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Foreign welcome to Enago Academy's podcast Research and Beyond. Our guest today is Dr. Emmanuel Tsekleves, a highly accomplished academic who achieved a remarkable feat of becoming a full professor by the age of 40 within just 15 years of completing his PhD.

However, his journey took an unexpected turn in 2021 when he witnessed firsthand the struggles faced by his colleagues and PhD students in securing academic jobs or advancing their careers. Driven by the desire to provide guidance and support, Dr. Emmanuel Tsekleves embarked on a mission to demystify the processes of academic career development.

He has since mentored over 50 PhD students and early career researchers, sharing his insights and strategies to help them navigate the challenges of the academic world. With a deep commitment to Prioritizing wellbeing, Dr. Emmanuel Tsekleves’ ultimate goal is to empower lacks of early career researchers, equipping them with tools and knowledge they need to secure their first or next academic job and accelerate their career growth.

Join us as we delve into his inspiring story and invaluable wisdom for those aspiring to thrive in the world of academy. Could you share with us the pivotal experience that inspired the shift in your focus? Yes. I've been in this long game of academia for many years and I've probably done all the mistakes that is there to be made.

I've managed to learn fast and I was fortunate enough to have some amazing mentors along the way. So there was a point a few years back when I could see some of my colleagues, especially early career researchers, that just started, or postdocs or PhDs, struggling with getting jobs or with navigating, you know, with the academic career. And I knew that actually I could do something to help because I have been there.

I knew exactly what they were feeling, the frustrations. And I have kind of figured out how to play the game and how to, you know, how to thrive in academia without overworking and burning out. So it was that moment actually where I decided I'm going to do something about it and I'm going to start sharing online with others what I've learned, in a way, talking to my younger self.

All right, so could you tell us the benefits of structuring a research paper like a story? There are several benefits. I would say the threefold first of all, you want to have a clear message. You know, your paper tells a story.

It's a message you want to come across. So that's the first benefit. And I'll come into more detail and explain that.

The other thing is it helps you with structuring your argument and structuring how you present it. So. So telling a story gives you a structure that as humans, we've had since the existence of humankind.

And it's the way we also learn about the world as children through stories. And the third one is also an easier way for reviewers to understand your work, engage with it, but also when you're co authoring a paper with other authors, it's a great way to again, have a shared framework of writing. Right.

So it does make the research paper more engaging and memorable for readers. It does, but it also helps you to structure it and to get your message across easier and be able to communicate it. And what would be the key components of a story structure that researchers can use when they have to like organize their paper? The first thing is figuring out the theme.

And I'm going to ask a question here. I'm going to ask you, have you seen any, any good movies lately? Oh, none of the Hollywood ones. Oh no, actually none of the Hollywood ones yet.

I've seen a few in regional language. Yeah, go ahead, pick up one. What was it about? So the one that I recently watched was in Malayalam actually, which is my mother tongue.

And it was about a group of friends visiting Guna Caves in Chennai. And one of their friend gets stuck, you know, into the deep levels of the cave and it's about, you know, how they were getting him out and what experiences they faced during that. Great.

And how long was that movie, if I May ask? About 1 1/2 hour or so. So in, in less than 30 seconds you're able to summarize the movie with and one and a half hour movie? Yeah, that's actually the, the aim of being able to tell that a story, you can very easily and in, in a way that others can understand even, even if they haven't seen the film, which I clearly haven't understand what it is about. And that's what the paper should do.

Right? Rather than going with jargon and trying to explain, oh, we use this methodology. So that's the first thing is finding the underlying theme that you can use to communicate what your work is about, but also frames the main argument in your paper. But of course, when we look at the actual structure of the paper, like any good movie, a paper has actually six main components.

You've caught the opener. So like any good story, your research paper starts with setting up the context. This is where you share the premise and research context, what we call the introduction.

Then you've caught the villain. Yeah, in most movies there is one. So every story needs a Conflict.

So in your research paper, this is the problem you're trying to solve the challenge. And this usually refers to the related work section you have in the paper. Then another core component of a movie is the hero, you know, and in this case, the hero is your methodology.

Now, this is how you tackle the research problem. This is where your research takes a stand and gets the villain applying tactics and strategies, I.e. research methods to conquer the issued hand.

And of course, any good story should have a climax, you know, this is where your story and paper reaches its peak. The climax is the moment where everyone has been waiting for. And this is your finding, you know, Here you use the data collected to answer your research question or questions that you asked the introduction.

Then usually after the climax, you have the resolution. This is where you weave together all the threads of your narrative. You contextualize your findings within the broader scope of your field.

And this is exactly what you're doing in the discussion section of the paper. And last but certainly not least, you know, you've got the ending of a story, your conclusion in the paper. This is where you tie everything together and bring your narrative to close.

This is where you help the reader understand, you know, why your research matters or why your story is important and how it contributes to the broader narrative of your research field. So, yeah, it's those six elements that was rather interesting. I did not expect you to give me an explanation of the entire movie.

And I could actually picture myself sectioning the movie that I saw and then, you know, dividing it into portions. So what. How would you suggest that the researchers unify all the different sections in the research paper? And what, what should they consider while making an entire.

Writing an entire manuscript? Very good question. And I would say, like any good movie, there's different ways of telling a story. You can tell the story right from the start.

So you can start with the introduction. You know, you can set the context. This is the.

The challenge you're facing and your research is trying to address. Or there is another technique, actually, where you can start from the end. And it's very popular in the narrative world in a lot of stories and films where you start from a scene at the end and then you move the view from what happened right from the start.

So you can start with your conclusion, which is, this is the message, this is the impact you want to provide to the reader, and then you move through the different sections. I would advise that again, starting from, you know, just your methodology or just starting from your findings, you need to have first your underlying Message because what you'll be doing is you're trying to tie your literature, your related work, your findings to the main message, the main narrative you, you want to promote. So I wanted to understand does the storytelling format work works for all the field, all the research field, or is there any specific research field that you know, it caters more to? It definitely helps you as a author of a research paper to formulate in your mind how you're going to write your paper, provided it adheres to the journal guidelines.

I mean, that's why I've made the one to one relation between for instance, the start of a story with introduction, you know, the resolution with a discussion, you're fine. But of course, in most journals you tend to write in a more scientific language. So you would not necessarily.

You would use many academic language rather than a narrative format, as for instance, you would do if you were writing a novel. But the elements of the story you'll be taking in there is the key principles of how you structure it and how you're presenting. So it's very clear to the reviewer, to the editor, to the, you know, to the other researcher that they're reading that, that they can see in a similar way.

You said before that, you know, I've seen this movie now I can see all these components. They can see, okay, this is the message they're trying to tell me. And they, they, I can see logically how, how they present it in a robust and clear way.

Could you share some examples where you have helped someone structure their entire manuscript and also adhere to the journal guidelines? Like if you could give us some specifics. Difficult to think on the top of the head. This is something I do all the time when I structure my papers and I do the same with my postdocs and bas the students.

So it depends also on the individual. So there's some people that they're very, I would say discuss it. I like to discuss things.

So I tell them, okay, tell me what you're going to write, but tell it to me. I like a story. And I want you to touch on these seven elements and, and they go through this one by one.

There's others with a more into writing they like to write. So in that case I would give them those six key story elements and I'll say in bullet points, just give me the key highlights. And then you've got something which you can expand and this can form your arguments.

So I would say there's different ways because we all learn in different ways. So necessarily put down all the points and then make cuts, etc. Or edits to adhere to the guidelines.

Yes, yeah, of course. Always you check the guidelines and you make sure that all the points you making that adhere to your. To your main theme.

Think of it like again, if I use analogy from the movie, the movie industry, when before they even hire actors and the suit the scenes, what they do is the moment a script for a film has been written. They do a storyboard and this is the key frames. They use a visual language that tells you, okay, this is the different sequences that then frame the.

The story, but also also a tool to communicate with different members in the team that produce the movie. So you're kind of doing the same way, but not necessarily storyboarding it the way it's done in a movie. Right, but with those bullet points necessarily work on the fluidity of the paper so that everything is connected well.

All right. Again, I would still want to get an understanding of what do you think if like, you know, if we approach, if we adopt to a storytelling structure, do you think it's easier to organize research paper content for technically dense research subjects? It is my experience in reviewing papers, one of the challenges that a lot of researchers face is telling what is the importance of the research, what is the wow factor and why they've done that. So privileged to work with some very bright scientists and researchers and they're amazing at what they do.

But when it comes to talk about or even sometimes route about the work, they are excellent and you know, talking about the methodologies, the technical findings. But then in the paper you need to discuss, okay, what is the broad implication of that in your field. But even beyond, I mean, nowadays in research papers, even technical and scientific ones, you need to explain what is the importance of your work to society or to different industries or practically or to the economy.

And beforehand you need to explain, okay, you're doing this great work, but why? What are you trying to solve? So for more technical and scientific papers is basically being. Being able to breed, you know, very innovative work with the why doing this work and the what you know, where it contributes. Why is it important? Could you mention one merit and like one demerit of writing research paper in a storytelling structure versus writing them traditional structure, obviously.

I'll start with the demerit is in some cases, if you have some journals that are very, very restrictive on the format that in that case we may pose a challenge. If it is your first time in using this process, if you're a bit more experienced, you can always write it. Around it.

The merit is, obviously, as I mentioned before, being able to communicate very clearly what your paper is about, why is it important, and tell it in a very coherent way right from the start, all the way to the end. Because, as you know, reviewers as well as editors and even sometimes researchers, when they discover your paper, they don't read the whole paper right from the start. They are very selective.

They usually read a bit of the abstract and introduction, Then they'll skim, read the rest and maybe focus on your conclusion. And most researchers, they tend to neglect those. They focus a lot on the methodology, the findings.

So using these methods ensures that every part of your paper, it's well written and tells a clear story, has a clear message. What were some of the challenges that you faced as a researcher when you were starting to write in a storytelling format, or how did you overcome those challenges? I first of all discovered about that, not necessarily for paper, but for presentations. So I was always looking at ways of how can I make my presentation less dry, less academic, more engaging.

And that's when I discovered storytelling. I started looking at TED talks and kind of, they use, well, some of the best TED talks, they use this technique of storytelling. I thought, can we apply that to papers? So the challenge was to think, okay, how can I translate that from a presentation format and from the story format into the paper? So it took a bit of time to experiment several drafts until it started to make sense for me.

And of course, the real test was when publishing the papers. And then when I was talking back to the community and exploring the merits and people starting to use it and come back, I think that's when the light bulb went on and think, okay, yes, we've got something here. Were there any challenges or how could you give us some practical tips that worked for you? Yeah, of course, there's always challenges.

The first challenge is the question I asked you about the movie you watch is, is developing your theme. Because I think you cannot start creating your paper as a story for my formulating in that format until you have nailed down your theme, your storyline. And this needs to be very brief.

It needs to be one or two sentences. And that is quite challenging, especially for someone doing it at the same time. And it's also more difficult when you're talking about your own work.

It's easier when you look at other people's work. So my tip for that is, is to work with others. So if you're a PhD student, you hopefully have a group of other PhD peers talk to them about the paper.

You want to write, said, I want to write about this and that. And they will help you actually, to develop your storyline. Say, oh.

They'll ask you questions about it, and then they'll say, oh, so your paper is actually about xyz. Or talk to your supervisor or other researchers. And funnily enough, this is also what a lot of storytellers and movie script writers do is they.

They've got some feedback. Yeah. On their ideas before they commit to writing.

Yeah. Breaking it down for your peers, basically, with this, we should conclude today's podcast session. Thank you, Dr. Emmanuel Tsekleves, for sharing your inspiring story and invaluable wisdom. I'm sure it will help researchers in the world of academia and accelerate their career growth.