

ALEXANDER CLARK
& BAILEY SOUSA

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ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE WORK AS EXTREME KNOWLEDGE WORK

The most valuable assets of a 20th-century company was its production equipment.
The most valuable asset of a 21st-century institution (whether business or nonbusiness)
will be its knowledge workers and their productivity.

(Drucker, 1999: 79)

How did you end up in academic work? Why? What pieces of golden advice have helped you most in your work so far? Which were the feeblest irrelevant misfires? Few of us work in academic workplaces because we are indifferent to learning, education or knowledge. Our place in this work has its origins in deep thoughts, motivations, decisions, and sometimes wild serendipity. Yet, academic work across and between academic workplaces and workers is defined mostly by difference. How then to make any comments – let alone steps for effectiveness, success and happiness – when diversity so dominates?

This chapter is about the nature of academic workers, workplaces, and work, but it also dwells on that which more deeply unites this academic work. In it, we shall show why academic work – fully and completely – is extreme knowledge work, and we shall consider the implications of this for those who do this work. We make space, too, for you to reflect on your own view of academic knowledge work and your place within it. Finally, we conclude that it is important for those seeking to be more successful, effective, and happy in academic work to understand and approach this academic work, not as mere tasks, inputs, or hours expended but as *extreme knowledge work*. The conception of academic work as extreme knowledge work is a foundation of this book.

Sounds all too uniform? Indeed, differences abound between academic work, workers, and workplaces. The UK, Australia, and Italy have national performance assessment exercises for research and teaching, while other countries have none. Public universities are the norm in some places but the exception in others. Academic workers have more job security than almost any other type of worker in some parts of the world, whereas management can hire

and fire academic workers relatively easily in other parts of the world. Profound variations extend to the nature of the work that academic workers do. Academic work stretches from bench science to population-based qualitative research. Good luck getting consensus on what success looks like, for example between the relative esteem of teaching versus research or of books, journals, and patents. Daily work patterns can vary markedly around individual autonomy, managerial involvement, and workplace expectations.

Such issues touch the daily lives of almost all academic workers, from doctoral students to university presidents, from issues of whether comics represent a viable genre for doctoral theses to how student teaching can be evaluated at the institutional level. What shape does work need to be in order to step across from casual contracts to permanent work? What are the rewards for spending the next hour writing a definitive teaching textbook versus writing another journal manuscript? How much should you focus on improving your student feedback versus improving your next publication? We could go on and on and on ... every working hour of every working day of the academic worker, variation upon variation. The immense diversity of academic work, workers, and workplaces raises immediate and unavoidable challenges, which make conclusions and comparisons precarious, and produce manifold tensions and pushes and pulls for individual academic workers, their workplaces and societies. Across all of these variations, what then is academic work?

WHAT IS ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE WORK?

‘Academic knowledge work’ is extreme knowledge work done by academic workers. To consider what this means, we first consider the nature of knowledge work.

What is knowledge work?

Peter Drucker (1967) first popularized the term ‘knowledge worker’ to describe professionals whose work involves a rich mix of thinking, problem-solving, action, and interactions with others. Unlike manufacturing work, knowledge work requires technical and people skills. As inputs bring no guarantees of outputs in knowledge work, its success is determined only by what is produced: years can be spent working to no discernable success, while a mere moment of insight can be ground-breaking. Knowledge work is far less routinized than manufacturing work and requires workers who are highly educated and autonomous (ibid.). Knowledge itself – rather than machines of manufacturing – are the means of production in knowledge work (Arthur et al., 2008).

More recently, knowledge workers have been defined as those who create, distribute and apply knowledge (ibid.) – a definition with immediate resonance with academic work. Knowledge workers use: *know why*, *know how*, and *know whom*. They have a clear, personal and sometimes deep sense of values: they *know why* they do the work (Drucker, 1999; Arthur et al., 2008). They *know how* to get work done in both technical and interpersonal realms: what methods to use but also how to go about their work and *with whom* to work with – the other people in teams, organizations or communities (Arthur et al., 2008). The effectiveness of the

knowledge worker depends then, not only on the individual but also on those with whom they work and interact. In knowledge work, other people can make doing the right things difficult, very time-consuming, or even impossible.

The success of knowledge work depends on *getting the right things done*, then acquiring the knowledge to do the next right thing (Drucker, 1967). Due to the demands of others, time is always insufficient for knowledge workers to do all that could be done. Success involves making the right choice of what to do. This sounds deceptively easy. Yet, choosing the right things to do from the infinite gamut of all that could be done is actually very difficult because the world is replete with known knowns, unknown knowns, known unknowns, and also unknown unknowns (Rumsfeld quoted in Department of Defense, 2002). How then to select what is the right thing to do?

Success in knowledge work is evident from outcomes – not inputs or processes. The knowledge worker should always seek to be effective: that is, to get the right things done (*ibid.*). Work success is not defined by the workers' quantity of work hours or even by the quantity of work, but simply by whether the work achieves the desired ends. For the academic worker, what paper will be written next and why? How best can student feedback or study recruitment be improved? What research grant should be worked on most? Decisions proliferate but the right next thing to do does not self-identify. Work needing attention does not even clearly label itself as being a problem of a particular type: the academic worker perceived by others (but not by themselves) as a bully may assume wrongly that having a more visible office will render them more approachable to others. Understanding, framing, and perception influence not only how problems are solved but even if or how problems are seen in the first place.

Yet, doing the right things is achieved far more by good habits than talent or skills (*ibid.*). Indeed, Drucker (*ibid.*) argued that all manner of intellectually brilliant people are also wildly ineffective as knowledge workers. They did things right – but they did the wrong things. In the face of academic work, many caution that academic work is too immense in variety and volume, too complex in nature and too mired in institutional, contractual, or country-based differences to be tamed into effectiveness. We disagree. More of the right work can be done right in academic workplaces but this won't happen by magic. In future chapters, we propose that The Success Pyramid can help this happen by better identification of what the right tasks are to do, while The Core can help you to do these well. First, though, we move to a deeper consideration of the nature of academic knowledge work as extreme knowledge work.

THE NATURE OF ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE WORK

Academic knowledge work is clearly and completely knowledge work. Let's consider this in relation to the main types of academic work: research, teaching, and engagement work.

Research as academic knowledge work

The most common route into academic work is via the undertaking of a higher degree with a research component, usually a thesis or dissertation. This research could be exclusively

philosophical, but more commonly involves the use of an overt method to collect data either from primary sources (for example, human beings, other animals, or the world) or secondary sources (from existing other research as with systematic reviews). Throughout their career, many types of academic workers are expected to have research in their work portfolio – research is to be done, published and hopefully used by others. Research work is knowledge work in source, impetus, means, and ends. Knowledge is used to justify, guide, undertake and, in turn, is then produced by research.

Research is accomplished using both skills and knowledge to produce knowledge. During doctoral degrees, academic workers become aware of existing knowledge ('literatures') in their areas, become proficient in the methods needed to complete their degree, and apply their skills accordingly to read, think, collect data, philosophize, problem-solve, work with supervisors and, crucially, write to complete their degrees.

New knowledge is the product of research but is then also applied in various forms (knowing how, who and why) throughout the process of doing research. Existing knowledge is applied during the course of research, from how to effectively manage and relate to other staff and students, to the application of theories to interpret research. Consider the skills now needed to undertake a systematic review of literature. This involves 'know how' skills in forming researchable questions from abstract thoughts and of the substantive literature and the patterns that exist therein – a task that has been memorably termed 'forcing the octopus into the jar' (Kamler and Thomson, 2014).

'Know how' and 'know who' skills are needed. Work with librarians is required to develop the systematic search (including the right key terms, combinations and databases) based on the question. Interpretation skills are needed to assess the quality of papers using different methods. Skills associated with supervising a research assistant to carry out the work and provide useful feedback to increase their performance may be employed. Knowledge of the principles of high-quality systematic reviews are used to ensure that the review contains only the studies that it should. All manner of processing and language skills are used to interpret the often messy, incomplete and meaningless data that are found. The meaning of the reviewed data, the conclusions, and caveats emerge from the integration of interpretations, principles and considerations. Meaning does not inherently jump out from the data but emerges from working with the data. All the while, 'knowing why' the review is being done may be important: What need it meets for whom?

The lack of a relationship between inputs and outputs is evident in research. Some academic workers labour for years exploring various research cul-de-sacs before suddenly and unexpectedly making profound contributions. Others work harder for longer but never make their intended breakthroughs at all. Further still, lucky others stumble on major developments serendipitously.

Teaching as academic knowledge work

Historically, teaching – not research – defined academic workplaces. Teaching in academic workplaces encompasses giving formal lectures or facilitating seminars or individual student supervision. Some academic workers only teach, while others do little or no formal teaching altogether.

Teaching, though diverse, is also academic knowledge work – involving knowing how, who and why. In the past, approaches to teaching methods tended to be normative, guiding teachers to organize knowledge into patterns, presenting facts and generalizations clearly, and fostering understanding and fair assessment (Ricca, 2012). However, these principles do not take account of differences in students’ experiences, backgrounds, cultures, and learning (ibid.). This placed further demands on the educator to individualize, contextualize, and personalize their teaching.

Variations abound around teaching in different workplaces with markedly different amounts of teaching in terms of time, mode (for example, face-to-face versus online), course numbers or student numbers, levels of autonomy, support and prescription of teaching methods to be employed. Quality of knowledge work around teaching remains contested. Student evaluation is useful and important, but also does not necessarily measure actual teaching quality (Spooren et al., 2013).

For academic workers, teaching can be challenging, difficult, and exhilarating. Many have progressed through doctoral studies with limited formal educational qualifications and skills but are then expected to teach and engage students in a wide range of classroom settings, from small groups to large lectures.

As with research, inputs and outputs are not proportional. A single exquisitely crafted example could yield more understanding in a student than a three-hour lecture. More assessment is not necessarily better assessment, particularly when assessments are not discriminating or do not have clear objectives. Knowledge remains the source, means and ends of teaching – wherein knowledge is applied to impart content or understanding of key concepts to students in order to increase their knowledge. More clearly than research work, teaching academic work involves ‘knowing who’, an interpersonal and direct connection between teacher and learner.

Engagement as academic knowledge work

In addition to teaching and research, the presence and influence of academic workers outside of their workplaces has become increasingly legitimate and important. In past decades, academic work in this area has focused more on communicating the results of research to other academics and students. However, over the last 10 years, a much greater focus has been placed on the social impact of research (Bornmann, 2013), commercialization via spin-off companies, patents and engagement via many diverse means. Consequently, engagement can now occur in all manner of ways and to all manner of groups. Research can be communicated to the public and to practitioners in applied fields through a variety of means, including mass media (like newspapers, radio, internet, and television) and social media (including platforms such as blogs, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram). Reviews can be done for journals, conferences can be organized and appraisals of others’ research can be done for grant review panels. Once more, this challenges the skillset of the traditional academic worker trained to communicate with other, similar, researchers.

All this work is knowledge work. Some of this work may be allocated or ‘suggested’ by other more senior academic workers such as heads of department, but great flexibility remains for most academic workers to choose the ‘engagement’ work that they take on, how they choose to do this work and how it synergizes with their teaching and research.

In summary, of course, it is impossible to even begin to capture the richness and diversity of knowledge work that occurs in research, teaching, and engagement. Yet, across each of these realms, academic knowledge work offers the supreme example of knowledge applied to itself. In teaching and research, this knowledge even produces new knowledge. In academic work, knowledge is the beginning, the end, and the means.

THE CHALLENGE OF ‘EXTREME KNOWLEDGE WORK’ FOR ACADEMIC WORKERS

Knowledge work is then everywhere and almost everything in academic work (Cortada, 1998b). Given the sheer ubiquity of workers now labelled as ‘knowledge workers’ (ibid., 1998a), has the term lost its special significance? Still, we see academic work as being different from this more general picture of knowledge work. More particularly, we see academic knowledge work as an extreme manifestation or form of knowledge work.

ACADEMIC WORK IS EXTREME KNOWLEDGE WORK

Completely knowledge work

Knowledge is the source, motivation, means, and product of academic work. While this raises challenges over ‘what isn’t knowledge’ (Blackler, 1995), nevertheless, by even the most restrictive definitions, knowledge is ubiquitous in academic work in research, education, and engagement. It is the work of the head, not of the hand (Defillippi et al., 2006).

As academic workers’ careers progress, demands on their skills and knowledge broaden and deepen. Whereas expectations of students (as expressed in their submitted theses, dissertations and oral defences) focus on methodological proficiency and substantive knowledge (Bogle et al., 2010), career progression in research places more demands on ‘softer skills’ such as working with people, leading diverse teams, and resolving conflict. More complex demands relate to the ability of the academic worker to be highly creative under pressure, to sustain teams, to work effectively in ambiguous contexts, and to reconcile their ethical and personal conduct with the perceived need to get or to keep a job

or to be seen as successful. Training and support to do this in academic workplaces is the exception rather than the norm.

Highly educated

Despite declining social status, salaries and job security, entry qualifications and ongoing competitiveness around academic work has not declined. Most salaried academic workers are required not only to have an undergraduate degree but usually a higher degree as well – often a doctorate. In some countries and disciplines, a period of postdoctoral experience is seen to be a necessary for independent research. Even then, it takes about a decade to be seen as progressing from being ‘junior’. As knowledge workers, academic workers are unusually highly educated in terms of years and standards, and this shows little sign of abating.

Most of this education is in formal qualifications rather than job-related skills. While doctoral education has focused predominantly on developing extensive and deep methodological and substantive knowledge, the actual demands of academic work extend far wider to encompass workplace skills, approaches and reactions to uncertainty, leading teams and managing people – amongst many, many other things (Bogle et al., 2010). This can create difficulties when academic workers confuse an expertise in substantive and methodological domains with a proficiency across all work domains.

Establishing, leading and sustaining teams around teaching and research is a common need in academic work (Lungeanu et al., 2014). Research is increasingly interdisciplinary and the academic workers’ ability to work with others outside of their disciplines is important. Increasingly, research funding bodies now specifically call for team-based research approaches. Out of all the research program announcements made by the National Institute of Health and the National Science Foundation in 2010 in the USA, 46 per cent specifically called for either ‘interdisciplinary’ or ‘multidisciplinary’ research approaches or both (Begg and Vaughan, 2011). The proportion of papers published by teams has increased from 17.5 per cent in 1955 to 51.5 per cent in 2000, with team size growing from an average of 1.9 to 3.5 authors per paper in the same period (Wuchty et al., 2007). Despite a growing expectation of working in teams, academic workers remain educated, evaluated, and discussed mostly as individuals. Yet, how many of these research teams have the characteristics of high-performing teams? How many are mere lists of people? While necessary, being highly educated and proficient in substantive and methodological domains is insufficient for academic work. ‘Highly educated for what ...?’ one might ask.

High autonomy

Autonomy in academic work is a place of marked concern and contention. Academic workers increasingly bemoan ongoing reductions in their freedom to teach, research, and engage at both the institutional and individual level (Henkel, 2005 and 2007). Flexibility around academic work patterns and work content mitigates the stress associated with longer working hours and high demands, particularly in relation to working from home or at flexible

times of the day (Darabi et al., 2017). Despite these benefits, the perceived growth of audit and managerial cultures in academic workplaces has led to concerns in some countries about the perceived decline in the autonomy and freedom of academic workers (Henkel, 2005). While historical interpretations of what constituted autonomy in academic work were varied and academic workers in more research-intensive workplaces have preserved high autonomy, autonomy in academic work is no longer a perceived right (Henkel, 2007; Kok et al., 2010) but is a contested and variable practise, which is often codified in more prescriptive contractual terms and shorter or otherwise less permanent academic positions (Musselin, 2013). Critical literature around these developments – variously labelled as managerialist, neo-liberalist, or corporatization – has raised issue of whether trends toward lowered autonomy represent reasonable societal checks and balances versus harmful ideological tools of power and oppression (Woodhouse, 2009; Barnett, 2011; Rolfe, 2013).

Where does this increased casualization and move away from autonomy leave academic workers? In absolute terms, the autonomy of the vast majority of academic workers in different countries has declined in the last 30 years (Musselin, 2013). The glass is, indeed, emptier than it has been historically. Academic workers are, in the main, evaluated more often, steered to teach well and attain high teaching evaluations, publish in journals of higher impact or visibility, move graduate students through to success against particular timelines and, in some disciplines, apply and obtain peer-reviewed grant funding.

That said, considerable absolute and relative advantages around freedoms still remain for academic workers. At the individual level, very few other types of knowledge workers function in the absence of any external constraints, reporting requirements or incentives. Indeed, unlike academic workers, many types of knowledge workers are assigned work projects and deadlines and – even in highly innovative organizations – have only a small proportion of their time for discretionary projects. It is entirely normal for knowledge workers to have to work toward particular defined ends, have to record and report their work or have some parameters placed on the processes through which work is attained. While concerns around low autonomy in academic work are understandable, these reflect the more autonomous past as much as the challenges of the present.

Seared with personal values

A commonality across many academic workers is that their academic work, in their eyes, cannot be reduced to simple ‘tasks’ that are performed or hollow platitudes about ‘excellence’ in academic work (Wood and Su, 2017). This work instead expresses deeper values and motivations (Darabi et al., 2017). These are often intertwined around broader aspects of identity related to particular aspects of the academic worker role, notably teaching (van Lankveld et al., 2017), gender (Bostock, 2014) or generational affiliation (Darabi et al., 2017).

To teach new nurses, doctors, or engineers, to teach new technologies, to make a difference, to cure a disease, to continue the legacy of past pioneers, to help particular communities, to develop a discipline – all manner of values and aspirations are played out in and through research work. Due to the nature of knowledge work and the especially high autonomy of academic workers, academic knowledge workers are particularly motivated by their personal values and volitions.

The place of values in academic work is incredibly important and we will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 2. Values help motivate and guide decisions on the work that is taken on board and completed, can inform career choices and contribute to the rich diversity of academic workers and work. Values also allow academic workers to fulfil their scholarly visions, to approach and understand academic work with a deeper and more profound understanding of ‘why’: why take on the challenge of supervising a challenging student, why seek to be published in a particular journal, why choose to teach in a new innovative way when it makes you uncomfortable? Values are essential to academic work.

Critical of organization, loyal to discipline

The individual attitudes that academic workers have, of course, vary widely. However, compared to other types of knowledge workers, academic knowledge workers tend to be more critical of their immediate employers, while being more loyal to and furthering the interests of their discipline (Deem, 2004). This represents the opposite of other types of knowledge workers, who tend to be less attached to their discipline (Arthur et al., 2008).

This can create challenges for those who seek to lead or manage academic workers, especially taking account of the high autonomy, education, and value-laden nature of academic work. Government and senior management often challenge those in leadership or management roles in academic workplaces, with expectations to provide and deliver around specific activities and indicators. This is what makes these roles both fascinating and also extremely challenging.

No upper thresholds

Academic work has both inputs and outputs like any other kind of work. However, in terms of outputs, academic work remains devoid of clear maximum output expectations. The quality of teaching resources can never be perfected. There is no upper threshold to how ‘big’ one’s research can become; there is always another paper that can be published, grant proposal written or activity engaged in.

Yet, major contributions to knowledge occur only over the long term, usually after many failures and often in uncertain contexts. Historical accounts of academic workers, such as pioneering scientists, tend to write out this blur, and the doubts, insecurities and fears that it brings (Clark and Thompson, 2013). In the midst of this, how do academic workers manage the volume, time, energy, and quality of their work? The issues around this are key aspects of effectiveness, success, and happiness in this book.

Academic research work occurs in the world replete with organizational, governmental and fiscal change, conflicts, and constraints. It occurs through the thoughts and actions of knowledge workers, who are influenced by emotions, thoughts, and often doubts. The lack of upper thresholds in academic work and the difficulties around how quality and success should be judged can lead to high levels of ambiguity and even self-doubt.

Variations in academic knowledge work and workers

The brief overviews of research, teaching, and engagement that we have provided cannot begin to do justice to the diversity of the work done by academic workers. This work is also ever changing, raising interesting challenges. Must academic work, for example, be confined to universities and colleges? How should academic work be approached and evaluated in ways that comprehend and respect its immense diversity, scope, and depth?

There is some extremely rich and thought-provoking work on the nature, evolution, and purposes of academic places (Boulton and Lucas, 2008; Barnett, 2011). While many of those working in academic workplaces have grown accustomed to ongoing change and some lament a past era of stasis and stability, the last 300 years of academic workplaces are characterized by ongoing change (Barnett, 2011). Change is not new but defines the growth and evolution of the sector. What, too, of those conducting academic work outside of traditional academic settings? While research is clearly carried out by all manner of different corporate and non-corporate organizations, our focus here is on those carrying out academic work under the auspices, if not the roofs, of academic workplaces. Differences even in these different institutions, old and new, abound in focus, philosophies, priorities, and academic worker attitudes (Kok et al., 2010).

Tasks and overall job portfolios differ, too. The degree to which academic workers can make choices around their research, teaching and engagement work – expressing their values, expertise and preferences, and reflecting their seniority and locality – generates an impressively wide diversity of work across different people, departments, and disciplines. Some academics focus predominantly or even exclusively on teaching in their roles, while others mostly do research. Some focus intently on external functions, such as community engagement or social media, while others barely give this a second of consideration or effort. Selective academics take administrative roles, acting as heads of departments, some become research chairs, whereas others delight in teaching students throughout their whole career. Diversity is also everywhere in terms of function.

The tremendous range and scope of work that an academic worker does or could do in research, teaching, and engagement raises distinctive challenges for those seeking to evaluate their own or others' academic work. For example, while most academics would agree that quality of research is important, disagreements proliferate on what this looks like, how it should be measured or whether it is measurable at all. What success should and does look like is prone to stunningly wide variation. Quality of research, teaching, and engagement remains hard to define and measure and is notoriously contested around the importance of quality, quantity, and visibility of outputs. How much merit is ascribed to publishing a single definitive book or five published papers in impactful journals versus 10 in any journals? How many presentations of the research should be made, to whom and at what venues, meetings and conferences? To what degree are teaching evaluations from students key to evaluating teaching quality? Is attending departmental talks and meetings expected or truly optional? Variations across disciplines also abound in the perceived value of different kinds of outputs, measures, and citation practises. Such questions go on and on ...

Clearly, not all research, teaching, and engagement efforts are of similar quality, but how is this quality to be discriminated, measured, and compared? Does diversity of academic knowledge work and its links to skills and expertise (Blackler, 1995; Alvesson, 2001; Arthur et al., 2008;) render futile attempts to evaluate quality? Given that quality can

be contested so much, even knowledge workers themselves come to question their competency (Alvesson, 2001): *Am I any good?* Doubt, fear, and vulnerability, as we cover in Chapters 7 and 8, all too frequently accompany academic work, particularly in the face of failure. In the context of the high autonomy of academic knowledge workers, this scope creates challenges for developing standards, categories or expected outcomes (such as in job or promotion applications and annual reviews). Confusion and anxiety results around expectations, excellence, and career progress. The challenge of evaluating work around quality is not an unusual predicament for knowledge workers but creates challenges for those seeking to evaluate and compare the relative merits of academic work and workers across disciplines, fields, and departments.

This diversity immediately questions the wisdom and veracity of anyone seeking to say anything universal or even widely applicable about academic work, workers, and workplaces. To do so undermines or downplays the manifold complexities and nuances of each. A challenge, indeed, for any book, workshop, or resource that seeks the noble ends of making academic workers more successful, effective, and happy! Herein lies the unavoidable problem with universalistic, prescriptive, and immensely alluring ‘tricks-and-tips’ approaches to academic life: these assume wrongly that norms, standards, and even cultures are similar and static across different fields, disciplines, and departments (Kamler and Thomson, 2008). We may well know what will work in our ‘world’ but whether this holds in the next department is a whole different matter. As such, this book focuses throughout on tools, resources, and insights that should be applied to personal situations. While some generalities are inevitable and useful, we try at all times to take account of and be responsive to variations in aspiration, context, and norms across disciplines, countries, and organizations.



OVER TO YOU

Knowledge Work and You

Academic work is extreme knowledge work but because of this it can also be extremely challenging. Think about the following questions.

For everyone

1. Why did you choose to do academic work? What were your initial reasons or motivations?

(Continued)

2. What are the three biggest challenges that you grapple with in the academic work that you currently do?

3. What challenges did you least expect?

4. Which challenges were you best prepared to address? How?

5. Which challenges were you least well prepared to address?

6. What scares or worries you most about your future?

Mid- and senior career academic workers

1. What has most helped you to do academic work effectively over the course of your career?

2. What has most hindered your capacity and ability to do academic work effectively over the course of your career?

3. What achievement or action has made you most proud in your academic work?

4. What is your biggest regret about your academic journey so far?

REMARKABLE RESOURCES

Imagining the University by Ronald Barnett

What are academic workplaces and what could they be? Ronald Barnett's (2013) extraordinary book is no dull treatise on the purpose of academic workplaces but a creative,

(Continued)

expansive, and optimistic vision of the work and possible places of publicly funded academic workplaces in modern societies.

Key messages

- The academic workplace has always been changing. Change is nothing new there.
- Academic workplaces are extremely diverse, conceivably with over 100 different functions.
- Aspiration is vital to academic workplaces - imagine and attempt to create *feasible utopias* to truly push toward what can be done and achieved individually and collectively in academic workplaces, in amidst the macro-structural and contextual factors in which they now must operate.

Key applications

- Argues for the importance and contribution of positive visioning in academic work, challenging academic workers to envision work positively and creatively, beyond seemingly constrictive academic workplace structures.
 - Gives insights into the immense diversity and potentiality of academic work and workplaces beyond the entrepreneurial university, with a vast array of different conceptions of academic workplaces.
 - Challenges via the concept of 'feasible utopia' in order to conceive academic work that strongly aligns imaginative personal values with realistic external expectations. Where can this sweet spot be in your academic work?
-