intrinsic aims and virtues is of utmost importance particularly when wellbeing is at risk and practices in need of renewal. Next, we will focus on how to better use time, get work done, and develop routines and meaningful work practices to foster professional virtues, intrinsic aims, as well as the overall wellbeing of the grant-funded researcher.

Using time consciously

Grant-funded research is usually not restricted by time or location. At the beginning of a new project, there is often a sense of having loads of time with the deadline still far in the future. Still (or perhaps exactly for this reason) many researchers struggle with time management.

Time management, however, is a misleading concept since time, by definition, cannot be controlled. Hence, we prefer to talk about conscious use of time, as Carol Kiriakos and Kimmo Svinhufvud (2015) propose. Conscious use of time is a matter of how we use the time available to us. The key is to identify the sources and aims of meaningful work and then compare how much time we allocate for them (see *Clarifying the sources and aims of meaningful work*).

However, conscious use of time does not imply an expectation to be as efficient and productive as possible all the time. Rather, the point is to make space for engaging with meaningful work activities in whichever way desired – even slowly, if need be.



Activity: Time-use diary

Keep track of how you use your time for one week. Record the time you use and how you allocate it among different activities and tasks. Next, return to the instrumental objectives, intrinsic aims, and professional virtues of your work (see *Clarifying the sources and aims of meaningful work*) and evaluate how they are reflected in your use of time. Pay particular attention to the amount of time that promotes the intrinsic aims of your work.



Activity: The Eisenhower matrix

The following table presents a time management method called the Eisenhower Matrix:

Important, urgent	Important, not urgent
Not important, urgent	Not important, not urgent

To complete this activity, use the results of the previous ones or, if this is your first activity, begin by listing all of your work tasks. Next, group the tasks according to the four quadrants of the matrix. Determine (or, if possible, ask) whether your colleagues or advisor would agree with your classification. What should you do to make enough space in your daily work also for tasks that are important, but not urgent? What should you give up? How could your colleagues support you in these efforts?

The important and urgent tasks call for immediate attention. For example, a grant application with a deadline in a couple of days is both important and urgent. Not all of the tasks that are important seem urgent, though. Completing a doctoral dissertation rarely seems urgent as the process extends over several years. However, responding to emails, sending an abstract to a conference, answering student inquiries, or updating social media often seem very urgent. And soon the workday has once again been swallowed up with busywork, that is, activities that are secondary to the core task. No wonder if a sense of inadequacy creeps in.

Email and other communication tools are often considered as the main culprits in eating up knowledge workers' time. It is possible to manage email by using methods such as Inbox Zero where all incoming mail is either deleted, archived, delegated, handled immediately, or scheduled for another time. How handy! You may notice, however, that maintaining an empty inbox takes more time than it would to do the actual work.

Social media is another reason why work days become fragmented, making it difficult to find time for focused reading, writing, and other similar tasks. The interruptions caused by such external stimuli can be reduced by turning off the notifications and closing all unnecessary browsers and applications. Paradoxically, this sometimes causes restlessness if the mind gets preoccupied with all the potential incoming, but still unread, messages.

Sometimes the mind wanders without any external stimuli: grocery list, picking up children, birthday present for a friend, scheduling a haircut....



Activity: Identify interruptions

Pick one day to observe how your work gets interrupted. You can count how many times your work is interrupted by an external stimulus (e.g. phone ringing or a sound of text message). Or, how many times does your mind wander off to other matters? If there are too many interruptions, think how you might go about reducing them.

The simplest way to reduce interruptions and busywork and to attend to important and urgent matters is getting rid of some tasks. In order to do one thing well and without haste, it is often necessary to let go of many others. Eliminating some and focusing on only a few, allows one to put one's mind to each task. As a result, the quality of the work is not diminished by simultaneous tasks eating up time from each other. In other words, it is important to carefully consider what one wants or is able to engage with.

In the process of letting go, it is logical to start with the fourth quadrant of the Eisenhower matrix, i.e. with tasks that are not important, nor urgent. As to the remaining quadrants, one option is to practice *selective conscientiousness*. This refers to choosing to do particularly well tasks that serve the intrinsic aims of the work. Other tasks can be carried out with less effort.



Activity: Letting go

List work-related tasks, activities, and responsibilities you could let go of to make space for the more important ones. You can do this just once or make it an on-going activity, for example once a month. Your observation period can range from one day to a few weeks.

Sometimes it is necessary to be a little selfish since having flexibility in daily work life is a double-edged sword. Often when the schedule is wide open, it becomes very difficult to reserve that time for writing, for example. In reality, it is so much easier to take on new tasks, respond to requests by others and agree to remain home with sick children. Therefore, it is best to make the time for writing visible on the schedule and this way allocate enough time for it – and then stick to it.

Various software applications can be helpful in using time consciously and organizing work tasks. *Any.do*, *Todoist* and *Evernote* allow the user to make daily lists and take notes. *Wunderlist*, *Trello* and *Asana*, in turn, are project management tools to list and schedule tasks for different projects and divide them between teams, friends, or family members. *Aikani* application, provided by the association for Finnish Business School Graduates (<https://www.ekonomit.fi/aikani>), assists in tracking the use of work and free time. There might be a fee for some of the applications or additional services but most basic versions can be tested free of charge.

However, software applications are a good servant but a bad master. They can put you into a mindless performance-mode or free up time for things that matter.



Activity: Test an application

Download one of the abovementioned applications and test whether it helps you organize your work in a meaningful way.

Procrastinating and getting things done

Creative work requires space and time for thinking, also known as idleness (in Finnish: *kotviminen*; Kangasvuo, Pulkkinen & Rauanjoki, 2018). Idleness allows new ideas to develop and helps to figure out why and when various tasks should or should not be done (*ibid.*). Hence, procrastination and idleness at work is not always counterproductive but rather a vital condition for learning and in-depth understanding.

However, procrastination does become problematic if avoiding and postponing work tasks results in strong feelings of anxiety and lethargy. From the outside this may appear as a time management issue or laziness but in fact, it represents a rather complicated cultural and psychological phenomenon that extends past the individual level and is rooted in the conditions of the work (Burka & Yuen, 2008; Kangasvuo, Pulkkinen & Rauanjoki 2018; Kiriakos & Svinhufvud, 2015).

Independent knowledge work, such as grant-funded research, is conducive to procrastination. This type of work, characterized by a seemingly amorphous scope, is commonly carried out independently, often without any support or guidance. Time easily slips away without specific

work hours and shared routines. Since nobody knows (or, sometimes, even cares) whether I work today or not, I might as well begin tomorrow... or next week.... or next month...

Procrastination rarely helps. The further the work is postponed, the higher the expectations become both regarding the work and the researcher. The greater is the disappointment if these expectations cannot be met. In other words, procrastination creates unnecessary pressure and makes getting started all the more difficult. At the same time, fear of failure and exposure of one's level or lack of capabilities, grows.

The deceptive cycle of procrastination can be prevented by developing a realistic understanding of one's use of time (see *Using time consciously*). First, it calls for questioning the assumption that more time would magically appear tomorrow or next month. Second, it is important to become aware when attention shifts to secondary busywork to avoid the more significant tasks. Third, it is necessary to give up the "as soon as" type of thinking. As soon as I get my desk organized, as soon as I get all the busywork done, as soon as I start exercising regularly, as soon as I get better funding.... As all the "as soon as" type people know, there are always more "as soon as" factors and reasons for procrastination to come.

A realistic understanding of one's use of time requires planning the work for different time spans. Enough uninterrupted time needs to be scheduled for the important but not urgent tasks. Also, there needs to be space for practicing idleness, without a guilty conscience, to cultivate overall wellbeing and creativity.



Activity: Setting goals

Think about your work tasks and write down what you need to accomplish tomorrow / next week / next month / next year. Consider what you need to do to reach these goals. Are your plans realistic? Is there space for developing your thinking? And above all: who can you share these plans with, and get support from, to make them a reality?

Researchers most often grapple with getting their writing done. Although not always evident most researchers experience problems from time to time with getting started, maintaining motivation, and getting things done.

There is only one way to overcome the fear of the blank page: writing. In order to successfully finish a large writing task, such as a doctoral dissertation, it is important to break it into smaller chunks and short-term goals. It may seem scary to set a doctoral dissertation as a goal but less so if the focus is on reading the articles needed for the literature review, writing a draft abstract, or finalizing the chapter on methodology.

Smart objectives are specific, concrete, and realistic. It makes no sense to promise to get everything done next week. Instead, it is best to set clearly defined, concrete goals: on Monday I will read two important articles and take notes on them, on Tuesday I will write three pages of my conference paper, on Wednesday I will draft a message to my research participants.

A positive goal (what I want to accomplish) usually leads to better outcomes than a negative one (what I want to get rid of). It makes more sense to set your mind on writing than to swear you will reduce surfing the internet.

Goals are attached to accountability. Accountability means that someone is expecting results from your work. As independent research is harder to measure, you need to create the accountability yourself. The following activity allows you to benefit from peer pressure and achieve a sense of accomplishment and progress.



Activity: Creating accountability

Discuss your work in detail with your colleagues so that you can agree on one concrete goal for each person. The goals do not have to be the same nor the same size. The point of the goal is to push everyone to focus their efforts on reaching their goal. Set a deadline for when everyone will report how they have reached their goal. Whether you form a group on social media (e.g. WhatsApp) or create an email group, the main thing is that everyone can participate equally.

In their book *Tohtoritakuu* (2015), Carol Kiriakos and Kimmo Svinhufvud present various methods to improve writing. For example, *pomodoro* is a method where work is divided into 25 minute chunks of intensive work with five-minute breaks in-between. The rationale is that writing (or any other work for that matter) is not mystified but broken down to concrete tasks. There are always some tasks to get started with that will help make progress towards the ultimate goal. Soon you might notice that you don't want to stop.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that while it makes sense to break down the bigger tasks into small ones, it is not a good idea to let work time get too fragmented. Enough time needs to be scheduled for the important tasks that require focused attention. Recovery time also needs to be taken into consideration: after an intensive work period you might feel completely drained. If that is the case, it may be best to switch to something entirely different (see *Overall wellbeing*).

Finally, it is important to think of a way to reward yourself and to do things that bring you joy so that work energizes and invigorates you. In everyday life the work may not feel so rewarding if the mind focuses only on the slow progress towards a big goal, such as completing a research project. Yet, one idea or a sentence may well be a good accomplishment for one day since it is not always possible to measure the results of research quantitatively.



Activity: What rewards me?

List things that you find rewarding in research. Then write down your accomplishments and think of how and with whom you would like to celebrate your accomplishments.

Setting up routines

Reaching both short-term and long-term goals (see *Procrastinating and getting things done*) requires systematic efforts. These efforts can be facilitated by setting up a regular work schedule and routines to structure the daily work.

Researchers working on university or research institute premises automatically take part in many shared routines. The departmental meeting is on Mondays, lunch is around noon, and coffee break calls people to the breakroom in the afternoon. Researchers working on their own have to develop their own routines. You need to get going, get started, remember to eat, take breaks, and know when to stop too.



Activity: Routines

Describe your typical work day. What routines do you identify? Do these routines serve the objectives and aims of your work (see *Clarifying the sources and aims of meaningful work*)? Is something missing? If so, what?

The need for routines varies for different individuals. One likes to write at nighttime, another works solely during regular office hours. One finds it easiest to get started with the biggest task first thing in the morning and take care of the little tasks in between periods of focused attention. Another prefers to take care of routine tasks first in order to focus on the essential ones. One of the dangers with this last approach is, however, that the list of routine tasks is endless (see *Using time consciously*).

In setting up a schedule, it is important to consider how it best serves your work-life needs. Some routines can be set up together with peers. A study circle, for example, is a way to make time for reading research literature. Another way to collaborate with colleagues is to make writing dates (Kiriakos & Svinhufvud 2015) with the shared aim to get writing done and to work on one's own or the texts of others. Writing dates can also be organized virtually by setting up a meeting on Skype, for example, to write for an hour together. Some departments and doctoral schools organize writing meets as well. Writing retreats, in turn, allow focused time for writing without distractions but they are not really everyday routines.

Another good way to collaborate with colleagues and peers is to agree on shared deadlines (see *Procrastinating and getting things done*). Creating mutual accountability supports systematic work towards individual or shared goals. This also provides the opportunity to give and receive feedback. There is usually no shortage of critique so it would be more helpful to focus on appreciative, strengths-based feedback.

Sometimes a lunch or a coffee date with no particular agenda can get you out of the house and bring a welcome break in the middle of the day. Taking a walk with good company not only provides fresh air and exercise but gives an opportunity to air your thoughts, make sense of life and research, and spur new ideas. Ask another researcher, perhaps even someone you don't know that well, for a coffee or strike up a conversation with someone in the cafeteria, break room, or hallway. You might make new friends and gain new insights!



Activity: Setting up shared routines

Propose a shared routine to one of your colleagues, such as a weekly lunch meeting, or a regular meeting on shared topics with a larger group. Offer feedback on a colleague's paper or presentation and swap roles when you need help. Sign up for a conference together and help each other in preparing the abstracts, papers, and presentations. Practice giving your presentations with each other. If you are working on your doctoral dissertation or a thesis, agree on a regular meeting schedule and rules with your advisors.

Using time consciously, setting up routines, and getting things done are skills that anyone can develop. There is no reason to dwell on guilt, however, if you are having trouble getting things done as you can always try setting up a small routine to improve your wellbeing and sense of meaningfulness. It is not a big deal if it doesn't work right away. The process of setting up a routine calls for a good deal of reflection, repetition, and also setbacks.

Describing competences

Funding applications, collaboration projects, doctoral studies, course applications, job interviews, and career planning all require grant-funded researchers to describe and evaluate their competencies. A realistic assessment of one's competence and development needs also serve to enhance a sense of meaning and wellbeing at work.

Although research work is characterized by continuous learning and development, it is not always easy to specify and describe what one knows. In addition, there are a variety of criteria for defining competence as they tend to be specific to the task and field. Sometimes researchers are also faced with preconceptions about their competence: theory is mastered but what about practice?

Independent knowledge work, such as grant-funded research, does in fact call for a variety of competencies: knowledge of the research field, methodology, writing and language skills, collaboration skills, IT and communication technologies, and organization and management skills. It is therefore useful to assess competence beyond the know-how related to research area and methods. This assessment would be helpful also when considering alternative career paths.



Activity: Mapping competencies

List all of your work tasks. Evaluate, by yourself or with others, what type of competencies are needed in each one. How would you rate the level of your competence in each task? What would you like to improve?

You can map your competencies with the help of the following questions:

- What kind of content-related knowledge do I need to do my work well?
- How do I get the information I need for my work?
- How do I solve problems?
- How do I handle ethical dilemmas at work?
- What kind of changes have I experienced at work and what have I learned from them?
- Am I capable of planning and developing my work activities? Am I aware of what I am doing, how and why? Do I know what I should be learning next?
- What type of guidance or advice do I need?
- How do I work and communicate with others?
- Can I form meaningful communities and networks to support my work?
- How do I utilize tools and technology?

Making competencies visible is an excellent way to avoid the so-called *impostor syndrome*. A person who suffers from the impostor syndrome is afraid that their accomplishments are a result of luck or chance. They further believe that they have somehow managed to fool others to believe in their skills and worry that sooner or later their lack of competence will be exposed.

The impostor syndrome erodes professional self-esteem and makes even a highly qualified researcher doubt whether they deserve their grant, for example. A person suffering from this syndrome may also postpone difficult tasks (see *Procrastinating* and *getting things done*) in fear of becoming exposed. However, identifying the competences and development needs necessary to succeed in one's work and professional practice is an effective way to prevent this type of cognitive distortion.

Using emotions as a resource

Emotions develop deep within the brain and influence how we experience work and life. Emotions direct our attention, thinking, and actions within a given situation. Our career choices and life paths are also shaped by emotions as they influence our choices among the available, sometimes rather random options in life. Emotions drive choices, assign meanings to experiences, and feed life aspirations. As a consequence, emotions also shape values, preferences, and relationships.

Emotions are a valuable resource in daily life and convey information about how a person experiences the world. Hence, it is important to tune into emotions and consider the unmet needs they may be revealing. Perhaps you enjoy discussions with colleagues because they meet your need for belongingness. You like receiving positive feedback on your article manuscript because you are hoping to succeed as a writer. You may get irritated by interruptions because you need space to concentrate. You feel anxious about waiting for a funding decision because you need a sense of continuity and security.



Activity: Emotions and competence

Reflect on the following questions about emotions and competence:

Which situations make you feel you know how to do your work? What brings this emotion about? Is it because you received positive feedback, you reached a milestone, or tools and technologies are operating smoothly? Does your future seem like a safe, bright adventure?

Which situations make you feel inadequate? Where does this emotion stem from? Is your job description unclear, schedule impossible, or have you received unreasonable or unfair feedback? Does your future seem uncertain?

These questions can help you identify the situations when emotions are threatening your sense of self as a researcher and professional. You may notice that such emotions are a result of certain social practices or structures and that delays in your research, for example, may not be attributed to you only.

Sometimes interactions with colleagues may feel strenuous and joyless, even alienating. Such emotions may be influenced by the past or present experience of time pressure and overwhelming tasks. However, it is possible to regulate the power of emotions and curb their impact on your relationships and collaboration.

The following activities are designed to help you manage two emotions that can interfere with daily work: fear and anger. Public presentations, difficult interactions, receiving feedback

or daunting tasks are typical causes of fear. Anger, in turn, is a common emotion in unfair situations, for example. While both emotions are natural and indispensable, if they become overpowering, fear can make you stall and anger can constrict thinking. As a consequence, they impair our encounters with others and our ability to listen and develop new insights. For this reason, it is important to learn to analyze and regulate one's emotions. The following activities are helpful in managing any negative emotions.



Activity: Managing emotions – fear

1. First think of work situations where you typically experience fear. Describe one such situation and your reactions in detail.
2. Analyze why this particular situation causes fear.
3. Think of the worst possible outcome that might result from this situation. Would that really be as bad it may seem? Would it be possible to bounce back from it?
4. Examine next whether this situation might bring any exciting opportunities. Write down any opportunities you come up with. Can you think of anyone who might be excited about such a situation? If so, why? For example, if you are afraid of flying to a conference you can think of pilots and how they enjoy their work. If you are afraid of public speaking, you could try to visualize how it would feel to be someone who enjoys it.
5. Finally, think of the positive outcomes of this situation. Next time you find yourself in a similar situation and a sense of fear begins to creep in and take you over, shift your attention to these positive outcomes and possibilities. Over time you may notice that your fear gradually loosens its grip and you are able to work more effectively.

A situation I am afraid of:	
I am afraid because....	
The worst that could happen is....	
It could be also exciting because....	
It may result in positive outcomes such as....	



Activity: Managing emotions – anger

First, consider what it is that makes you angry at work. Note these situations or interactions down in the following table as neutrally as you can. Then explain why this particular situation makes you angry. Next, consider possible positive aspects of this situation. The next time you get angry in a similar situation, think of the positives. Does this soothe your anger? If it does, be grateful for this possibility to calm your mind and refocus.

An anger-provoking situation:	
This situation makes me angry because....	
Three positive aspects of this situation are...	

As emotions can sometimes be very draining, it takes time to recover. In addition to identifying and managing emotions, recovery can be facilitated by uninterrupted sleep as it helps effectively regulate powerful emotions, such as shame and fear. Sometimes it is best to simply face the cause of the emotion. For example, you can use visualization techniques to face and manage your fears.

You can also trick your emotion by associating it with another one. For instance, to manage fear you can tell yourself how a fearful situation can be exciting. As you encourage yourself to get excited you may notice how fear subsides (see *Activity: Managing emotions – fear*). A good laugh with others is another way to alleviate fears: when you are laughing with others, by definition, you are not alone nor afraid.

These tips can help you in individual situations but are not effective if a sense of fear has taken over your work environment or community. To offset such an atmosphere, it is necessary to focus on improving equality and fairness so that researchers can plan ahead and feel safe.

Emotions are closely intertwined with roles which vary from one situation to another. Situational factors and expectations, our own and those of others, shape the roles we take in research community, family, and free time.

Roles can generate conflicts. For example, the expectations between the role holder and other stakeholders do not meet, different roles are in conflict in a given situation, or the demands of the role and the personality of the role holder are incompatible.



Activity: Role map

A role map can help you analyze and manage your emotions by analyzing role expectations and their potential conflicts:

Specify the expectations for your role as a researcher by various stakeholders (e.g. work community, scientific community, funding bodies, colleagues).	Do you share this expectation?	Is this expectation in conflict with your personality?

List your other roles in life (e.g. family, friends, hobbies).	How does this role relate to your role as a researcher?

What are my most challenging role conflicts?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

In addition to managing role conflicts and negative emotions, such as anger and fear, it is important to focus on positive emotions that enhance wellbeing. Concentrating on, and consciously practicing enriching emotions, such as compassion and inspiration, makes everyday life meaningful and enables rewarding interactions as well as giving and receiving support.

Developing a culture of compassion alleviates anxiety-provoking and stressful situations, reduces fear of failure, and supports professional development. Self-compassion, that is, being kind to oneself and accepting perceived inadequacies and failures, is important as well. Research has shown that self-compassion reduces stress, anxiety, and fear of failure and increases learning, wellbeing, and quality of life (Neff & Germer 2017).

Self-compassion is an important skill as no one is perfect nor always succeeds. Everyone faces difficult emotions and failures. It is useful to consider how you would talk to a colleague or your child at such times. You probably would not blame or judge - so why talk to yourself like that?

You can find exercises for developing self-compassion skills here:

<https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#exercises>

Overall wellbeing

Meaningful aims and routines, conscious use of time, ability to influence one's work, and successes and accomplishments all serve to improve wellbeing and a sense of meaning at work. It is just as important, however, to pay attention to other fundamentals of life. Wellbeing at work is connected to the requirements for overall wellbeing.

All the learning, analytical thinking, problem solving, and eloquent communication required in research is straining on the brain. Constant information overflow, interruptions, and busyness take a toll as well. *Adequate sleep* helps the brain function at work and enables learning and adoption of new knowledge. Lack of sleep, in turn, impairs many of the core skills in research: focus, learning, and creativity. While the necessary amount of sleep varies individually, seven to nine hours of sleep is usually recommended for adults.

In addition to sleep, social activities, hobbies and other invigorating activities aid *recovery*. Having something else to think about for a while makes it easier to resume working on the challenges of research. Each day should include short breaks to help recover and re-energize the mind and the body. It is also a good idea to have at least one or two days per week when there is no need to think about work at all. Vacation time is also important but its need varies. One prefers to take an uninterrupted month-long summer vacation whereas another likes to take one week here and another one there.

Downtime is crucial for inspiring creativity and new ideas. Getting away from the daily grind is important also for reflecting and critically examining one's work and professional identity.

Regular mealtimes and snacks help sustain energy levels throughout the day. Moreover, the quality of nutrition influences not only energy levels but also happiness and health.

Taking care of the body is important in work that involves a great amount of sitting in static positions in front of the computer. Stretching, oxygen breaks in fresh air, and exercise maintain the ability to work and wellbeing. Appropriate technology, or quality eye glasses when needed, would benefit researchers who need to do a lot of reading and computer work. Unfortunately, grant-funded researchers are responsible for work ergonomics and healthcare themselves whereas for salaried employees such services are (or should be) provided by an employer.

Work-life balance can be both easy and challenging to achieve in grant-funded work. As grant-funded work is free and independent it can easily be adapted to other activities and family life. There is no need to report one's hours into complicated systems and no one controlling one's comings and goings. Many grant-funded researchers work at home which makes it possible to adjust the work to their own and family rhythms, save commuting time and costs, and avoid interruptions. Nevertheless, working alone can make one feel lonely and long for interaction and involvement with others.

The freedom in research work may hamper performance (see *Procrastinating and getting things done*) and blur the boundaries between work and free time. Similar to all knowledge work, research easily spills over to free time due to smartphones and information technology. This is not necessarily an issue per se since work is not an isolated part of life but often an essential part of identity. Without specific work hours, however, it may be difficult for a grant-funded researcher to estimate when to stop working. It is up to them to decide the appropriate length of their work days, vacations, and sick leaves.

To better manage work-life balance, it is useful to examine the expectations you or other people have set for your performance. Only a few people maintain a consistent drive at work from one day to another. Some days it is more beneficial to rest rather than stretch yourself too thin. It is important to listen to your body and monitor energy levels and to adjust work accordingly.

Sometimes the difficulties are expounded by the weight of multiple demands in life. One should be a passionate professional, ray of sunshine, social butterfly, mindful parent, and dedicated triathlete – while maintaining constant presence across the social media. It can be hard to manage all the expectations without succumbing to feelings of inadequacy. Yet, it is necessary to accept that one cannot be all things at the same time nor can all problems be solved, or even need to. This requires tolerance for imperfections and understanding of the limitations of a given situation.

If the daily work nevertheless feels extremely exhausting and the work offers no joy this might be a sign of burnout. The symptoms of burnout vary but chronic headaches, lack of appetite or overeating, muscle cramps, and stomach pains are clear signs that the body needs to rest and recover. Burnout symptoms also include excessive worrying about work, lack of initiative, cognitive and decision-making problems, and insomnia. If you find yourself fretting about work at night or not having enough time for family and friends, your work has taken too big of a hold of your life.

Burnout is typically caused by excessive workloads or extreme conscientiousness. This type of strain can accumulate over a longer period of time or be a result of short-term overload. Nevertheless, the issue is the same – a decrease in wellbeing and performance.

However, it is important to note that uncertainty, shortage of work, and the resulting sense of uselessness can also be stressful. Each situation is unique as are the remedies. One benefits from slowing down, another needs complete rest.

The situation of a burned-out, grant-funded researcher is challenging as there is no occupational health services to turn to for diagnosing the situation and determining the need for care. In municipal health centers the wait times for appointments are often long. Rarely does a grant-funded researcher have a manager who could help organize the work in a more sustainable way.

The stressors in grant-funded research work, such as piecemeal funding and uncertainty, lack of support and guidance as well as inadequate social security and healthcare, are political and social issues. An individual researcher working with a grant is rather powerless. Therefore, we will next look at various shared, social, and policy-level practices that can promote the wellbeing of grant-funded researchers.

PEER SUPPORT

How can we change practices?

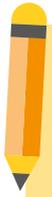
The previous chapters have focused on the individual and detailed how each person can promote their wellbeing at work. However, it is hard for an individual grant-funded researcher to change the institutional practices and cultures which are the prime culprit for many of their challenges. That is why this chapter focuses on a collective approach to wellbeing and meaningful work that emphasizes peer support and shared practices.

Peer support as a resource at work

Peer support refers to support received from a person with similar experiences of a particular situation or problem. Through the process of sharing same or similar experiences, peer support allows participants to identify and strengthen their resources and find ways to deal with challenging situations.

The core values of peer support groups are equality and mutual respect. Participants are considered experts who collaborate in the group via sharing experience, information collection, and reflection. This collaboration enables individual participants to identify their resources and empowers them to solve their challenges (Laimio & Karnell 2011, 12). Moreover, peer groups can help find alternative ways of working, promote meaningful work, and enhance wellbeing (Henttonen & LaPointe 2015).

Peers and peer support are an important resource also for grant-funded research. Another researcher in a similar situation understands the challenges and joys of working on a grant. With peers one can share experiences as well as important information regarding funding opportunities, for example. Peer groups also provide a space to experiment with new ways of working and to develop common practices, such as shared accountability, deadlines, or writing dates, in order to make work more meaningful (see *Setting up routines*). Another positive aspect of working with peers is that there is no need to prove that grant-funded research is real, serious work.



Activity: Would I benefit from peer support?

Have you ever considered whether you could benefit from peer support or joining a peer group? Ask yourself the following three questions:

- Do I perpetually grapple with questions that I cannot answer?
- Is it difficult for me to move forward?
- Do I feel like I have been left to my own devices at work?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions you would most likely benefit from peer support. Have you talked about these issues with anyone? Could you find other people in your research community who might have similar issues? Could you set up a peer support group yourself?

Setting up and running a peer support group

The purpose of a peer support group is to support each other and simultaneously help oneself. A group can be set up and run in many forms: as an online forum, lunch dates, walking meetings, discussion groups with a rotating chair, or a monthly club. The participants are all equal and have the right to be heard and feel understood. A regular schedule and common rules support the group and individual participants.

A dedicated coordinator, or several, and a group of motivated researchers are needed to get a group started. There are many potential places to look for participants. One place to find peers are the various courses offered by university doctoral programs and schools on research methods and academic writing. Some universities offer courses on academic work and professional identity development utilizing peer support (e.g. Räsänen 2016; Räsänen & Korpiaho 2011).

The annual event on wellbeing at work for grant-funded researchers organized by Mela provides another opportunity to meet grant-funded researchers from all over Finland. Mela is also testing an online peer support group.² Some of the more progressive foundations and other funding bodies provide peer mentoring opportunities as well.³ You can find peers also at various academic conferences as well as learned societies and associations. Some of them organize events and get-togethers targeted for doctoral students in particular.

2 This peer support group (*Virtaa verkosta*) is an online service provided by Mela to support performance and wellbeing. Participants are offered coaching by experts on motivation, life habits, stress management, recovery and change.

3 For example: <https://koneensaatio.fi/en/peer-mentoring-groups-will-start-their-work-grantee-sign-up-now/>

Another way to find or set up a group is by asking around in your own department or college and letting peers know you would like to join a regular group. Alumni activities or events are also a great place to find peers.

Before setting up a group it is important to identify the various needs for peer support and organize the group to meet these needs. Different motivators appeal to different people. Outgoing individuals would probably like to meet new people whereas goal-oriented individuals would value specific objectives and career-oriented individuals, in turn, might be attracted by the opportunities for learning and collaboration.



Activity: Why commit to running a peer support group?

It can be difficult to decide whether to take the responsibility of running a peer support group. Am I up for it? How much time will it take? Will other participants find the group useful? To reflect on these questions, consider the following factors:

What kind of a researcher do I want to become? What do I need to do to get there? What is the role of collaboration in my work? How can I improve my collaboration skills? What would I like other researchers to understand about my work?

Running a peer group is a great way to gain professional experience and receive feedback to help you improve. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to make sense of working life, get support and influence the conditions of work.

One of the outcomes of the project on wellbeing at work for grant-funded researchers, carried out by TJS Opintokeskus and Mela in 2016, was a model for peer support groups. There was one group in Oulu, Tampere and Turku, and two in Helsinki and they all met four times to focus on work wellbeing issues.

In the wellbeing project, the groups were run by specialists from TJS Opintokeskus. However, anyone who is interested in peer support activities can take on the role of the coordinator. All you need is a meeting space or online tools; coffee and tea would be a nice added touch.

Although the project groups met four times, three times might be enough for a group getting together over one semester. It is better to schedule the meetings during the daytime to keep the focus on work.

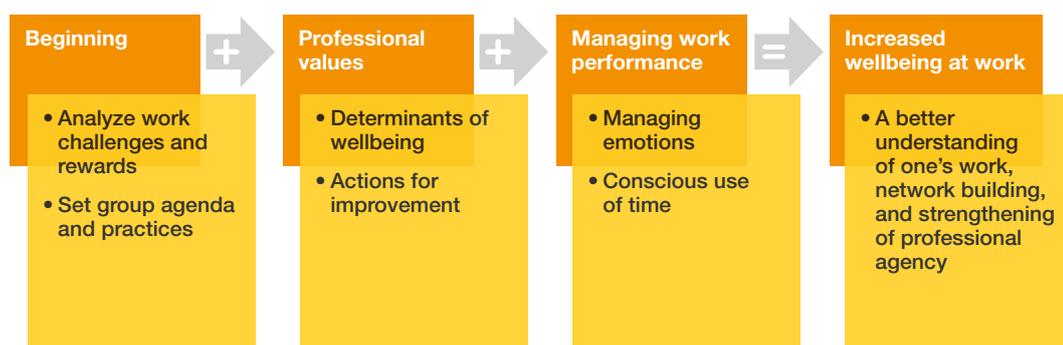
The agenda for a peer group depends on its participants. A good way to begin is to discuss the pros and cons of grant-funded research to determine everyone's needs. Another key topic for discussion is values in research work which would allow participants to clarify their professional virtues and strengthen their agency. It is also important to discuss emotions and their social determinants as well as professional development to provide better tools for managing the everyday work. In the wellbeing project, the groups also discussed and worked on grant applications.

The first meeting is important, and needs to be well prepared, so that the group gets off to a good start. In the wellbeing project, the first meeting focused on describing the various challenges of grant-funded research and identifying possible solutions. The work continued by elaborating the joys of grant-funded research to boost everyone's motivation. Another activity towards this end is to assist participants to identify and describe their accomplishments.

Starting from the first meeting it would be good to write down the various insights gained in the group. A concrete plan, jointly prepared, would also help the group stay on track.

In the wellbeing project, the subsequent meetings were structured according to the issues identified in the initial discussions. The coordinators made sure that all groups progressed in a similar fashion, yet each group focused on slightly different matters depending on their specific needs. A postdoc group, for example, was not interested in discussing grant applications whereas other groups worked on the applications together and shared experiences of the bureaucracy, austerity, and arbitrariness involved in grant application processes.

The outline of the four-meeting process was as follows:



The position of grant-funded researchers makes them vulnerable to a variety of emotions, yet they often need to deal with them on their own. Peer support and collective efforts help identify these emotions, develop solutions, and make it easier to manage the work.

“It is empowering to see others in a similar situation and therapeutic to talk together. It is possible to live with uncertainty. Meeting other researchers in a relaxed environment liberates you to talk about wellbeing at work instead of the content or progress of the research. Being a grant-funded researcher is just one aspect of my identity. This group has helped me see that my work is not chaotic or some amorphous blob. Having a better understanding of my work makes it easier to step back and just rest for a moment.”

(Peer group participant)

Identifying emotions, offering compassion, and sharing the experiences and joys of research with peers are all helpful in preventing negative emotions to take over. In group discussions it becomes evident that the shared feelings of inadequacy and loneliness are not individual problems but a result of the ambiguities of the work and the marginal position of grant-funded researchers in their work communities.

“I have learned that my feelings of inadequacy stem from the position of the grant-funded researcher in the organization. It is not an individual problem. That is why it is not enough to discuss the position of grant-funded researchers in peer support networks alone. The feelings of loneliness are created by the nature of the work and the position of grant-funded researchers. The arbitrary management practices and policies in small units, in particular, tend to generate such experiences as there is no oversight.”

(Peer group participant)

The peer groups in the wellbeing project identified various ways to address the feelings of inadequacy, such as setting the boundaries around work and making an advising agreement with one’s university regarding the expectations, rights, and responsibilities for both parties. In collaboration with FUURT, the project offered an online class on the rights and responsibilities of grant-funded researchers.

The groups also discussed conscious use of time, organization of work, and self-management and experimented with Bullet Journals, Kanban, and online tools for organizing daily work. Peer groups came up with the idea of recording all positive feedback in a file that one can return to on the more somber days. In addition, the participants learned teamwork skills and the influence of values on communications. The groups also worked on identifying the competences and skills of each researcher (see *Describing competences*).

You can use the following activity to describe competences and skills:



Activity: Competence sun

Fill in the following boxes your competences, hobbies, and areas of interest as well as personality, work habits, and development needs. Share your observations in your group and ask others for feedback and comments.

The diagram features a central orange sun with a smiling face. Eight lines radiate from the sun to connect it to eight rectangular boxes arranged in a circle around it. Each box is intended for a specific category of information related to the user's competences and skills.

My qualifications:	My hobbies:	Comments about me/ my competence by other researchers (collect here concrete, positive feedback you have received).
My personality:		
My work habits:	Areas of improvement:	Skills I would like to use more in my work and research:

The group can also create network maps to describe the current professional networks of the participants and to identify ways to develop them to better support research work:



Activity: My professional network

Reflect on your professional network based on the following questions:

- Who belongs to my professional network? How, and how often, do I keep in touch with them?
- Who do I turn to, and whom do I ask, for advice and support?
- Who do I admire in my field? Would I dare to approach them? What would I like to ask them?

Finally, you can draw a map of your professional network by placing your most important contacts as circles closest to you.

Along with peer groups, professional networks can also be used to look for mentors. Mentoring is a confidential relationship where a more experienced professional, the mentor, supports the career development of the mentee. A mentor can help find meaning and direction in work and share information, know-how, and experiences. Universities, unions and associations have their own mentoring programs that you can apply for. You can also initiate a mentoring relationship yourself by contacting a desired mentor and discussing possibilities for collaboration.

Developing practices

In addition to self-management and other individual-level efforts (see *Chapter 2*), the promotion of meaningful work and wellbeing requires shared, social practices.

Practices refer to shared, routinized ways of behavior that guide our everyday activities often automatically and unconsciously. For example, research work consists of numerous established practices: research methods, conference presentations, peer reviews, and department coffee breaks. Doctoral studies and dissertation research, in turn, are governed by a specific set of practices related to advising, doctoral program, academic affairs, college and university administration as well as funding (Kantelinen & Korpiaho 2009).

From the perspective of grant-funded research, the key is to identify those academic work and research practices that either enable or constrain wellbeing and meaningful work. Which practices strengthen wellbeing and need to be fostered collaboratively? Which practices reduce a sense of meaning? What type of new practices could support the daily life and work of grant-funded researchers?



Activity: Identifying practices

List all practices that you participate in during one work day or week. Evaluate each practice in terms of how meaningful or meaningless it makes your work feel.

Changing deep-seated practices is not up to an individual but calls for collective effort. Change requires collaboration and dialogue, jointly defined problems and objectives, collective actions, and collaborative learning. It also calls for strong trust in others and commitment to shared aims. Collective efforts not only foster a sense of community but also help handle all the heavy demands placed on grant-funded researchers without getting discouraged.

You can analyze the practices in your work by yourself using the previous activity but it is more effective to examine them together with others, peers in particular. Shared, often deep-seated practices can only be changed collectively although even then the task is by no means easy.

You can get started with the following activity in which you 1) describe a chosen practice, 2) analyze it from the perspective of meaningful work, wellbeing, or some other objective, and 3) make a plan for change.



Activity: Analyzing a practice

1. Choose one practice that influences the meaningfulness of your work. Describe the practice by using the following questions:
 - What activities are included in the practice? Who does what, when, how, and with what type of tools?
 - What are the objectives and aims of the practice?
 - How is the practice sustained?

2. Next, analyze the practice from the perspective of meaningful work (or wellbeing at work or some other objective)
 - How does the practice enable or constrain meaningful work?
 - How could it be strengthened?
 - How could it be changed or renewed?
 - Could it be eliminated?
 - Should it be replaced with a new practice?

3. Finally, discuss what it would take to change the practice:
 - Where should we start? What is important to us right now?
 - What do we need to find out? Who could have answers? What do we know already?
 - Who do we need to get involved?
 - What is the timeframe and resources needed?
 - What needs to be done and by whom?

Let's use the doctoral dissertation advising practice, in which a grant-funded researcher may either be the advisor or advisee, as an example for this activity. The first task would be to describe in detail how this advising practice is carried out (in a given unit, university, and discipline), who takes part in it, and how. The objectives and aims of the practice also need to be discussed as well as the role of various stakeholders.

Next, the focus would shift to the effectiveness of the advising practice from the perspective of the participants. Are there any aspects that need to be improved? Or is there something that is not working at all? What new ways of providing and receiving advising could be developed?

You might notice, for example, that advisees are nervous about contacting and potentially bothering a busy advisor. Perhaps they are afraid of sending draft papers because the expectations for such papers have not been clarified. The advisors, in turn, may feel that advisees are not well prepared for the meetings and advisors' time and advice is wasted.

If this is the case, there needs to be a discussion on possible remedies. Would it improve the advising practice if all doctoral students and advisors were to make an advising agreement specifying the rights and responsibilities of both parties? What factors should be taken into consideration, who should be involved, and how should it be implemented? Should peer support practices be addressed in the agreement? Should the agreement include a policy regarding the authorship of resulting research publications, including the order of names on them?

In addition to everyday practices, colleagues or peers may want to discuss wider issues and changes in the society that influence their work. A better understanding of complex social, technological, societal and ecological changes calls for dialogue on future scenarios and challenges. A shared predicament and an improved understanding of the conditions of work generated in dialogue foster a sense of community and belonging. Changes may also feel less threatening when they are addressed collectively.



Activity: Mapping changes in work

Use the following questions to develop a shared assessment of the situation:

1. What social changes can I expect in my work environment? What types of challenges do they pose? How do I participate and interact in different groups?
2. What technological changes are taking place and how do they influence my work? What types of technological tools are available? Are they available to all and is there support and training for their use?
3. Does the free movement of people influence my activities as a researcher? How do I act with people coming from other countries and cultures? How do I act in international collaboration? Do I have any prejudices and if so, am I working on them?
4. How are the economy and labor markets changing and what kind of an impact do they have on my work?
5. What kind of science policy is being developed? How does that influence my work and research field?
6. Are there any changes in legislation (such as data privacy acts) that would influence my work?
7. What types of ethical guidelines do I work by? Does my research contribute to social change? How does my work environment operate? Is it sufficiently open and transparent?
8. Do I pay attention to ecological issues in my work? Are there any environmental changes that may have an impact on my work or the society at large? How do I prepare for them?

You can use the following table to record your notes:

Social factors	Technology	Immigration and mobility	Economy and labor market
Politics	Legislation	Ethics	Environment

From the perspective of meaningful work and wellbeing, an analysis of the current situation and environment allows you to differentiate issues that are within your sphere of influence from those that are a result of wider social and structural changes and, therefore, call for collective efforts. Moreover, this analysis enables you to see which trends you can and want to try to influence collectively. A desire to collectively address such common issues often results in a sense of community as well.

In addition to shared aims, you will need a concrete plan detailing the necessary steps, actions, and people as well as standards for evaluating progress.



Activity: Preparing a shared plan

To organize your collective efforts, think about the following issues:

Aim: what do we want to accomplish and why is this important?	
What will we do: actions and activities	
Who does what and when: timeframe and responsibilities	
What will we gain: benefits	
How do we monitor progress?	
What is our rationale and message?	

Many academic practices are so deeply entrenched that changing them may seem a daunting task. Some tasks may have been carried out in a particular way for years, if not centuries. The power of practices is indeed in their repetition. At its best, this power creates continuity and sustains valuable traditions but it may also prevent necessary change. It is worthwhile to remember, however, that if there is even a slight possibility for doing something differently, conscious, collaborative efforts can help shape, develop, and redefine practices.

COLLECTIVE POWER FOR IMPROVING WELLBEING AT WORK

Peer groups provide valuable resources for daily grant-funded work and support collective efforts in changing practices. However, these collective efforts need to be complemented with higher education and science policy measures targeting the precarious position of grant-funded researchers. This argument can also be found in the FUURT (The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers) higher education and science policy program for 2019–2023.

Policy-level measures are particularly important at a time when the status of science is being threatened by the wave of populism and the associated dismissal of science in general. There has been disparaging talk of scientists, mergers and privatizations of research institutes, and budget cuts. There is an urgent need for multiple stakeholders to engage in strong and collaborative science and higher education policy development to ensure wellbeing of all researchers equally.

Therefore, in this chapter we aim to address not only grant-funded researchers but also all those who provide funding for them, use their research results, educate, advise or support them as well those who are in charge of regulating and managing their work and social security.

The institutional measures we propose to improve the position of grant-funded researchers require not only science policy but also democratic debate on science and its prerequisites. All researchers need to engage in this discussion.

Science policy to support grant-funded researchers

The current science policy measures leave grant-researchers in a precarious position characterized by uncertainty. Although uncertainty is an individual experience it is structurally produced. A major problem with the position of grant-funded researchers in their work communities is the lack of unified policies among universities and research institutes, or sometimes even within a single organization. The practices for supporting grant-funded researchers vary also among grant-awarding foundations. In addition, the social security system and other societal forms of protection are based on the ideal of permanent full-time jobs (Suoranta & Leinikki 2018) and therefore, do not meet the needs of grant-funded researchers.

The researchers who participated in the wellbeing project carried out by Mela and TJS Opintokeskus were wondering why the Finnish research funding system divides researchers

into two castes, those who are employed and those who work on a grant. Some researchers are chosen to do research at universities and research institutes as salaried employees whereas others live in perennial uncertainty applying for grants to make a living and practice their profession. Some researchers end up having to fund their research with other jobs or unemployment funds.

Doing research on a grant is an unpredictable and uncertain path: will I get a grant and if so, for how long, can I participate in a research community, what will happen if I get pregnant or get sick, how will I continue my work after the grant runs out? Using the services of Kela, employment office, or tax office is frustrating as even their specialist personnel does not always master all the quirks of the confusing system. In one place the grant-funded researcher is considered unemployed, in another employed, in the third a student, and in the fourth a self-employed entrepreneur:

“Grant-funded research is not seen as proper work and so I find myself constantly having to explain the nature of my work to tax officials, the landlord, and the doctor at the health care center.”

(Pseudonym *Entering the labor market with a hat in hand*,
Helsingin Sanomat, 5.11.2018)

It is no surprise then that nearly half of the respondents in the FUURT survey among junior researchers reported considering changing careers. The system is not working which in turn creates concerns about the future. These circumstances do not benefit individual researchers, funding bodies, research institutes, industry, or society at large. Neither does this situation promote the effectiveness of Finnish doctoral education and science funding.

To address the shortcomings of the system we need openness, dialogue, collective efforts, collaboration between foundations, shared policies and practices among universities and research institutes as well as explicit, fair agreements. Next, we will detail what this would entail for the various stakeholders.

Grant-awarding foundations

One of the biggest challenges with grants is that the funding time periods are not long enough. As a result, research repeatedly gets interrupted with time-consuming, highly competitive application processes. The short funding periods also influence the quality and depth of the outcomes of basic research and the available time for disseminating the results of applied research to labor markets and industry. In addition, the continuous grant application processes make it hard for grant-funded researchers to ensure sufficient livelihood for themselves and their family. Constant worry and stress about making ends meet makes it harder to focus on research.

As to the differences in what the grant awards include, it would make sense to align the awarding practices across the foundations. Grant-funded researchers would also need more guidance in the obligations related to grants, such as taxation. As a participant in the wellbeing project commented:

“We need collaboration among foundations and alignment of the expectations for grants. Grant decisions need to include clear rules in how it can be used, whether it can be used for traveling, how much, and where. Traveling rules need to apply to all equally. The application forms should also be aligned.”

(A peer group participant)

Universities and research institutes

“The grant-funded researcher has no place to do research, no tools nor health care services let alone employment benefits, such as lunch vouchers or overtime pay. University does not offer any form of research community or support for everyday work. Everyday life is lonely.”

(Pseudonym *Entering the labor market with a hat in hand*,
Helsingin Sanomat, 5.11.2018)

Universities and research institutes are not willing to take responsibility for grant-funded researchers because these researchers are not their employees. However, universities do get a part of their funding based on outcomes that include dissertations and research articles written by grant-funded researchers. It would only be fair that universities offer adequate facilities for research work they benefit from.

FUURT (2018) states that universities should take care of the healthcare needs of grant-funded researchers when researchers work at their premises and their work is counted in the university outputs. In addition, other grant-funded researchers should receive the same quality of healthcare as entrepreneurs and farmers currently do, for example.

As already proposed, integrating domestic foundations and their grants in the university funding model would be a significant improvement for the position of grant-based researchers and their equal treatment:

“Foundations proposed to Finnish universities already back in 2013 that they would provide a compensation for the university for each grant recipient. In return, universities would provide grant-funded researchers with necessary resources and an equal status with researchers at a similar career stage in the university. Universities did not like the proposal. Is now the right time to implement a new, equivalent system? Including domestic foundations in the university funding model would improve the position of grant-based researchers. In the existing model, competitive funding received from outside institutions influence the

amount of government funds universities receive. This applies to funding from foreign, but not domestic, foundations. Why? Grant-awarding foundations provide over 200 million euros of annual funding for Finnish science. “

Liisa Suvikumpu, docent, executive director
Advisory board for foundations and funds, HS Opinion 13.11.2018

Within the current system, department chairs in universities and directors in research institutes should be obligated to engage grant-funded researchers in the research community, at the bare minimum. This applies to any other organizations with researchers working on a grant.

Integrating grant-funded researchers into work communities is not only crucial for their wellbeing at work but also contributes to the completion of research and its effectiveness. Educational opportunities should be offered to grant-funded researchers as well since the university benefits from their pedagogical qualifications, professional development, and communication skills. Moreover, grant-funded researchers should have representation in various advisory and decision-making bodies.

As to doctoral education, universities need to ensure that all doctoral students have the possibility to participate in the courses and advising offered in the doctoral programs and schools. Grant-funded researchers also need an advisor, regular and systematic communication as well as support for grant applications, research progress, and network building. Moreover, doctoral students need academic advising services and clear guidelines for their studies.

According to a career survey of PhDs (Aarresaari-verkosto 2018), 62 % of them had been employed outside the university within three years of graduation. A large part of doctoral students will, therefore, end up working in expert roles in research institutes, public administration, business, non-profit, or as entrepreneurs. Doctoral students should be made aware of these various career opportunities available outside universities already during their studies. Moreover, employers need to learn about the benefits of hiring doctoral graduates and the versatility of skills researchers have. There should also be more services available to support academic entrepreneurship.

To increase their employability, grant-funded researchers need targeted services both at the university and the employment and business offices. As the FUURT survey (2017) showed, junior researchers would also benefit from career coaching which could help them examine alternative career paths. Career coaching can help grant-funded researchers evaluate the uncertainties related to a research career and consider different career options in universities or elsewhere. Researchers could also use descriptions of alternative career paths and roles as well as examples of how these different roles can be creatively combined at different stages of career.

Unions and public agencies

Researchers need to organize collective efforts to promote the interests of grant-funded researchers. This could be achieved by setting up a group within a labor union or the National Union of University Students in Finland. Such a group should focus on the interests of all doctoral candidates or researchers, instead of just those funded by grants, in order to avoid a caste system between salaried employees and those working on a grant. As one of the participants in the wellbeing project of TJS Opintokeskus and Mela proposed:

“By combining our forces, we could improve the position of grant-funded researchers: for example, receive longer funding periods and salaries instead of grants.”

(Peer group participant)

There needs to be a responsible institution that has the sufficient expertise to handle the various needs of grant-funded researchers, such as social security, work and family integration, and sick leaves. As to benefits, the current local practices and advice on applying for the benefits and using income-based benefits to fund doctoral studies needs to be aligned nationally. Public employment and business service offices, unemployment funds, and Kela need to ensure they have the necessary expertise to serve and advise grant-funded researchers that have fallen through the cracks.

To sum up, there is a need for wider societal efforts to make the social security of grant-based researchers and other self-employed people equal to those of salaried employees. Social security and taxation need to adjust to careers that require a creative combination of salaried employment, entrepreneurship, and grant-based work. Grant-based researchers would benefit from basic income which would allow shifting the focus from financial concerns to completion of research.

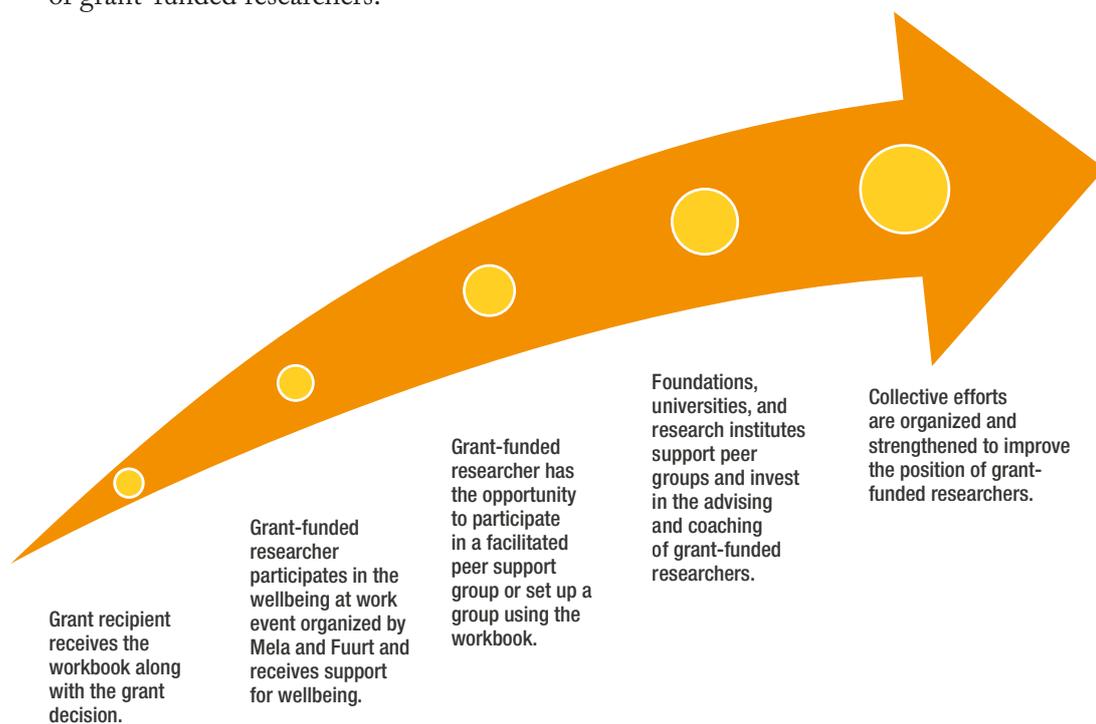
Measures for improving wellbeing at work

In an ideal situation, the wellbeing of grant-based researchers at work would be promoted by a collaboration of grant-awarding foundations, their social insurance institution Mela, FUURT and its local associations as well as their home universities and research institutes. We propose that all these stakeholders combine their efforts to support the wellbeing of grant-funded researchers.

This collaboration on grant-funded researchers' wellbeing would include the following measures:

- 1) The promotion of wellbeing at work is included in grant decisions. The grant-awarding foundation includes this workbook in the information packet about the grant or Mela includes it with the instructions for pension insurance.

- 2) This is followed by an invitation to one of the events on wellbeing at work organized across the country for grant-funded researchers by Mela and FUURT. The wellbeing at work event provides the researcher with the opportunity to meet peers and get ideas for enhancing wellbeing.
- 3) During the grant period, the researcher is offered the opportunity to participate in a peer support group for grant-funded researchers, online coaching, and/or set up a group of their own with the support of this workbook (see *Setting up and running a peer support group*). This ensures that the researcher is not left alone as peer support offers the possibility to identify wellbeing challenges and their solutions in collaboration with others.
- 4) Participating in a peer support group, or running one, is included in the activities of the doctoral programs and schools and accumulate credits in the doctoral program. Foundations, universities, and research institutes offer peer support groups a meeting space and resources. Doctoral programs and schools take the challenges and work conditions of grant-funded researchers into consideration by providing appropriate advising and coaching.
- 5) Collective efforts are strengthened to promote the interests of grant-funded researchers and to include domestic grants in the university funding model. This would make the position of salaried and grant-funded researchers equal and strengthen the social security of grant-funded researchers.



The wellbeing and effectiveness of grant-based researchers are in the interest of all researchers, funding bodies, universities benefiting from their results as well the society at large. This is an aim we can all strive for!

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