



When Recognition Comes Late: Reflections on Academic Resilience, Institutional Setbacks, and the Long Road to Professorship

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Abstract

Academic promotion is often regarded as the culmination of scholarly achievement. Yet the official announcement of promotion rarely reflects the invisible years of disappointment, self-doubt, perseverance, and personal growth that precede it. This reflective commentary examines my own journey towards promotion to full professor after three applications over eight years. My first application in 2013 was not supported at the departmental level, while my second application in 2016 was discontinued at the faculty level because the minimum institutional performance score required for promotion was not achieved. Although these decisions were professionally discouraging and emotionally painful, they became turning points that reshaped my understanding of resilience, academic identity, and scientific purpose. My third application, submitted on 2 January 2019, culminated in promotion on 1 May 2021 after approximately thirty months of evaluation. Rather than focusing on administrative procedures, this paper reflects on the psychological and professional lessons learned from delayed recognition. I argue that resilience in academia extends beyond publication metrics and research funding. It encompasses the ability to preserve scientific integrity, continue contributing to society, and remain committed to knowledge creation despite repeated institutional setbacks. Ultimately, the greatest achievement was not becoming a professor but becoming the person who could endure the journey towards professorship.

Keywords: Academic Resilience; Higher Education; Promotion; Perseverance; Academic Identity; Reflective Commentary

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Introduction

Every academic curriculum vitae tells a story, but it is rarely the complete story. It records appointments, publications, research grants, student supervision, citations, awards, and promotions. It presents an orderly sequence of achievements that appears logical and progressive. Yet, what remains invisible are the emotional landscapes between those milestones. The curriculum vitae does not reveal the manuscripts rejected before publication, the grant proposals that were unsuccessful, the promotion applications that did not advance, or the private moments when an academic quietly questioned whether continuing the journey was worthwhile. These experiences rarely become part of academic literature despite their profound influence on professional identity [1].

This paper originates from one such experience. I write not to revisit institutional decisions or assign responsibility to individuals. Time has changed my perspective, allowing disappointment to evolve into reflection. Instead, I write because I believe that resilience deserves scholarly attention, particularly within higher education where professional achievement is frequently evaluated through measurable indicators while the human experience behind those indicators remains largely overlooked [2, 3]. Academic careers are not merely collections of performance metrics. They are lived experiences shaped by aspiration, disappointment, perseverance, and personal growth [4].

My journey towards becoming a full professor was considerably longer than I had anticipated. My first application in 2013 was not supported at the departmental level. Three years later, my second application in 2016 progressed to the faculty level but did not proceed because my overall performance score failed to meet the institutional requirement of 80% (Figure 1). Receiving the official notification was one of the most discouraging moments of my academic career. Although the letter consisted of only a few formal administrative sentences, it represented years of research, teaching, supervision, publication, and professional service. Behind every sentence was a much

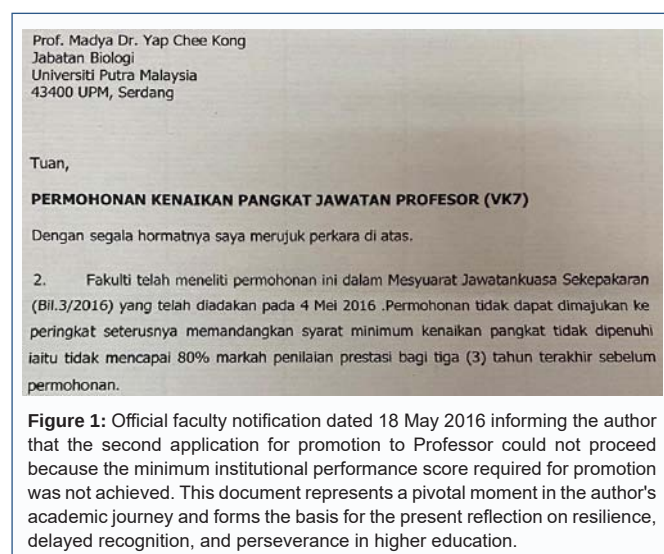


Figure 1: Official faculty notification dated 18 May 2016 informing the author that the second application for promotion to Professor could not proceed because the minimum institutional performance score required for promotion was not achieved. This document represents a pivotal moment in the author's academic journey and forms the basis for the present reflection on resilience, delayed recognition, and perseverance in higher education.

longer story that could never be captured in official correspondence.

For several months, I questioned whether pursuing promotion remained worthwhile. Like many academics, I rarely discussed these feelings openly. Universities celebrate successful promotions, but unsuccessful applications often remain private experiences. They become silent disappointments carried individually rather than collectively understood. Previous studies have shown that academic rejection and delayed career progression may contribute to self-doubt, emotional exhaustion, and reduced professional confidence, even among highly productive scholars [5, 6]. Yet despite these setbacks, I continued teaching students, conducting research, publishing scientific papers, reviewing manuscripts, supervising postgraduate candidates, and contributing to my university. Outwardly, little changed. Inwardly, however, I was trying to understand whether my value as a scientist depended upon institutional recognition.

Eventually, I submitted my third application on 2 January 2019. After approximately thirty months of evaluation, I was officially promoted to full professorship 1 May 2021 (Figure 2). Looking back today, I realise that the promotion itself occupied only one day, whereas the journey towards it occupied nearly a decade. More importantly, I now recognise that the greatest lesson was not how to become a professor, but how to continue believing in science while waiting for recognition.

The objective of this reflective commentary is therefore to examine how repeated institutional setbacks shaped my understanding of academic resilience, professional identity, and scientific purpose. Rather than presenting promotion as the destination, I argue that the journey itself became the most important teacher. My hope is that this reflection will encourage academics, particularly early-career researchers, to understand that delayed recognition should never be interpreted as diminished worth. Sometimes the most meaningful achievements are those that require the longest periods of perseverance, a characteristic increasingly recognised as fundamental to resilience and long-term professional development [7, 8].

Why I Write This Reflection

When I finally received my promotion to full professorship on 1 May 2021, many colleagues congratulated me. Friends, collaborators, and former students celebrated the achievement, and understandably

so. Promotion to full professorship represents one of the highest milestones in an academic career. Yet while others naturally focused on the destination, my own thoughts repeatedly returned to the journey. I could not celebrate the title without remembering the disappointments that had preceded it. Every congratulatory message reminded me not only of success but also of the years during which success had seemed uncertain.

For a long time, I did not intend to write about these experiences. They felt too personal and perhaps too uncomfortable. Academic culture often encourages scientists to discuss discoveries, methodologies, and achievements while remaining silent about vulnerability. We are expected to appear objective, productive, and resilient, even during periods when we privately struggle with disappointment. However, reflective practice has long been recognised as an essential process through which professionals transform experience into learning and personal growth [9, 10]. Over time, I realised that silence serves neither science nor the scientific community. Many academics quietly experience similar disappointments, yet because these stories remain untold, individuals often believe they are facing such challenges alone.

This reflection therefore is not written to question institutional procedures or to seek retrospective justification. Promotion systems are complex and necessarily involve evaluation against established criteria. Different committees may reasonably arrive at different conclusions. My intention is not to evaluate those decisions themselves, but rather to reflect upon their influence on my own development as a scientist and educator. The administrative outcome became less important than the psychological journey it initiated.

Looking back, I recognise that the unsuccessful applications forced me to ask questions that I had never previously considered. Why had I entered academia in the first place? Was I conducting research primarily to achieve promotion, or because I genuinely loved scientific discovery? Would my commitment to biology diminish if formal recognition never arrived? These questions were uncomfortable because they challenged motivations that had remained unquestioned for decades. According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation is sustained when individuals remain committed

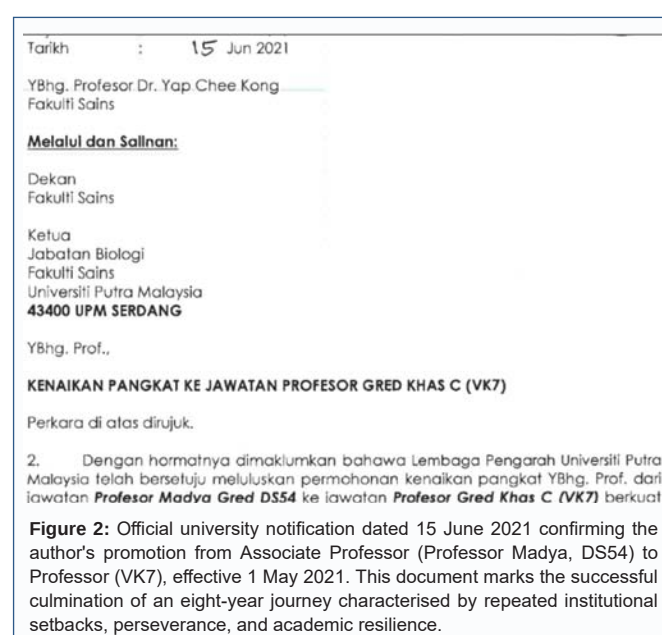


Figure 2: Official university notification dated 15 June 2021 confirming the author's promotion from Associate Professor (Professor Madya, DS54) to Professor (VK7), effective 1 May 2021. This document marks the successful culmination of an eight-year journey characterised by repeated institutional setbacks, perseverance, and academic resilience.

to activities because of inherent interest and personal meaning rather than external rewards [11].

Surprisingly, the answers gradually became liberating. I realised that long before promotion entered my thoughts, I had already found satisfaction in observing ecological systems, analysing environmental contamination, supervising students, and contributing to scientific knowledge. These activities remained meaningful regardless of administrative outcomes. Publications continued to be written. Students continued to graduate. Scientific questions continued to emerge. Nature itself remained indifferent to academic titles. The rivers I studied did not become more interesting because I held a professorship, nor did heavy metals behave differently because of institutional recognition. Science continued exactly as before.

This realisation fundamentally changed my understanding of academic success. Promotion became something desirable but no longer something that defined my identity. My identity rested instead upon curiosity, integrity, perseverance, and the privilege of contributing to scientific knowledge. Ironically, it was only after reaching this understanding that I felt emotionally prepared to submit my third application. By then, promotion had become an aspiration rather than a necessity for self-worth. This shift closely resembles what Dweck (2006) describes as a growth mindset, in which personal development becomes more important than external evaluation.

I therefore write this paper because I believe reflections such as these have scholarly value. Universities invest considerable effort in measuring academic productivity, yet comparatively little attention is given to understanding how academics psychologically navigate disappointment. If higher education genuinely values resilience, then resilience itself deserves to be examined, discussed, and documented [2, 3].

Three Applications, Three Different Lessons

Looking back across the eight-year period between my first application in 2013 and eventual promotion in 2021, I no longer see three independent promotion exercises. Instead, I see three stages of personal development. Each application taught me something different about academia, about institutions, and perhaps most importantly, about myself. Reflection transforms experience into learning by allowing past events to acquire new meaning through later understanding [9].

My first application in 2013 ended before reaching the faculty level because it was not supported within my department. At the time, I experienced disappointment, but I also believed that greater effort would naturally produce a different outcome. Like many academics, I assumed that publications, research grants, supervision, and teaching would eventually speak for themselves. I still viewed academia as a largely meritocratic system in which sustained scientific contribution would inevitably lead to recognition. My optimism remained largely intact.

The second application in 2016 proved considerably more difficult emotionally. Unlike the first application, it progressed further through institutional evaluation before eventually stopping at the faculty level because the required performance score was not achieved. Receiving the official notification was profoundly discouraging. The letter itself was brief and administrative, explaining that my application could not proceed because the minimum score of 80% had not been attained during the evaluation period. Yet the emotional meaning extended far beyond those few sentences. It represented another

interruption to a goal that had required years of preparation. Career setbacks such as these frequently trigger self-reflection, uncertainty, and diminished professional confidence, particularly among highly committed academics [5].

For some time, I struggled to separate institutional evaluation from personal identity. I wondered whether my scientific contributions were genuinely valued or whether I had misunderstood what academic excellence required. Like many researchers experiencing professional disappointment, I privately questioned my own ability despite an active publication record and ongoing scientific productivity. Looking back today, I recognise that this self-doubt was perhaps the greatest challenge, greater even than the unsuccessful application itself. Yet resilience research consistently shows that adversity often becomes the catalyst for later psychological growth when individuals continue pursuing meaningful goals despite setbacks [3, 8].

There were moments when I seriously considered abandoning the pursuit of promotion altogether. Preparing another application meant exposing myself once again to uncertainty, possible rejection, and emotional disappointment. Continuing seemed exhausting. Giving up seemed emotionally easier.

Yet, despite these thoughts, I continued doing exactly what I had always done. I continued collecting samples, analysing data, publishing papers, reviewing manuscripts, teaching undergraduate students, supervising postgraduate research, and mentoring younger scientists. Gradually, I realised something important. My daily work had remained unchanged regardless of promotion outcomes. My commitment to biology had not diminished because an application was unsuccessful. The curiosity that first attracted me to science remained alive. This persistence reflects the concept of grit, defined as sustained passion and perseverance towards long-term goals despite obstacles and failure [7].

When I eventually prepared my third application on 2 January 2019, my perspective had changed fundamentally. I was no longer applying simply because I wished to become a professor. I was applying because my academic record honestly reflected years of sustained scientific contribution. Whether promotion arrived or not, those contributions already existed. The application therefore became an expression of confidence rather than a plea for validation.

The official promotion on 1 May 2021 brought immense satisfaction, but perhaps not for the reasons many people assumed. Certainly, I was grateful to receive the recognition. Yet the greatest sense of achievement came from knowing that I had not abandoned the journey after repeated disappointment. The title of full professorship recognised my academic accomplishments, but resilience had already transformed my character long before the promotion letter arrived.

Looking back today, I no longer remember those three applications primarily as administrative events. I remember them as three lessons. The first taught me optimism. The second taught me perseverance. The third taught me that genuine success is not measured by how quickly recognition arrives, but by whether one continues contributing to science while waiting for it. In retrospect, resilience became not simply a response to adversity but an enduring component of my academic identity [1, 4].

The Emotional Ecology of Academic Rejection

Academic rejection is often described in administrative language.

Applications are unsuccessful, proposals are declined, manuscripts require major revisions, and promotions do not proceed. Such terminology creates an impression that these events are merely procedural. In reality, every rejection has an emotional dimension that is rarely acknowledged within higher education. Although universities routinely measure academic performance, they seldom measure the psychological effort required to continue performing after repeated disappointment [5, 6].

My own experience taught me that rejection extends beyond the immediate decision itself. The official letter informing me that my second promotion application could not proceed because the required institutional score had not been achieved occupied only a single page. Yet emotionally, it represented years of accumulated effort. Every publication, every postgraduate student supervised, every lecture delivered, every research grant completed, and every manuscript reviewed suddenly appeared insufficient. Looking back today, I realise that what hurt most was not the administrative decision itself but the temporary loss of confidence that followed.

Perhaps the greatest psychological challenge was the gradual emergence of self-doubt. I began asking questions that many academics silently ask after professional disappointment. Was my work genuinely valuable? Had I misunderstood what academic excellence required? Was I simply overestimating my own contributions? Such questions are neither irrational nor unusual. Research has shown that repeated professional rejection frequently leads individuals to question their competence despite objective evidence of achievement, a phenomenon often associated with impostor feelings and reduced professional confidence [12, 13].

What surprised me most was that these emotions existed despite continuing scientific productivity. My publication record continued to grow. Students continued graduating under my supervision. Invitations to review manuscripts and collaborate internationally continued arriving. Objectively, my academic career was progressing. Subjectively, however, the unsuccessful promotion created an emotional lens through which I temporarily undervalued my own accomplishments. This disconnect illustrates an important psychological reality. Human beings rarely evaluate themselves purely through objective evidence. Instead, institutional decisions often become powerful symbols that shape self-perception [14].

With time, however, I began viewing rejection differently. As an ecologist, I realised that ecosystems rarely develop without disturbance. Floods, storms, droughts, and fires interrupt ecological succession, yet they frequently create conditions for renewal, adaptation, and increased resilience [15, 16]. My academic journey appeared remarkably similar. The unsuccessful promotion did not terminate my development. Instead, it disturbed a previously comfortable understanding of academic success and forced me to reconstruct it upon stronger foundations.

This ecological perspective gradually transformed rejection from an endpoint into a process. Rather than asking why promotion had been delayed, I began asking what the delay was teaching me. The answer was unexpected. Rejection had become an educator. It taught humility without destroying confidence, patience without encouraging passivity, and perseverance without fostering resentment. Looking back today, I would not describe those years as wasted. They became part of the education that no university curriculum formally provides.

Resilience as an Academic Competency

Universities traditionally evaluate academics according to measurable indicators including publications, citations, grants, postgraduate supervision, teaching, innovation, and professional service. These indicators remain essential because they reflect scholarly contribution and institutional impact. Yet my experience suggests that another competency deserves equal recognition although it is rarely assessed directly. That competency is resilience.

Resilience is commonly defined as the capacity to adapt positively despite adversity, uncertainty, or prolonged challenge [2, 8]. Within academia, resilience is frequently discussed in relation to student learning or research productivity. Much less attention has been given to resilience as a defining characteristic of academic careers themselves. Yet universities are environments in which rejection is remarkably common. Manuscripts are rejected. Grants remain unfunded. Promotions are delayed. Research experiments fail. Students occasionally withdraw. Careers therefore require sustained psychological adaptation as much as intellectual ability.

My own journey gradually convinced me that resilience is not simply recovering after disappointment. Recovery implies returning to a previous condition. Genuine resilience, however, involves transformation. After my unsuccessful promotion applications, I did not simply regain my previous motivation. My motivation changed fundamentally. Initially, I associated success with institutional recognition. Over time, I learned to associate success with continuing scientific contribution regardless of recognition. This shift resembles what Self Determination Theory describes as movement from external motivation towards intrinsic motivation, where personal meaning becomes more influential than external reward [11].

Equally important was the recognition that resilience is expressed through ordinary actions rather than extraordinary events. Popular narratives often portray resilience as heroic determination displayed during dramatic crises. My experience was considerably less dramatic. Resilience consisted of returning to the laboratory the following morning. It consisted of continuing field sampling, analysing data, writing manuscripts, teaching undergraduate classes, supervising postgraduate students, reviewing papers, and mentoring younger researchers despite lingering disappointment. These ordinary actions accumulated gradually into extraordinary perseverance.

Duckworth *et al.*, [7] described this sustained commitment towards long-term goals as grit. Although grit and resilience are conceptually distinct, they share a common emphasis upon persistence despite repeated setbacks. Looking back, I recognise that my promotion resulted less from exceptional ability than from refusing to abandon the journey. Many people possess talent. Fewer continue applying that talent after repeated disappointment.

Today, I believe resilience should be regarded as an essential academic competency rather than merely a desirable personal characteristic. Scientific progress depends not only upon intelligence but also upon persistence. Every major discovery has emerged from repeated failure, revision, and renewed effort. Academic careers follow precisely the same principle. Titles, awards, and promotions may recognise achievement, but resilience makes sustained achievement possible.

What Delayed Recognition Taught Me About Leadership and Mentorship

One unexpected consequence of delayed promotion was that it transformed how I understand academic leadership. Earlier in my career, I viewed leadership primarily through formal positions and institutional authority. Becoming a professor appeared to represent the culmination of academic leadership. Today, I no longer believe this.

Leadership begins long before promotion. During the years when my own applications were unsuccessful, students continued entering my laboratory seeking guidance. Young researchers continued asking for advice about publications, career planning, statistical analysis, and scientific writing. None of them asked whether my promotion application had succeeded. They came because they trusted my experience. Gradually, I realised that influence does not depend entirely upon institutional title. It depends upon willingness to help others grow.

This realisation changed how I approached mentorship. Instead of encouraging younger academics to pursue promotion as rapidly as possible, I began encouraging them to pursue meaningful scholarship. Publications should contribute to knowledge rather than simply increase numerical performance indicators. Research should answer important questions rather than merely satisfy evaluation systems. Promotion should become a consequence of sustained scientific contribution rather than the primary motivation for conducting science. These perspectives align closely with scholarship emphasising authentic academic identity and scholarly purpose [1, 4].

My own disappointments also increased my empathy towards younger colleagues. Before experiencing repeated promotion setbacks, I may have underestimated the emotional burden carried by academics facing rejection. Afterwards, I became more attentive to encouraging others after unsuccessful grant applications, rejected manuscripts, or delayed career progression. Having experienced disappointment personally, I recognised that encouragement can become an important form of academic leadership.

Interestingly, the promotion itself changed relatively little about my daily work. I continued conducting research, supervising students, publishing papers, reviewing manuscripts, and teaching biology. What changed most was my perspective. I no longer viewed academic success primarily through institutional milestones. Instead, I measured success by whether my work continued benefiting students, advancing scientific understanding, and contributing to society. In retrospect, the years before promotion shaped my leadership far more profoundly than the promotion itself.

Perhaps this is the greatest irony of my journey. Had promotion arrived immediately after my first application, I might have become a professor earlier, but I would almost certainly have become a different professor. The years of waiting taught patience. The unsuccessful applications taught humility. The repeated disappointments taught empathy. These qualities cannot easily be quantified in institutional evaluation systems, yet they profoundly influence the quality of mentorship and leadership that academics ultimately provide.

Looking back today, I therefore regard delayed recognition not simply as an obstacle but as part of my professional formation. Promotion acknowledged my academic record, but the years preceding promotion shaped my character. In the end, I became convinced that

leadership is not conferred by a title. It is earned through consistent service, integrity, compassion, and the willingness to continue supporting others regardless of one's own disappointments.

From Promotion to Purpose: Redefining Academic Success

Receiving the official notification of my promotion on 1 May 2021 was undoubtedly one of the happiest moments of my academic career. Years of effort had finally received institutional recognition. Family members, colleagues, collaborators, former students, and friends shared my happiness. Looking back, however, I now realise that the emotional significance of that day was very different from what I had imagined years earlier. The promotion itself was not the end of my journey. Instead, it marked the beginning of a different understanding of what academic success truly means.

For many years, I unconsciously viewed promotion as a destination. Like countless academics around the world, I associated becoming a full professor with professional fulfilment. Such thinking is understandable because universities naturally organise academic careers around milestones including appointment, tenure, promotion, research funding, and scholarly recognition. These milestones provide structure and motivation, yet they also carry the risk of encouraging academics to equate external recognition with personal worth [1, 4].

My own experience gradually challenged this assumption. After becoming a professor, I returned to my office the following morning and continued doing exactly what I had done before. Students still required supervision. Manuscripts still needed revision. Research proposals still demanded careful preparation. Laboratory equipment continued malfunctioning occasionally. Field sampling remained physically demanding. Scientific questions remained unanswered. Nature itself remained unchanged. The rivers, mangroves, mussels, snails, fish, sediments, and heavy metals that had occupied my research for decades did not recognise my promotion. Biology continued exactly as biology had always been.

This simple observation became profoundly important. If my daily scientific life remained fundamentally unchanged before and after promotion, then perhaps the meaning of academic success had never depended primarily upon the title itself. Instead, success lay in maintaining curiosity, contributing new knowledge, educating students, mentoring younger scientists, and serving society through science. These activities had defined my academic identity long before institutional recognition arrived and continued defining it afterwards.

The distinction between achievement and purpose became increasingly clear. Achievement is externally recognised, often measured through publications, citations, grants, awards, or promotion. Purpose, however, originates internally. It reflects why an individual continues pursuing science even when recognition is delayed. Self Determination Theory proposes that long term motivation is sustained when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and meaningful purpose rather than relying exclusively upon external rewards [11]. Looking back, I realise that my motivation gradually shifted from achievement towards purpose during the years preceding my promotion.

This transition also changed how I interpreted scientific productivity. Earlier in my career, publications often represented evidence supporting future promotion. Today, they represent

contributions to scientific understanding. The difference may appear subtle, yet psychologically it is transformative. Research no longer serves primarily as evidence of personal accomplishment. Instead, it becomes part of a broader responsibility to expand human knowledge and address environmental problems that affect both ecosystems and society [17].

Ironically, the delayed promotion strengthened rather than weakened this perspective. Had promotion arrived immediately after my first application, I might never have questioned why I pursued science so intensely. Delayed recognition forced me to separate professional identity from institutional validation. Once these two concepts became independent, my relationship with academic work became healthier, more sustainable, and ultimately more meaningful.

Today, therefore, I no longer define my academic success by the date on which I became a full professor. I define it by whether I continue asking important scientific questions, whether my students become independent researchers, whether my publications contribute useful knowledge, and whether my work leaves environmental science slightly better than I found it. Promotion recognised my achievements, but purpose continues to guide my journey.

Lessons for Younger Academics

If there is one reason I have chosen to write this reflection, it is because I hope younger academics may discover encouragement through experiences that were once deeply discouraging for me. Academic careers rarely progress according to carefully planned timelines. Manuscripts are rejected despite careful preparation. Research grants remain unfunded despite months of writing. Promotion applications sometimes fail despite years of productivity. These experiences are painful precisely because they occur within professions where individuals invest not only intellectual effort but also personal identity.

To younger academics who may currently be experiencing disappointment, I offer several reflections drawn not from theory alone but from lived experience.

First, never allow a single institutional decision to define your scientific worth. Universities evaluate according to established criteria that inevitably reflect particular institutional priorities at specific moments in time. These evaluations are important, but they cannot fully measure curiosity, creativity, integrity, mentorship, or long-term scientific influence. Some of the most influential scientists in history experienced repeated professional rejection before receiving widespread recognition [18].

Second, continue producing science during periods of disappointment. Looking back, I am grateful that I never stopped publishing after unsuccessful promotion applications. Had I paused my research while waiting for institutional recognition, disappointment would have achieved a second victory by interrupting scientific contribution itself. Instead, continued research gradually became my most effective response to temporary setbacks.

Third, recognise that comparison with colleagues is rarely productive. Academic careers unfold under different circumstances, opportunities, institutional cultures, and personal responsibilities. Some individuals are promoted earlier. Others require longer journeys. Such variation should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of greater or lesser ability. Sustainable academic development is more accurately understood as a marathon than a sprint [7].

Fourth, protect your curiosity. Curiosity represents one of the most valuable resources an academic possesses because it survives fluctuations in external recognition. Grants may be unsuccessful. Promotion may be delayed. Publications may require multiple revisions. Yet genuine curiosity continues generating new questions worth investigating. As long as curiosity remains alive, scientific contribution remains possible.

Finally, remember that resilience is not demonstrated only during extraordinary crises. It is demonstrated each ordinary morning when an academic returns to teaching, research, supervision, writing, and mentoring despite previous disappointments. Looking back, I realise that resilience was never a single dramatic decision. It was the accumulation of countless ordinary decisions to continue.

I hope younger researchers understand that delayed recognition should never be confused with personal inadequacy. Sometimes institutions recognise contributions immediately. Sometimes recognition arrives much later. What ultimately matters are not the timing of recognition but the consistency of contribution. Science benefits most from those who continue asking questions even when immediate rewards remain uncertain.

Conclusion

Looking back across the years separating my first promotion application in 2013 from my eventual promotion in 2021, I now understand that the most important outcome was not the title itself. The title recognised my academic accomplishments, but the journey towards that title shaped my character. The unsuccessful applications, moments of disappointment, self-doubt, uncertainty, and persistence collectively became an education that no formal academic programme could have provided.

This reflection has attempted to examine academic resilience not as an abstract psychological concept but as a lived experience. My journey demonstrates that resilience is not simply recovering after disappointment. Rather, resilience involves continuing to teach, conduct research, supervise students, publish scientific papers, review manuscripts, and contribute to society while disappointment remains unresolved. In this sense, resilience is less about extraordinary determination and more about sustained commitment to meaningful work despite uncertainty.

Perhaps the greatest lesson concerns the relationship between recognition and identity. Earlier in my career, I believed that promotion would confirm my identity as a scientist. Today, I recognise the opposite. My identity as a scientist enabled me to persist until promotion eventually arrived. Scientific curiosity, commitment to environmental research, dedication to students, and belief in the value of knowledge existed independently of institutional recognition. Promotion acknowledged these qualities but did not create them.

This journey also reinforced an ecological lesson that has quietly accompanied much of my scientific career. Ecosystems rarely recover immediately following disturbance. Recovery occurs gradually through adaptation, persistence, and the restoration of functional relationships. Human resilience follows remarkably similar principles. Academic setbacks may disturb confidence, but they need not destroy purpose. When individuals continue learning, adapting, and contributing, periods of disappointment often become periods of growth.

If this paper offers a single message, it is this: delayed recognition

should never be mistaken for diminished value. Academic titles are important because they acknowledge professional achievement, but they are not the source of scientific integrity or intellectual curiosity. These qualities develop long before promotion and continue long afterwards. Ultimately, the most enduring achievement of my academic journey was not only becoming a full professor. It was becoming the person capable of continuing the journey until that day finally arrived.

Looking back today, I no longer remember my career primarily through three promotion applications. Instead, I remember a scientist who almost gave up after repeated disappointment but chose, one ordinary day at a time, to continue believing in science. In retrospect, that decision was perhaps the most important achievement of all.

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The author declares that generative artificial intelligence tools were used in a supportive capacity during the preparation of this manuscript. These tools assisted with language refinement, structural organisation, and stylistic clarity of the text. All ideas, interpretations, reflections, and conclusions presented in this paper are the author's own and are grounded in personal experience and scholarly judgment. The author retains full responsibility for the content, accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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