

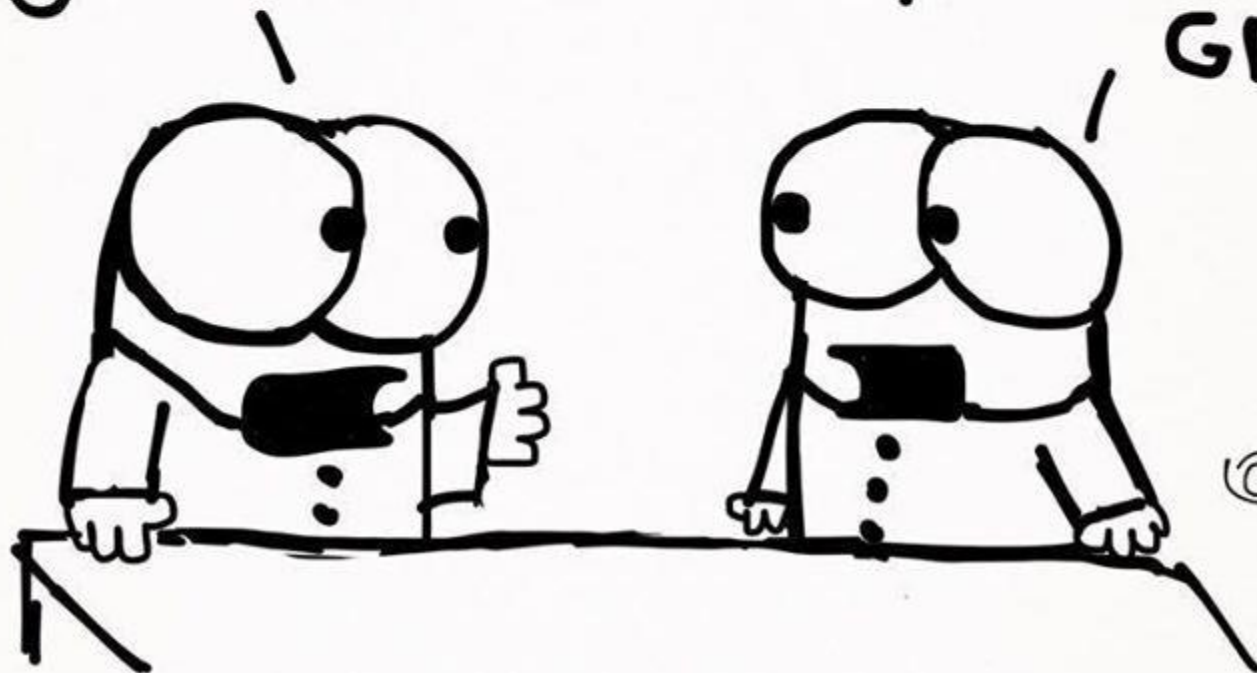
# How to Develop a Project Proposal for Funding

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I ASKED  
SANTA  
FOR A  
RESEARCH  
GRANT.

YOU STILL  
BELIEVE IN  
RESEARCH  
GRANTS?



© THE  
UPTURNED  
MICROSCOPE

# Agenda

—WHY

- WHEN

—WHAT

»HOW

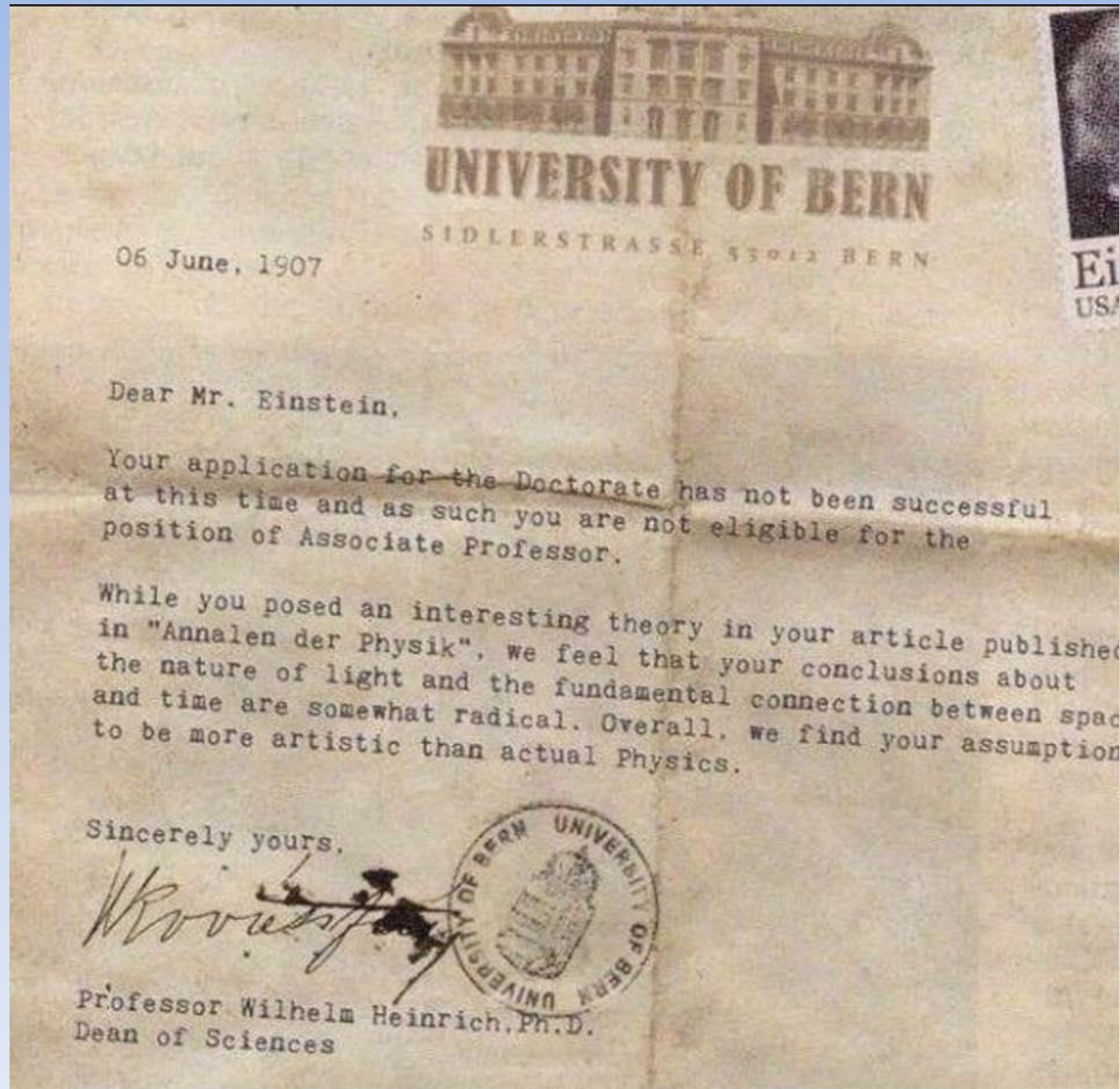
# WHY: CREATIVE ACCUMULATION VS CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

**Accumulation:** get a post-doc job: Phd's find resources for their own post-doc

**Destruction:** get an opportunity to change environment, travel abroad, disruptive networking



# Careful with creative destruction!



# Pros and cons

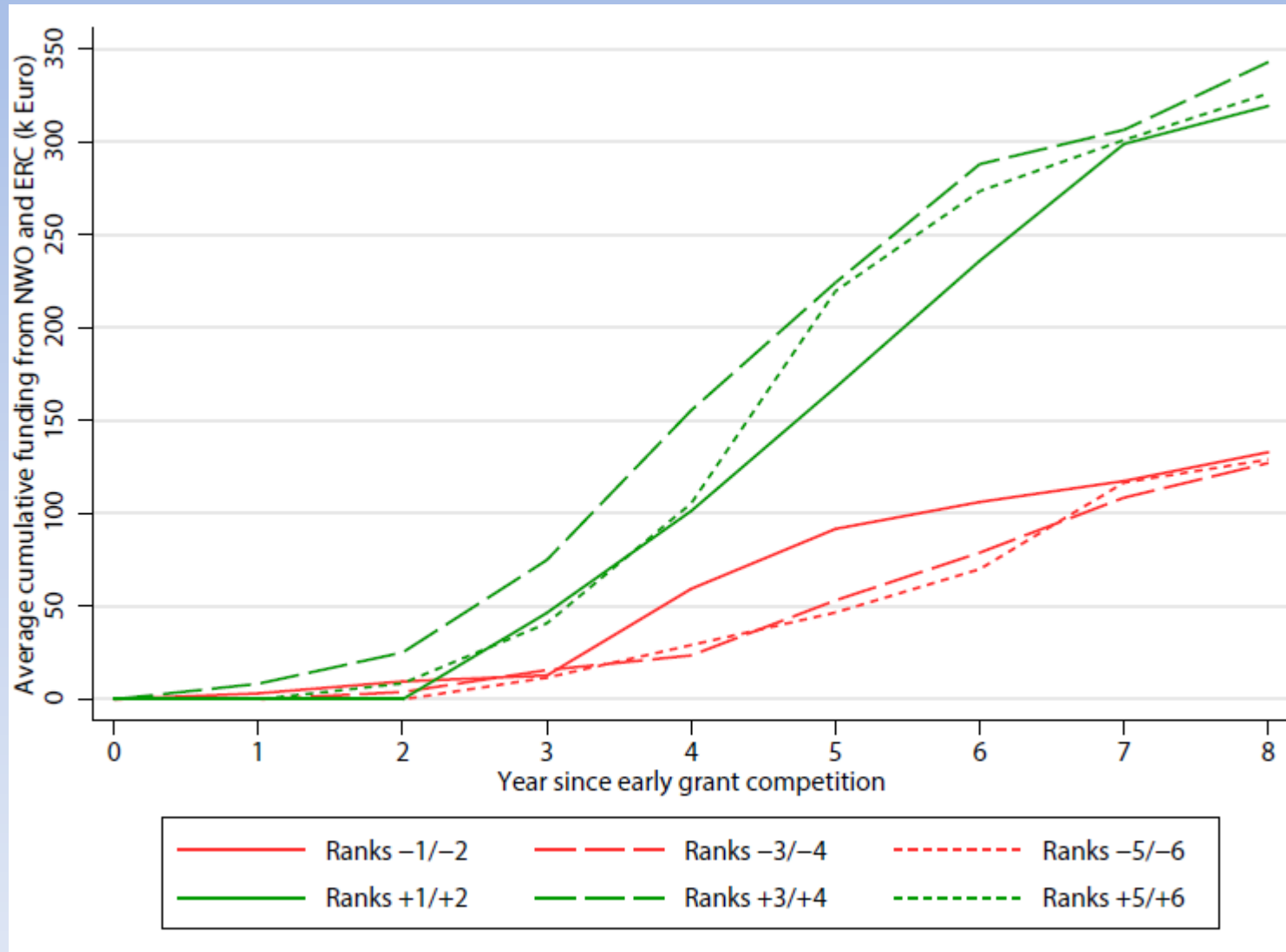
- Creative accumulation:
  - Build a strong group
  - Increase internal recognition
  - Gain «points» to get stabilised (permanent position)
- Creative destruction
  - Enlarge your network
  - Increase external recognition
  - New stimuli for research
  - Increase the opportunity set

For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance;  
but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

— [Matthew](#) 25:29, [RSV](#).



So: success breeds success, or not?



# Summing up

- Winners enjoy resources and status advantages over the nonwinners
- Candidates who won prior awards are evaluated more positively than nonwinners
- Winners apply more in subsequent contests compared to non winners
- A grant at the beginning of the career might improve its benefits over time

# WHEN...*it is always a good time*

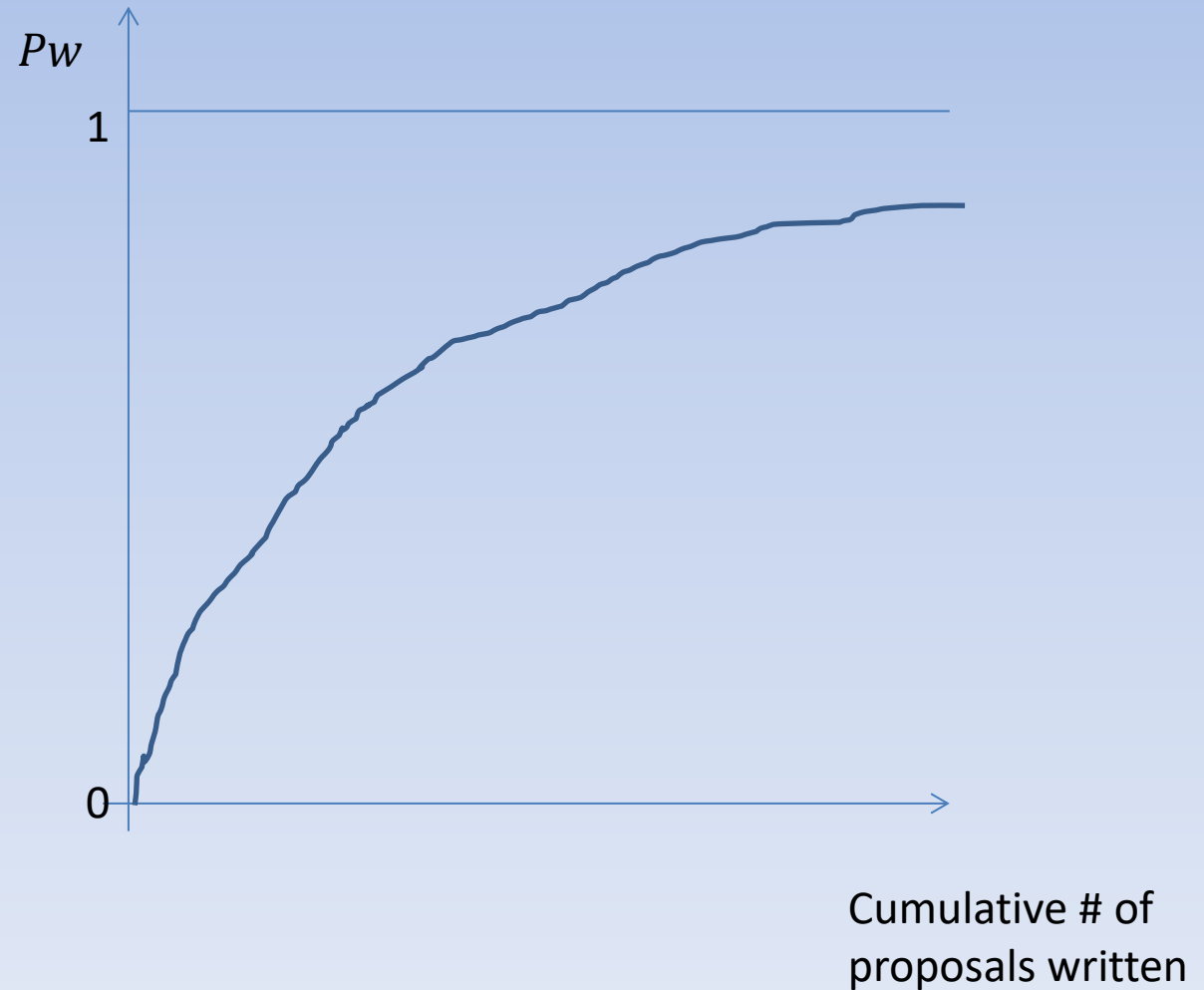
- Writing a grant proposal is full-committment-time-consuming activity (*no last minute!*)
- «*I am not applying...I do not want to waste my time!... WRONG!*»

# *writing a grant proposal is a process of learning itself:*

- Clarifies your position vis-a-vis state of the art of research
- Makes you think out of the box, i.e. out of your current research trajectory
- Makes you to look ahead
- A proposal is not a paper: thinking big
- Circular economies: Lots of recycling opportunities

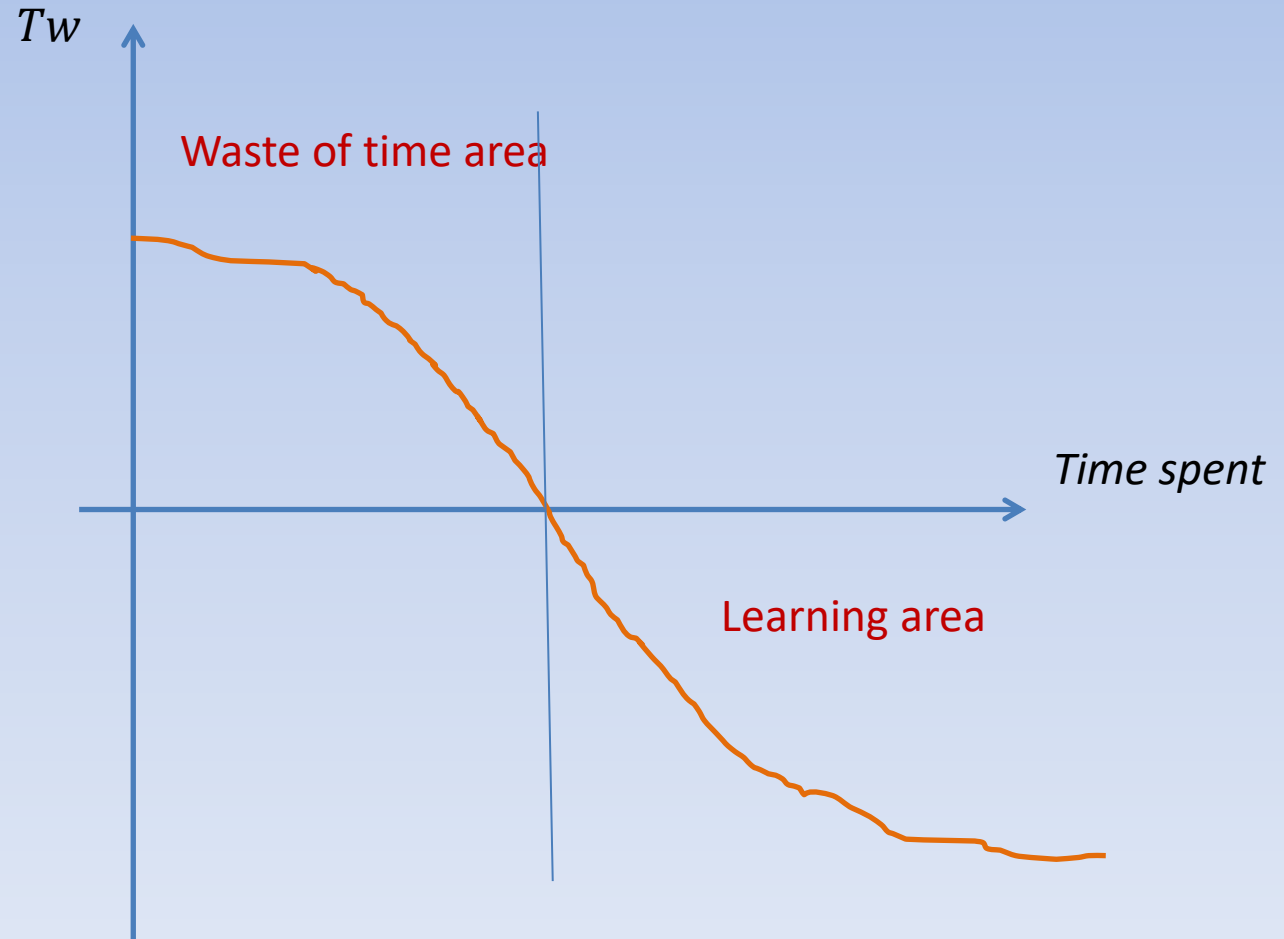
# Law #1: *just keep writing*

*probability of winning( $P_w$ ) =  $f(\# \text{ cumulative proposals})$*



## Law #2: the more you work the less the waste of time

$$\text{time waste}(Tw) = f(\text{time spend to prepare the proposal})$$



Writing up a *good* research proposal is never a waste of time!



# HOW

- «*I'll make it a try let's hope this works*» [little winning probability, little scope for learning, high sunk costs]
- Spend the first days analysing the guidelines, do not start writing your fabulous research plan (a good research idea is necessary but not sufficient)
- Criteria: *Forget about 'I am too young' or 'I am too old' for this fellowship*

# Let's get to work:

- Contact the National Contact Point of your future host country. The grant office of your host University may also help you with the application; they want you to be successful and they will help you in every step of the way and give you advice
- Contact previous winners (and get their proposals!)
- Official and unofficial documentation
- List of projects (title and abstract) from previous years
- Evaluation panel
- Evaluation guidelines (explicit vs implicit)

# How evaluators think

- Annoying activity
- Looking for weaknesses
- They cannot remember the various proposals
- What do they want to know? → *try to get reviewers' comments from previous proposals*
- *Evaluators are willing to get persuaded by yourself: just give them some good reasons*
- Try to get «Evaluators manual», e.g. [here](#)

# Evaluation criteria (ERC)

## **Criterion 1 - RESEARCH PROJECT**

### **Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project**

- To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
- To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or
- development across disciplines)?
- To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain?

### **Scientific Approach**

- To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high
- risk/high gain (based on the Extended Synopsis)?

# Evaluation criteria (ERC)

## Criterion 2 - PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

### Intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment

- *The questions below can have one of the following four responses: Outstanding/Excellent/Very good/Non-competitive*
- To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to propose and conduct ground-breaking research?
- To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative independent thinking?
- To what extent have the achievements of the PI typically gone beyond the state of the art?



tick all the boxes

## CHECKLIST



# Reviewers' comments (ERC)

- The high risk in this project is the integration of research on individuals/society ..... There is a potential for theoretical innovation, although for a large degree the proposal seem incremental.
- The approach is not offering especially high risk approach, apart from the scale of the analysis (but 5 years is plenty of time to the type of analysis that is offered here).
- The research team is presented, but the proposal lacks of precise time table. The reason of the choice of case studies is not enough explained. The research seems feasible.

# Reviewers' comments (Marie Curie Fellowship)

## *Strengths:*

- Host 's experience in mentoring/tutoring researchers is high. It has hosted numerous Marie Curie Fellows.*
- A very detailed training plan is offered. It is overall feasible.*
- Research training opportunities are clear and relevant.*
- The plan includes knowledge development about the industry sector.*

## *Weaknesses:*

- The specific training objectives are not explained in sufficient detail.*
- The learning plan is described by the applicant only on a general level.*

## *Overall comments:*

*The host organisation and supervisor have an excellent track record in training researchers. The proposal presents the research-related and complimentary learning objectives. However the learning plan is presented only on a general level.*

#### *Strengths:*

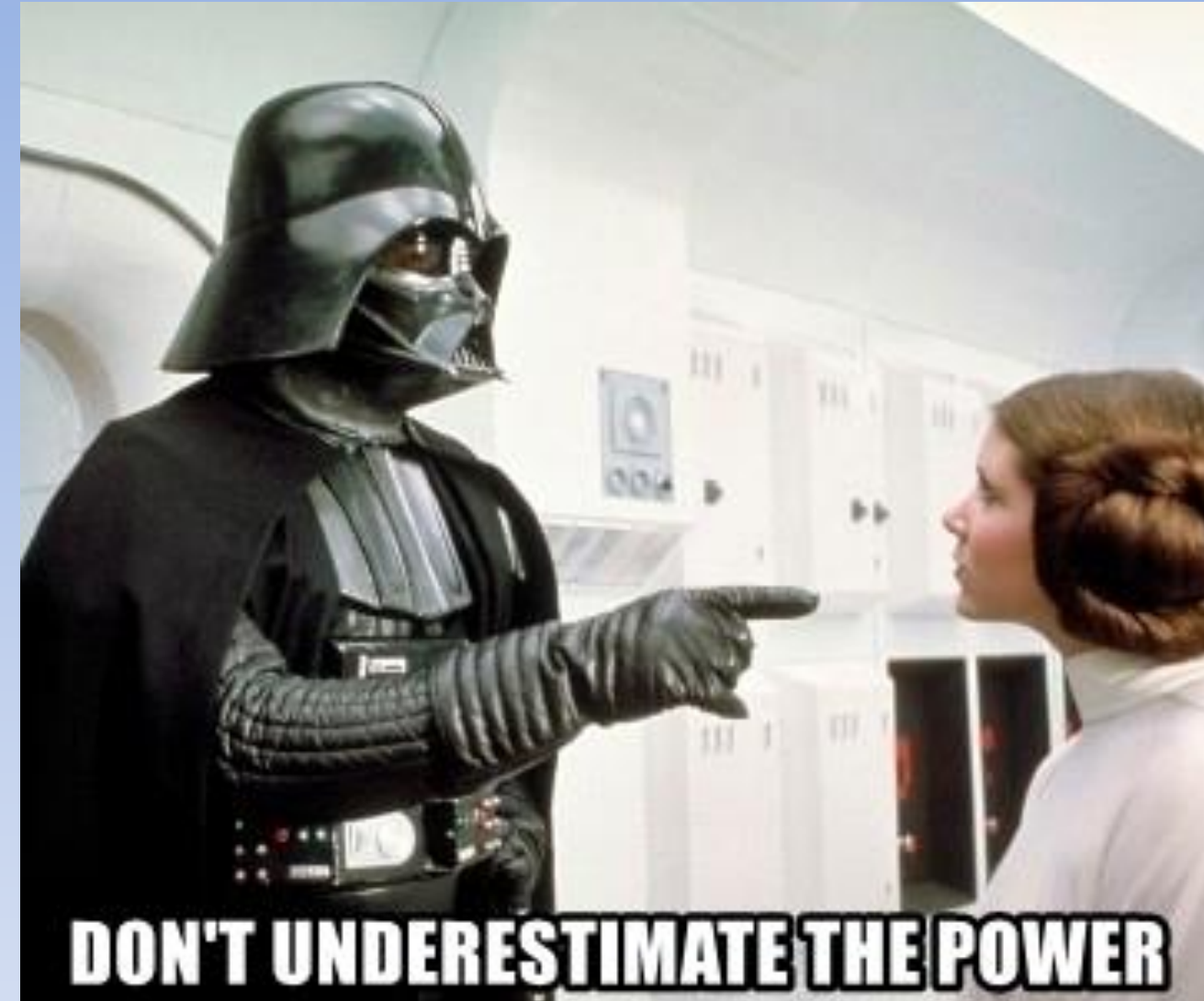
- It is demonstrated that the applicant's skills and experiences are suitable to the proposed project.*
- The applicant has sufficient experience of professional activities.*
- The applicant has a good amount of research experience.*
- The number of academic papers is impressive considering the rather short academic career of the fellow.*
- The applicant has shown some leadership qualities, including management of projects.*
- Match between the fellow's profile and the project is adequate.*

#### *Weaknesses:*

- Creativity and independent thinking have not been fully demonstrated as the fellow has experience of the management of few projects only.*

#### *Overall comments:*

*The researcher has good research experience. The number of academic papers is impressive. The application also presents evidence, albeit limited of leadership skills. The fellow and the project are well matched. The research project would make it possible for the researcher to acquire new competence and reach a higher level of professional maturity.*



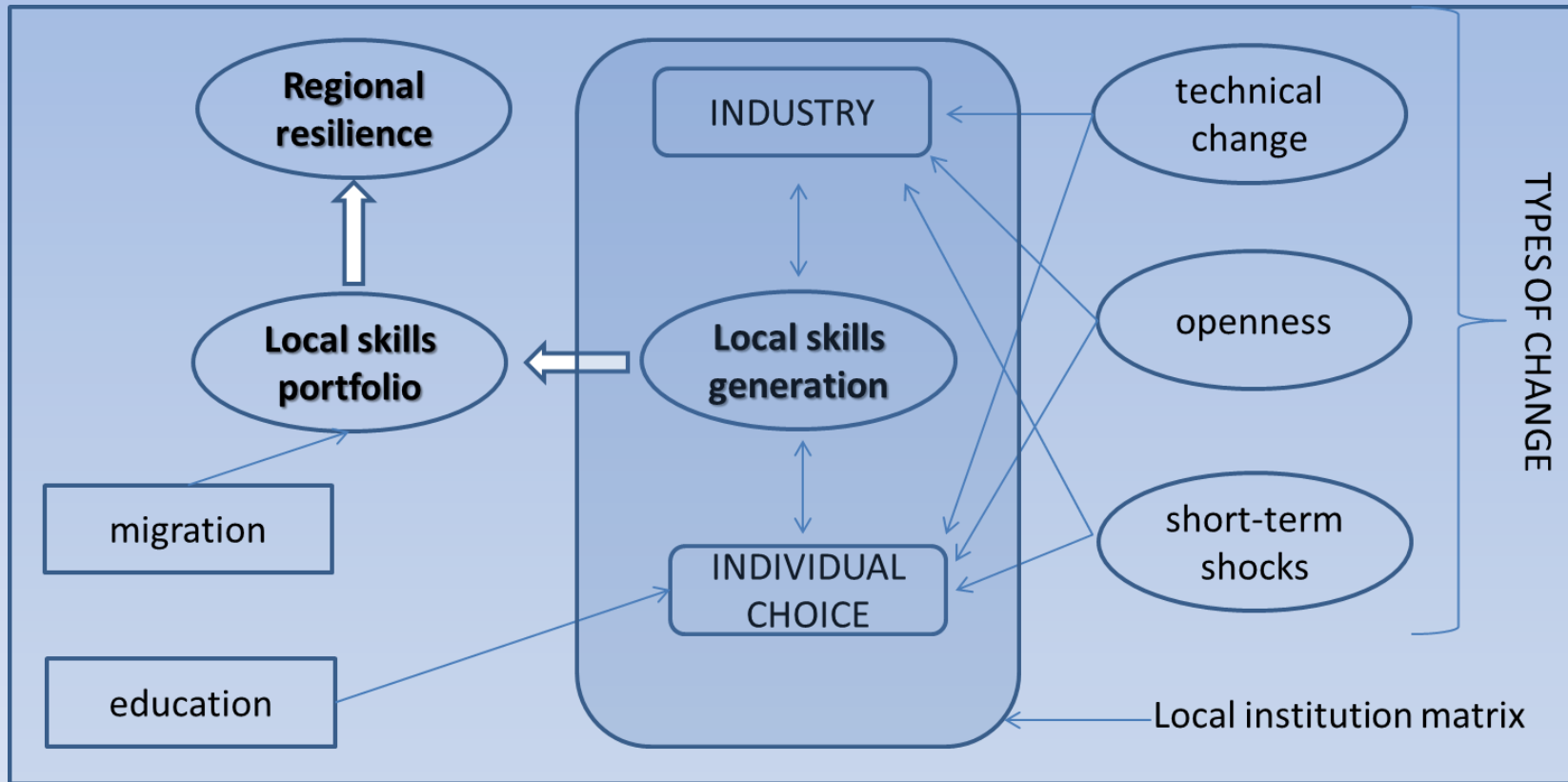
**DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER  
OF THE**

OTHER SECTIONS IN RESEARCH GRANTS

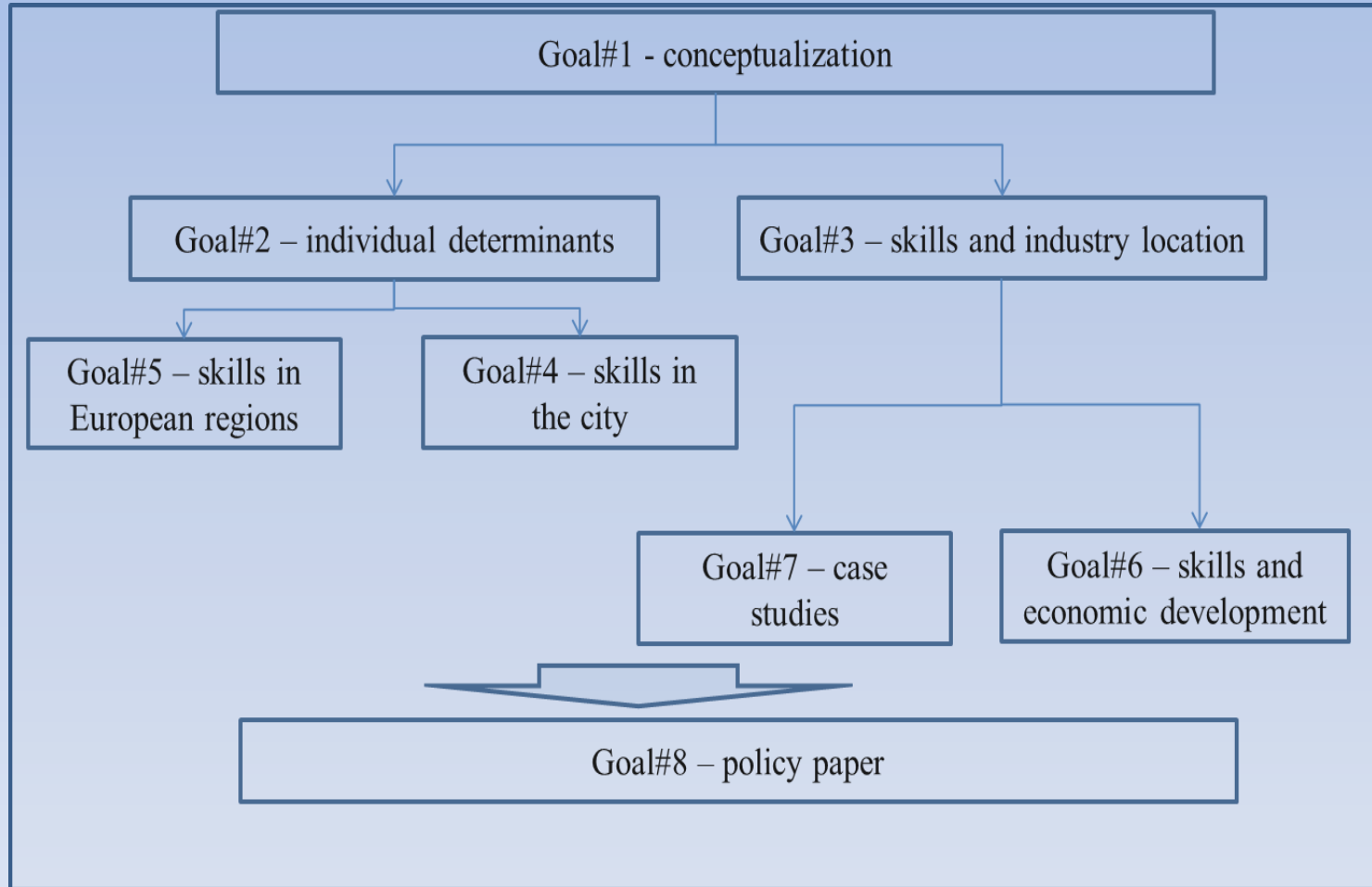
# tips

- Do not focus 99% of time on research and 1% on other *minor* aspects (e.g. impact and dissemination!)
- Include catchy elements:
  - Elegant charts
  - Smart title
- Make sure supervisors and colleagues (even if not working on your field) read it and comment
- Circulate a short draft:
  - Aim
  - Method
  - Expected results

# The theoretical model



# Plan of the activities



| <i>Strategies</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <i>Timeliness</i>         | <i>Indicators</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Develop a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to regional studies, including institutions, regional system of innovation, geography of innovation, and their connections with EU policy                                          | 24 months                 | Presentation at seminars and conferences, publications of research papers and of a book-length monograph                                                                                                                                          |
| Training in econometrics applied to geography                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 24 months                 | Presentation of the research results at conferences in Europe and abroad, publications plan in English. Publishing 8 research papers (4 in the first 12 months, 4 in the last); publication of a book length monograph to be published in English |
| Reinforcing my international profile as a researcher in European studies, through training my writing and presentation skills and through the development of a set of publications in English                                                  | 24 months                 | Presentation of the research results at conferences in Europe and abroad, publications plan in English. Publishing 8 research papers (4 in the first 12 months, 4 in the last); publication of a book length monograph to be published in English |
| Training in productivity analysis during my stay at the Center for Productivity Analysis, University of Queensland                                                                                                                             | From month 4 to month 5   | Presentation of the research results at conferences in Europe and abroad, publications plan in English. Publishing 8 research papers (4 in the first 12 months, 4 in the last); publication of a book length monograph to be published in English |
| Training in institutions applied to the sub-national case during my stay at the Center for European Studies, Harvard University                                                                                                                | From month 11 to month 12 | Presentation of the research results at conferences in Europe and abroad, publications plan in English. Publishing 8 research papers (4 in the first 12 months, 4 in the last); publication of a book length monograph to be published in English |
| Training in regional innovation system and regional innovation policy at the University of Groningen during my visit                                                                                                                           | From month 17 to month 19 | Presentation of the research results at conferences in Europe and abroad, publications plan in English. Publishing 8 research papers (4 in the first 12 months, 4 in the last); publication of a book length monograph to be published in English |
| In order to achieve a full "Europeanization" of my research profile, I will participate at European research networks with the help of the seminars and activities at the DGE-LSE and collaborating with my supervisor at the two 7FP projects | 24 months                 | Presentations of working papers at international conferences; participation at the two projects' workshops and conferences                                                                                                                        |
| Training in presentation skills, writing scientific papers and publish, and valorisation of research results                                                                                                                                   | 24 months                 | Presentations at IEE doctoral seminar and conferences; presentation at international conferences; elaboration of a publication plan; building a website with regular updates and a Newsletter concerning the development of the research project  |

## Tips (2)

- Give the idea that the grant will represent a substantial push for your career
- Extend your research into a:
  - New area of interest
  - New data
  - New theory

# Novelty vs coherence

- BUSINESS AS USUAL IS FORBIDDEN!, but
- going too far is not wise...THEN:
- **Coherent diversification:**
  - Novelty of the research BUT COHERENT with your history (i.e. track record)

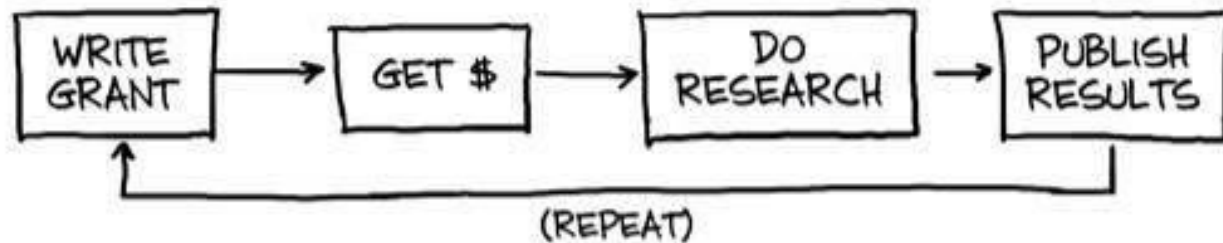
- His CV shows a solid track record, with good papers dedicated on studies of the role of innovation in regional and national evolution of economy. The shift from the kind of research to the new topic addressed in the project looks coherent.

# Generic vs. specific

- Outcomes vs discoveries?
- Serendipity and predictability
- What if I do not get the predicted outcomes?
- How much shall I be shy? humble? cautious?

# THE GRANT CYCLE

HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO WORK:



HOW IT REALLY WORKS:



*Thank you and good luck...*