

Research in a Contagious Stage: Some symptoms and cures

Ken Surendran, Mae McSparran
School of Information Systems and Computing
UNITEC Institute of Technology
Auckland, New Zealand
Ksurendran@unitec.ac.nz

When an academic department in a Technological Institution suddenly makes research part of academic accountability, many staff members are forced to play the number game and exploit every opportunity to meet their research output quota. Many departments and even organisations go through such a *contagious stage* as part of the research growth process. In order to ensure quality and sustained growth in research, there is need to put in some control measures. First we carry out a brief situation analysis. Later we suggest some suggestions which might benefit the academic staff member involved in this process.

1. Situation Analysis
 - 1.1 Research is part of accountability
 - 1.2 Impact on academic staff
 - 1.3 Impact on academic staff relations

2 Staff Research: Current Situation

2.1 Enrolled in Masters and Ph.D programs

Very few enrolled in Ph.D, may not be relevant for us in BCS, Difficult to get block time off Collaboration with other staff is not possible.

2.2 Experienced Researchers

Already with Masters and Ph.D qualifications, No formal research assistance (post-graduate students) allocated, New entrants (post-graduates) used as unpaid research assistants, Course forum used for collecting research data.

2.3 Researchers with Limited Experience (less than five years)

Mainly on specific areas related to the teaching activity

2.4 Recently appointed Academic staff member (new to research as well)

Very limited time for research (in view of course preparation and enhancing knowledge base), Limited or no experience in research, Limited familiarity with the research process, procedure, and etiquette, Slowly forced to reprioritise workload, allocating time for initiating research.

3 Suggestions

In the list in Section 2, the first three groups usually meet the research requirements. For someone in the last group, the easier thing to do would be to look at some of the areas people are already working on and get into the same bandwagon. As in many cases these are not coordinated well, there are chances of duplication of effort producing conflicting and unusable results. Those with research experience usually work on specific areas and are able to meet the required research points. In this process, they also tend to stay in their comfort zone, not really bothering to move up on the research ladder. All these create quite a bit of tension. To alleviate this and to bring about a co-operative style of research, we offer the following suggestions.

3.1 Generic

Publicise who is doing what, Organise research forums, Communicate intentions and seek co-operation from colleagues, Create awareness of ethical and legal issues surrounding research, Disseminate information regarding procedural matters, Schedule questionnaires to students, Encourage subject groups to discuss research issues in their area and identify a niche for their own activity, Make available research coordinators who provide support without demanding publication credit.

3.2 New Entrants

Find out who is already working in the area of your interest, Look at the courses you facilitate and initiate research projects to improve facilitation techniques, Examine currency of topic, Study the industry practices, Join with more experienced researchers where possible, Look for a new angle when you are interested in an already established area of research.

3.3 Experienced

Examine the currency of the topic you are currently working on, Examine the industry practice in the light of what you are doing, Focus research in areas pertaining to your discipline (department's core area), Be part of the forums working on standards in your discipline, Move out of presentation research and focus on refereed journal publications, Consider a sabbatical in industry, Take on board new colleagues to enhance the scope of the research, Refrain from, at the same time, encroaching into new entrants' research areas, Give unconditional