Forging your career path

Risk science career opportunities are as broad as the definition of risk analysis. When starting a career, the path forward can feel amorphous or uncharted. And then there is the small matter of advancing in your career.

We recently convened a small group of experienced risk professionals who shared insights from their career paths, including international and U.S. academic and commercial industry appointments. The conversation is summarized in 5 takeaways for young professionals to consider:

1. **Finding the right fit can take time.** While academic and industry risk analysis research, methods, and programs can serve real-world challenges, changes can happen midstream, and shift focus areas and funding. It's helpful to remain nimble and continue to network and plan for what's next.

2. **Expect to wear multiple hats and engage in several disciplines.** Session participants discussed taking on different industry applications and projects throughout their careers and compared industry and academic environments. Industry work has a broader range of requirements and risk professionals in this arena are typically tasked with delivering results faster and providing broader context. The academic environment places high priority on publication of research and being cited and establishing a key leadership position for the institution.

3. **Strive for an identifiable disciplinary core.** Session leaders recommended professionals be open to a hybrid approach of taking on academic research and industry work. They tempered the recommendation by noting the tenure system in the U.S. evaluates academic and intellectual development over industry experience. This may mean that the transition from academia to industry is easier than the reverse. One session leader recommended maintaining an identifiable disciplinary core pre-tenure, and then once tenure is achieved, see how the focus can expand into other areas.

4. **Be prepared to navigate through a range of changing methodological requirements, deadlines, standards, and teams.** The one common dominator across international, industrial, and academic research? The expansion of international and national standards and response to threats. Today more than ever, organizations are exposed to different types of risk threats, and the unknowns are higher and endangering the resilience of organizations. According to one expert, the current standards and responses shape the way people connect today and think tomorrow. Risk analysis is

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central to guiding entities of all types, government, and corporate to assess, plan and respond to various threats.

5. **Define your ideal career path.** Participants spent time discussing how their work outside academia influences research and how established professionals derive satisfaction advancing the methods and standards of risk science. One leader shared this straightforward response, which could be a guidepost for young professionals: "I like to see my research driven by a real problem that standard methods can't address. Let's use that to push our research forward because we need it for what we're actually trying to solve."

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