The Conference:

Finagle Gets Educated About Research (A Case Study)

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# ABSTRACT

*Ian Finagle, a doctoral student, wants to know how to become a productive researcher. At a conference, he and some colleagues from his Alma Mater discuss various tactics and strategies. Finagle receives considerable, but conflicting, advice. This case study asked learners to consider which advice is helpful and what advice is potentially unethical. As a result of reading and analyzing this case study, Ph.D. students and junior faculty members should have a better idea of the tactics they can employ to increase their research productivity.*

# CASE STUDY

Ian Finagle was ecstatic since his paper had been accepted at the *Down South Management and Teaching Conference*. “This is my chance to present my work and to hang around some of the big names in the field,” he thought, “And if I’m lucky, I’ll get a tip or two about how to succeed in the academic game.”

Now, here are a few things you should know about Ian if you haven’t already met him. After being in industry for a couple of years, he went back to university for an MBA. But one thing led to another, and the “another” in this case was a Ph.D. program in which he’d done rather well. Façade University waived his tuition, found him a graduate teaching appointment, and encouraged him to submit his research to the *Down South Conference*. Better yet, his dissertation’s latest revision was in the hands of Maggie McCarthy, his supervisor. If she agreed, he could defend it, becoming, at long last, Doctor Finagle. There was even some talk of a tenure-track appointment at Façade once he’d jumped the hurdle of his Final Defence. So, a dark, snowy, morning in mid-February found him in seat 12A of a small airplane headed to a Much Larger Airport and then on to the *Conference*. After a bumpy ride, a jerky landing, and an interminable wait in the Much Larger Airport, he settled in on a bigger plane headed south.

“Just three short hours,” thought Finagle after settling in, “And I’ll be at the Conference Hotel, and I’ll get there in time for the Inaugural Reception.” Now, this wasn't Finagle's first *Down South Conference.* Last year, Maggie had led a gaggle of graduate students to the *Conference*, made a round of introductions, and generally played “safari leader,” keeping her “kids” out of the academic quicksand that can be found at the *Conference,* where egos can be large, and one-upmanship was often the name of the game. But this time Finagle was on his own.

Finagle spent a few quiet moments after takeoff looking out the window at the snowy fields passing far below. Then, he stole a sideways glance at the woman sitting next to him. She was somewhat older than Finagle and looked tired, in fact as tired as he felt, given the early morning flight. She had her head down, doing her best to concentrate on something in her lap. Finagle glanced down, recognized the typeface of *The Journal* and the title of the article she was reading. When he looked up, she was looking quizzically at him.

“Ah,” he said lamely while pointing at the journal in her lap, “What do you think of Equivocate and Quibble’s take on leadership? I couldn't help but notice that you’re reading their latest.”

She looked at him for a moment—Finagle feeling rather warm—then “Well, it’s not *bad,* mind you, if you grant them some of their assumptions.” And so it began. The conversation drifted from research to the *Conference* to, eventually, university politics. During the conversation Finagle discovered his seatmate was Magda, an Associate Professor from Megalith University, she’d just made tenure and was on her way to the *Conference*.

“I’ve had my Ph.D. for six or seven years, Ian, and I’m looking forward to meeting up with some of the folks I went to graduate

school with. How about you?”

“Well,” responded Finagle, “I’m just at the dissertation stage, so I’m around my friends most of the time. But when I’m done in the spring, I think I’ll have a tenure-track position at Façade.”

“Façade?” said Magda, looking like she was trying to remember the face of someone she’d met only a few times, then more brightly, “Oh, that’s that small Regional university up north, isn’t it? I knew they were small and out of the way, but I didn't know they ate their dead.”

“Yes, we’re up north, and *I* think Façade’s a good school, even if it’s a bit small. But what do you mean by ‘ate our dead’?” asked Finagle, a bit perplexed.

“Hired your own Ph.D. graduates.”

“Oh, what’s wrong with that?” Finagle asked, now a bit hurt.

“Well, it’s a good way to make sure your faculty is insular, hardly any new ideas will get in from the outside. But it won’t hurt you too much if you get out in time,” said Magda, planting a seed that would sprout a few years later. “Who’s your advisor?”

“Maggie McCarthy.”

“*The* Maggie McCarthy? What the hell is *she* doing at a place like Façade?”

“I'm not sure, but we hit it off when I started my MBA. I was her research assistant, and she encouraged me to get a Ph.D. Anyway, you said you got tenure at Megalith. That’s quite an accomplishment.”

“It was. Megalith is strictly a publish or perish place. When I got there, my Dean made it clear that if I wanted tenure, I needed at least as many journal articles as the Faculty's top performer: 20 articles in A journals!”

“Boy, that’s a lot,” said Finagle, with a low whistle. “I’d be lucky to have a couple of manuscripts on the go at one time, and there’s no way they’d all be A level. But my Dean told me when we were talking about a tenure-track position that Façade isn’t publish or perish. He says he wants a balance between research and teaching, which sounds good, but I really don’t know what that means.”

“We don’t have that much latitude at Megalith. I've done all sorts of things to get stuff out the door. A couple of years ago I started co-authoring with some colleagues in my Faculty, and we had some success, but Joe Johnston, who got tenure before I did, told me not to overdo it with co-authors. He said the tenure and promotions committee was worse than a monkey looking for fleas and that if I had a lot of co-authored papers, they’d question my contribution *and* ask why I can’t do independent research. Boy, was he right; if you do co-author stuff, the Committee questions your ability but if you only do single-authored pieces, they say you don’t play well with others. If you do practical research, they ask if you can do theoretical pieces; do only theoretical pieces and they say you’ve lost the common touch; data-based researchers can't see the big picture, but theorists aren’t out in the field.1 It's a grind, and a bit unfair.”

“Really, that hard, eh?” Finagle asked, shaking his head. “We’re told to be collegial. Besides, it’s pretty rare to see a single-authored piece in *The Journal*. And we’re not sticky about theory or practice as long as what we do is useful. I hope that a few major articles, some proceedings, and a good teaching record will be enough to get tenure.”

“Well, maybe at a place like Façade, but not at Megalith. From what I’ve seen it’s damned if you do, damned if you don’t. To be safe I’ve started doing a lot more solo work. It’s hard, Ian, and it’s getting worse. It’s gotten to the point where some of us have cots in our offices. I mean even *with* tenure, I’ll work till about three or four in the morning some days, take a quick nap in my office, then grab a coffee when the Faculty Club opens before my eight o'clock class. I figure I’ve got to do it, or I’ll never make Full Professor.”

Finagle was silent. That’s not much of a life, he thought, a grind to get tenure, then work even harder to make Full. What about their families? Do the folks at Megalith have any kind of private life? And sleeping in her office? Being there day and night just to get work done? He thought he might ask about the toll Megalith was taking on her personal life but had second thoughts since they were getting ready to land.

The Inaugural Reception was held in a large, ornate ballroom. It was as grand as Finagle remembered and ran as late as you might expect. Now we’d like to say Finagle got off to a grand start, but, except for a brief chat with his Dean, Mike Jordan, at the Cash Bar, that wasn’t the case. People were clustering in small groups, facing each other with wine glasses in hand. Most of these circles seemed to consist of young acolytes talking with a research star or old friends catching up with each other. Finagle didn’t know anyone, and there didn’t seem to be a good way to introduce himself without barging in. At first, he simply stood on the outside of a circle or two waiting to be acknowledged but, after a few minutes, it became clear that this simply wasn’t going to work. Finagle

1 Tolliver, J. M. and Llambias, H. (1983). Neither Publish nor Perish: Avoid the Gatekeepers by Going Over the wall. Annual Con- ference Language Policy and Social Problems Curacao, Netherlands Antilles

finally noticed an older man standing alone, holding a mixed drink, and looking dejected. Well, sometimes misery likes company.

Finagle walked over, and as he got closer, he read the name “Phillip G. Phelps” on the fellow’s name tag.

“Holy Smokes, it’s Phelps!” Finagle thought, as he edged closer. “Dr. Phelps, I’m Ian Finagle a graduate student at Façade. I’ve read a lot of your work, but I didn’t expect to see you here. I thought you had retired.”

“You've read my work?” asked Phelps, growing less dejected. “You must be new to the *Conference*, and no, I haven’t retired. I'm still at Enormous Public University, you know. More like put on the shelf.”

“On the shelf?” asked Finagle, innocently enough.

“Oh, yes, the shelf. You see, my Inverted Theory of Leadership didn't pan out the way I’d hoped. At first, it was all the rage. I’d had six or eight articles in some of the top academic journals, then a few publications in *The Tremendously Important Business Review*, some more in *Significant Management Discussions,* and I don't know how many in practitioner journals. I was even interviewed by some major magazines and newspapers.”

“Yes,” said Finagle. “But wasn't there some discussion about the right methodology to use regarding what you were doing?” (Trying to put the question as politically acceptable as possible.)

“Oh, you most certainly could call it a discussion, if you’re willing to call the Atlantic Ocean damp2. Jack Cottage did a replication of my best study, or at least he called it a replication, but he did it in a very different way. When he didn’t find anything, he followed that piece up with a searing review. He said my theory was inconsistent and conceptually vacuous and that my original results were an artifact of the way I did my studies.”

“But I remember some very good counter-arguments you made,” said Finagle, “Didn’t they go anywhere?”

“In the end, they bought Cottage’s arguments, not mine. They forgot the only purpose of any theory is to get us to a better one and that *I* brought the problem up in the first place. And so, as you can see, I’m now a bit of a pariah.”

“Pariah?”

“Most certainly. After that Cottage incident, no one talks to me. Even though *The Journal* is allegedly blind-reviewed, I think I’ve been blackballed. Nothing I write gets published. And I’m invisible at *The Conference*.”

Finagle was silent for a moment, then coming out of his reverie, “Still, it must have been exciting for a while.”

Phelps lit up, “Why, yes, yes it most certainly was. Everyone wanted to talk with me, get my advice, and co-author papers. It was all very exciting, but then it was gone.”

“Well, I think you made an important contribution,” Finagle said, again being political.

“That’s very kind of you, young man,” replied Phelps. He checked his watch. “I believe I should go. However, before I do I have a

brief question for you.”

“Of course.”

“What will you do, after a lifetime of dedication to the field, if all your years of solid work are denigrated because you did the best you could, but you made a single mistake, or the field moved on? What will you do when, as most work in this field is, your work is no longer relevant or is simply abandoned? Do you know?”

“No sir, I don’t,” said Finagle, suddenly feeling tired. “I really don’t. It was a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Phelps.”

And so, Finagle left the Reception and made his way to his room, but sleep was not easy, and morning came a bit too early. But things got better after breakfast and a few interesting sessions. One session, however, was a bit odd. It was billed as a round-table discussion about research productivity. It was moderated by a well-published researcher, but it started about 15 minutes late, and then only when the Moderator strolled lazily into the room—a cup of coffee in hand. She didn’t apologize. Rather, she said there was a line-up at *The French Press* and what was she to do? Coffee was simply a *must* if educating graduate students and younger faculty was to be endured. Finagle could tell the audience wasn’t happy with her or her point of view.

The session started with the Moderator saying, “It’s easy to be productive once you get into a set schedule. Every weekday, I get up at 5:30 am and work exclusively on research from 6 am till noon. At noon, I socialize with my colleagues over lunch, and, from 1 to 4 pm, I teach or get grading out of the way. Then I'm home to a nice evening with my family until 9:30 pm or so. Then I go to bed. Next day, the same thing.”

2 This is a very old saying. We don't know its source.

Finagle raised his hand, “Er, you didn’t mention committee work. Where does it fit in?”

“Committee work’s a chump’s game. You get local visibility, but nothing else. If you want to be mobile and get some negotiating power, you’ve got to protect yourself,” the Moderator replied. “I told my Dean that I’m good at research. I bring in a bunch of grant money, and if he wants the money to continue, he’d better find less talented colleagues to sit on committees. But if I had to do committee work, I’d fit it into my teaching window.”

Another participant, Alex, said, “Yea, you’ve got to think strategically. A great way to do research is to work as a team to get the most done. I work with four other guys: we collect our data, then slice and dice it so each of us can write a paper and add everyone’s name to it. Now sometimes my co-authors might just edit a paper or write a few lines but since they're part of the project, it’s legitimate. Write one paper and get five published! Woohoo!”

A seemingly more experienced faculty member, Karen, turned to Alex, “Alex, I'm not sure what you’re doing is legitimate, and it sounds more like mass production in a factory than research. Sure, there are benefits to working with others, but everyone’s got to carry their weight. A few years ago, I asked a colleague to help me with a manuscript that needed some work. But he only changed a sentence or two then expected co-authorship. I felt badly used but said 'yes' since he said he had some problems in his personal life. Then I found out that, aside from his dissertation, he'd never had any ideas for research. He just counted on being carried by others.”

“Carried by others, Karen?” asked the Moderator.

“Yea. He said he had the financial resources to get others to do things he didn’t want to do himself. He never read *The Journal*. He just paid colleagues or senior students to write up literature reviews for him, perform data analyses, and assemble the reference section. He’d do this once he'd gotten an idea from abstracts in *The Journal* or article summaries he had his graduate students write. Why he even paid colleagues under the table to grade papers and exams for him. Once I got to know him, it seemed like all he ever did was chat us up looking for opportunities.”

Another participant, Shana, said, “When I teach doctoral-level students, I inform them their term paper *must* be publishable and, given my feedback, I’ll be either the first author or a co-author on anything published. Graduate students are usually easier to manage than colleagues: they’ve got more to lose and they’re looking for a chance to build a c.v. They’re really motivated since I usually set the term paper’s value at 100% of their grade. Sometimes, I also require them to collect data from their network, which gives me access to a continuous flow of data. I tell them it’s all part of their learning experience. Besides they like having my name next to theirs.”

Finagle stuck up his hand again, “Ah, not to be rude, but aren’t you exploiting your students?”

“Not at all. It’s a master and apprentice thing. They’re learning the craft from me, and I know how to get things published. They’ll be co-authors, after all, and having a few publications improves their chance of getting a job.”

That answer made Finagle think for a moment: Maggie will most likely be a coauthor on anything I publish from my dissertation, but can I really use my students as galley slaves3 so to speak? Is that the right thing to do? Maybe it’s a good way to introduce students to the world of research, but I just don't know …Being immersed in his thoughts, Finagle almost missed the next comment from another attendee.

“... I do something similar: I ask my students to prepare detailed case studies, which we then present as joint efforts either to publishers or at conferences. But I don’t expect students to collect data for free, so I pay them on a piece-rate basis to distribute questionnaires to people they know. My samples aren't scientific, but they’re good enough to get my stuff into lots of journals. And when I’m asked for advice or comments on a paper I’ll give it alright, but at a price. I tell people I’ll help but I must become a co-author, so I help them and myself at the same time. It’s only fair that I want my investment of time and expertise to pay off. It might not be everyone’s cup of tea, but I publish a lot.”

That point got Finagle thinking about all the time he’d spent reading and commenting on the papers of other students and even junior faculty members, papers that were later accepted at the *Conference* or in *The Journal* but his only reward was a buried footnote, not co-authorship. It’s not right, he thought, to spend hours, or days, helping someone out and get nothing for it; but can I really ask my friends to include me as the price for my help?

As these things go, although this round table session was held in a large conference room with eight or so rows of chairs facing a

front table where the Moderator sat or, actually, lounged. She pointed to someone sitting behind Finagle.

“Hi, I’m Dr. Jay Rae. When we use our students to produce research for us, we might be in questionable territory ethically. But that aside, I've got two questions. How do you *know* the work your students give you is original? I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t want to put my name on something that turned out to be plagiarized. Second, instead of putting an intellectual tax on others for your help, how about joining a university research institute? Seems to me, you can get some traction that way. In an institute, you work with people interested in a common problem, and you won’t be seen as doing butterfly research, that is darting from one research topic to another4.”

Finagle raised his hand, “In talking with the Associate Dean of Research at my University, she said that I ought to join a research center. She said that it’s a good move, especially for writing grant proposals and hiring students to help with research. She said that I can list my center membership on my c.v. and, one day, even lead one of our centers. That would give me a chance to eventually manage a lot of money, have enthusiastic researchers working for me, and have fewer courses to teach. She said I wouldn’t even have to bother doing any research myself, just manage the process and add my name when something’s published. From what Jay said, that seems like a good strategy. What do the rest of you think?”

The Moderator called on an older person sitting to Finagle’s left, but about four chairs down.

“My name's Pierre Dobson, and I'm from Sprawling University. We've got about 40,000 or so students and lots of these institutes on campus, there's even four or five of them in my Faculty, and yes, the directors live a cushy life. Two directors did exactly what Jay suggested. In the past few years, Peter got lots of money from various funding agencies. And so, he got a large office with a personal secretary. Another director, Susan, got enough funding to support 14 Ph.D. students in the last eight years. The media interviews her about her research, and our Dean loves the positive publicity we get because of it. But here’s a funny thing. Although they both have great internal reputations and can get almost anything they want from our Dean, there are very few publications linked to the funding they received. They’re not on any of the major research sites, and their faculty website profiles simply list the institutes they belong to, the research dollars they've brought in, and the number of students they have supported. Seems to me they pay very little attention to research outputs. Although they have a couple of publications in lesser-known journals, their primary accomplishments seem to be supporting students, writing reports, and giving interviews, nothing more.

“Dr. Dobson,” asked Finagle. “Do you know if it was hard for them to get tenure? The other day, I talked to someone who told me it’s hard to get tenure at a big university if you don’t publish much and in the right places.”

“They didn’t have any trouble at all,” said Dobson turning to speak to Finagle. “My university loves good P.R. and positive press, and getting large grants does the trick. Like someone once said, ‘Dollars make nice, tight, dependent variables.’”

Someone who didn’t identify himself, said, “I don’t know. Managing an institute and writing a bunch of internal reports might be a career choice for some people, but it sounds like hell to me. I got my Ph.D. to do research, and I don’t want to distance myself from it for the sake of getting one more grant. I want to do something *important*. And I’m bothered that, usually, these institutes are more about getting grants and looking good than quality output.”

Again, from the floor, “Hi, I'm Sylvia, also from Sprawling. I want to do stuff that makes a difference too, but let’s be fair. Grant writing is important: given the state of university finances, getting money, and lots of it on an ongoing basis, is a constant worry. Deans everywhere are concerned about money. It keeps the lights on, it funds grad students, and a lot of internal operations because administrators scoop up as much grant money as they can for overhead. Grant money also pays, at least indirectly, for us to go to this *Conference.* Administrators say they care about publications, and they might, but only if it affects their rankings or their accreditation. So, money’s the name of the game, and I can see why people who have a talent for bringing in large amounts of it would be a shoo-in for tenure.”

Finagle turned to Sylvia, “I guess that’s true, but I always thought grants were to help us be productive researchers, that they weren’t a measure of research productivity itself. Grants are just, well, inputs. What about the outputs of those grants: conference proceedings, articles, or things that change the world?”

“I’ll grant Sylvia her point,” said another unidentified, speaker. “We've got to keep the lights on, but a lot of great research can be done on a dime; you don't need a lot of money. If productivity is doing more with less5, then being able to do a lot with a little should be rewarded, right? And it’s not that hard. Because I was in industry for years, I’ve got lots of contacts, companies who'll sponsor my research in exchange for receiving reports. They’ll pay the research costs and I give them a report that, if a consultant did it, would cost them tons of money. We both win, but I’ve got trouble getting graduate students to work with me. I can guarantee them a great learning experience and, usually, a top publication, but I can’t pay them. I remember one project that I proposed to several students as a thesis topic. I told them what they would learn and that I was confident this research would be published. But I also said that there wasn’t any money to pay them. The students weren’t the least bit interested, and neither were my colleagues in my faculty. So, a colleague from another university worked with me on the project, and the research got us the best paper award at last year’s *Conference* and another best paper award when we wrote it up for *The Journal*.”

By this time, the Moderator had lost control of the discussion, since people sitting next to each other were talking with their seatmates, while some were trying to get the attention of the Moderator, Pierre, Jay, Sylvia, or the unidentified speaker. As nearly as Finagle could tell, the conversations were about what should count for tenure, the role of grants in the research process, if internal reports should count as publications, and whether one should be a research purist or sully oneself by becoming a manager. The Moderator, looking at her watch, announced it was time for coffee and thanked everyone for their contributions.

Finagle edged toward the door, made his way through the crowded halls, got a coffee, then started observing the people clustered around the refreshment tables. He was thinking about Phelps when someone tapped him on the shoulder. Juggling his coffee, he turned around.

“Mary Thompson! I haven’t seen you since your graduation last year. I was just in a session with a guy from Sprawling.” “Good to see you too, Ian. Who was it?” asked Mary.

“Dobson, I think. Anyway, how are you doing? Is Sprawling all you hoped it would be?”

“Well, yea, a lot of work, but lots of fun too. A group of us from Sprawling are getting together tonight at *The Bent Fork* for dinner*.* Want to come along and meet some of the gang?”

“Sure, Mary, I’d love to have dinner with you and your colleagues. I’ll be there.”

With dinner in mind, Finagle drifted into the next session and then an unremarkable lunch. Finally, the time came for Finagle to present his paper. As you might expect he was a bit nervous because he expected some difficult questions from the audience. This had occurred in the past at the *Conference* where some of the questions were confrontational since one-upmanship was often the order of the day. But, thankfully, most of the questions were polite.

After his presentation, an audience member whose name tag read *Dr. William Purloin. Sprawling University* introduced himself, “Hi, I’m Will. That was a good presentation, Ian. I think you've got a great new approach to an old question. Where did you get the idea?”

Finagle, excited that someone was interested in his work and wanting to be collegial, responded enthusiastically. “Well, I used the classic studies published by Embers et al. and combined their methods with the more recent work from the McKenna group. This suggested the mediators and moderators I used. I added in some very recent stuff to make the lit review comprehensive, I collected the data and did the structural equation modeling.” And Finagle continued to give more specifics at Will’s prodding.

Will, pulling out a pen and grabbing a pad of paper set out by the hotel, started taking some detailed notes, finally saying “That’s interesting. Where’s it published?

Finagle responded, “Oh, it’s not published yet. It’s something from my dissertation. I need to wait for some final comments from my supervisor first. But I think I can finish my dissertation and have a paper published from it sometime next year if I’m lucky.”

“Now that’s really interesting,” responded Will. “Thanks for your time. Good luck publishing this.” That evening, Finagle joined Mary and the rest of her gang at *The Bent Fork*.

“Hi, Ian, glad you could make it. This is John Collins, Mike Pond, and Sandy Keys. We’re office mates at Sprawling. John and Mike are into motivation research, and, if you ever need data juggled, give Statistics Sandy a call. Guys, this is Ian Finagle. We ‘served time’ together at Façade,” Mary said with a smile. “Which reminds me, has Maggie approved your dissertation yet?”

“Pleased to meet you all. No, not yet. But I hope she will in a few months. But I’ve got one paper out of it so far. I just presented it

this afternoon as a matter of fact. So, you’re office mates?”

John replied, “Well, space is scarce at Sprawling. So, they put us together in a rather large bullpen. It’s working out. You know how good Mary is at seeing things that others don’t. Sometimes, Mike and I can’t see the things in the data or literature that she does, and Sandy, well, she’s great with statistics.” (Nodding to Sandy).

Mary said, “It’s great that you already got a paper out of your dissertation. How did your session go?”

“I think it was ok. No questions I couldn’t answer and, oh, one of your guys, Will Purloin, was interested in my stuff. We had a great chat.”

Mary, John, Mike, and Sandy glanced at each other briefly, looking slightly alarmed.

John asked, “Ian, is the paper you presented in press or at least submitted to a journal?”

Finagle replied, “No, not yet: I wanted to get some feedback here at the *Conference* and then submit it.”

3 Finagle's use of the term *galley slave* is appropriate for two reasons. First, a galley is “a printer's proof in the form of long single- column strips.” Second, “Galley Slave” was a short science fiction story published in Galaxy by Isaac Asimov. See http:// [www.bing.com/search?q=galley&form=IE11TR&src=IE11TR&pc=DCJB](http://www.bing.com/search?q=galley&form=IE11TR&src=IE11TR&pc=DCJB) for the various definitions of galley and see https:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galley\_Slave for a fascinating discussion as to why Finagle’s term is appropriate. References accessed April 2021.

4 The name Rae and the “uncharted territory” comment is a bit of a pun. The real Doctor John Rae was a major explorer of the north- ern part of Canada, looking for the Northwest Passage for the Hudson’s Bay Company, and in so doing discovered the fate of the Franklin expedition (see K. McGoogan's *Fatal Passage*). The authors first heard the term ‘Butterfly Research’ from Robert House in about 1975.

5 Recall that the ratio of outputs to inputs (p = o/i), is a measure of productivity.

Mary sighed, “Oh, Ian, you may have made a huge mistake!”

“What mistake, asking for feedback at the *Conference*?” responded Finagle. “I thought the purpose of being here was to share ideas and get a different perspective on what we're doing.”

“Well, that’s what ‘they’ say but with Purloin you’ve got to protect yourself. Before I joined Sprawling, he did the same thing to me. He asked me about my work after I presented my paper. I told him all about it, and before I knew it, he published a paper that was based on a very similar idea. Ever since then he is viewed as the originator of MY theory. Still burns my butt.”

John shook his head and said, “The same sort of thing happened to Mike and me, but in our case, it was another rascal. About three years ago, we presented a pilot study for a large field experiment that we were going to do. After the presentation, someone asked us all about it. Then, about six months later, I’m asked to review a paper whose abstract seemed really familiar. I agreed, and when I read the whole manuscript, I said to Mike, ‘This dammed guy has taken out our work and tested it in the field before we did. It's our stuff.’ Well, Ian, we *thought* it was our stuff, but it was just different enough that we couldn’t prove it. He had reworded our hypotheses very cleverly, added some references we’d missed, and added a few bits of his own. Worse, it was a good piece of work, and his findings agreed with our pilot study, so I had to give it a good review. But the killer was that we had to drop our larger study. Editors of *The Journal* would see it as a replication, and replications are a notoriously hard sell So, we were forced to drop that research topic after we had invested lots of time in it. And I’m the guy who convinced Mike that we should present our pilot study at the *Conference* before submitting it to a journal. I’ll never make that mistake again.”

Mary emphasized, “Research is a competitive sport, Ian. Like most new products, being the first on the market with an idea is critical. Take a page from our book: be friendly, but be careful about sharing your ideas and who you share them with. And if you want to play a hard game, interrogate THEM for their research ideas!”

“Oh no, what do you think I should do now?”

Mike suggested, “Well, what I’d do is make some quick revisions, so your paper is a bit different from what you presented here, and submit it to one of the lesser journals. That might increase your chances of getting it accepted quickly. Then, tell Purloin that it’s under review and send him a copy when it’s in print. You *may* have a head start on him since it might take him about six months to cobble something together and submit it somewhere. But it’s a tough call. On the other hand, you could start with *The Journal*. That

– or *Significant Research Discussions* – is most likely what Purloin will do. If you take that route, it might get rejected, but you’ll get some good feedback and, possibly, be able to ‘stake your claim’ before Purloin does. Unfortunately, it takes forever to get a review back from those journals. I don't know; it's a question of how critical this piece is to you and what risks you want to take with it.”

It was disquieting news, to say the least. His paper was at the core of his dissertation research. But, to his credit, Finagle held up his end of the conversation during dinner, a conversation about the hows and whys of research. They had ordered dessert when Finagle turned to Mary.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Finagle said, “I had an interesting conversation with Phil Phelps last night.” “Phelps, the Inverted Leadership guy? I thought he was dead,” exclaimed John.

“No, at least not physically; I'd say he's only in his late fifties,” replied Finagle.

“Phelps should be a lesson to all of us, Ian,” continued John. “A lot of what you heard at the round table session like having multiple co-authors, working from student projects, taking a piece of the action for our advice, and the like minimizes the risk to our reputations. I think jumping around from one research topic to another does that too. Despite what you heard about butterfly research, if something goes sideways or blows up completely, your name doesn’t go into the trash because you’ve only done one thing all your life. Phelps put all his eggs in one basket, but the basket had a huge hole in it. Or the eggs were rotten. You pick your metaphor.”

“I guess,” said Finagle. “But you’ve got to admit, the research stars are all usually known for a single big idea they developed into a research program.”

“True,” said John. “But think about it. Very few people – one in a thousand—become a big name. Better to be safe and spread your research around several topics, or you can end up like Phelps.”

“So, what’s the best way to get research done?” asked Finagle. “We've batted around lots of different ideas. You guys work together at the office, mostly, from 8 to 5, but one person at the round table today said he goes to a coffee shop to write, and he has been doing that for 20 years. He loves the ambiance, and it gets him away from students knocking on his office door and the phone ringing. Someone I met on the plane sleeps in her office one night a week to get more done. Some folks work only at home, others don't bring work home at all. Some folks think institutes are important and will help their research, others think they’re a career dead-end. My Dean emphasizes the need to be collegial, but some places seem to slander folks who work together. And we’ve already talked about Purloin’s dedication to community effort. So, what’s the answer? How do I become a productive researcher?”

Mike responded, “Well, I guess you’ve got to figure out what works best for you after you try a few things. You can’t always know

what will work till you try it. I write all my drafts with a ballpoint pen. It drives John wild, but it’s the only way I can get started.”

John replied, “Come on Mike, it’s not that bad. I just tease you about it. And I did give you a pen for Christmas! To each his own. I couldn’t ever write in a coffee shop: too many conversations to overhear, too many scents to enjoy, and just too many people around. I’d never get anything done. Besides, too much coffee makes me jittery.”

“Ok, where and how we write is up to us. But what *should* we do—what really counts?” asked Finagle.

Mary pondered, “The bottom line on that one, Ian, is knowing what your tenure and promotion committee wants and delivering THAT. How many publications are acceptable? What type? Do grants count? Is bringing in money where they want you to focus your efforts? Or do they want peer-reviewed articles in *The Journal* or some other rag with good rankings? Do what gets measured and valued. But that aside, I do know one thing.”

“What’s that?” asked Finagle.

“Don't confuse what your university measures with who you are. And when we get to be the stars at this *Conference*, if we ever do, let’s not confuse the total worth of a person with the worth of a single idea.”

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The next morning, Finagle had breakfast with his Dean, Mike Jordan, a meeting they had arranged while waiting in line at the Cash Bar. When Finagle arrived, Jordan was already seated with two female Conference attendees.

“Morning, Ian,” said Jordan, “This is Annie Chimera and her colleague, Lisa Sharp. Annie’s an old friend from the Deans’ Circuit. Two years ago, she grabbed the Deanship at Aspiring to Be Great University (ABGU).”

“Pleased to meet you, Ian,” said Chimera, “Let me introduce you to Lisa Sharp. We hired her last year.”

“Wow,” thought Finagle. Chimera's a major name in research. Not only had he read several of her articles in a doctoral seminar a couple of years ago, but he also heard her speak at a doctoral student consortium.

“So, how’s it going Annie?” Jordan asked, “I’ve heard that ABGU is trying to be a major research university and that you just hired a bunch of talented people like Lisa here and stolen a couple of established ‘names’ from Already Great University just down the road from you. Things must be going well!”

“They are,” interjected Sharp, “Annie’s building a great faculty. Our department had 15 A-level journal hits in the last 18 months, and our combined research impact factor is twice as good as it was two years ago.”

Chimera sat silently and was struggling with what to say. Then she took a deep breath, looked at Lisa and Finagle, and said, “You guys will keep this to yourself, won’t you? They both nodded. Then, “Lisa, you and your colleagues are doing a great job, but it’s not the whole story. We do make lots of noise about our research being as good as Already Great University, Administration’s throwing money around, and our new hires are up over the last few years. But the truth, as usual, is found in the bottom line. Lately, the government’s been cutting our funding, and we're already in a budget crunch. I love research as much as anyone, but it just doesn’t pay the bills. The budget manager in me doesn’t give a rat’s rear end about impact factors; it’s our undergraduate enrolment and tuition that pays the bills. I’m proud of what we have accomplished but in the next few years, teaching is going to be the name of the game. What I *really* need is great teachers to build our reputation so we can recruit students.”

“Annie,” said Jordan, “Is that true? Good research in major journals is a big factor in determining university rankings, and those rankings are important for recruiting students and getting tuition money.”

“Not completely,” responded Chimera. “You’re right that research is a large determinant of rankings. But the problem is that rankings are important in attracting only a very small slice of the overall student market. Rankings might attract graduate students, and even more specifically, international graduate students. But that part of the market isn’t our bread and butter. Let’s be real; we’re Aspiring to Be Great, not Already Great, and our market is more local than international. So, I stand by what I said: I need great teachers, not research prima donnas that won’t or can’t teach. But if I can hire great teachers that are also great researchers like Lisa, that’s gravy.”

Well, now Finagle was truly confused. He had heard lots of contrasting messages over the past few days, from Phelps, at the Round Table, and dinner last night. Although the messages were diverse, the central focus was on research, not teaching. But for Chimera, a top researcher, research seemed to be the “tail” on her “teaching dog,” so to speak. Finagle expected Chimera, a Dean at a much larger place than Façade, to follow the publish or perish dictum, but that wasn’t the case. Did budget drive everything? Jordan wanted balance, much like Chimera seemed to want, but what if Jordan left Façade? Would a new Dean want strictly teaching, a balance, or have publish or perish expectations? In the end, just how important *is* research? Over his second cup of coffee, Finagle pondered what he should do to become a productive researcher.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What did Finagle learn about being a productive researcher at the conference: (a) What does it mean to be a productive researcher? (b) What should Finagle do to become a productive researcher?
2. Do you disagree with any advice that was shared during the conference? Why?
3. What would you recommend to Finagle?

~ Instructors may obtain the Teaching Notes from the first author. ~