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Boredom in the Work of Scientists

Science (in the broad sense of either natural sciences or social sciences and humanities) is frequently associated with passion, curiosity and mission and is believed to require dedication, devotion and calling. However, realities of everyday work in the nowadays, rationalized, parametrical university reveal another, more negative aspects of performing this profession. Scientists, aside from abovementioned positive emotions and attitudes, experience also negative states like boredom, frustration, dissatisfaction, which might eventuate even in burn out syndrome (cynicism, disengagement, decreased efficacy) and seriously influence the process of ‘doing science’.

The presentation aims to diagnose main causes and give examples of boredom in scientific work as well as show significance of that socially-neglected emotion for scientific endeavour. The paper is based on qualitative research among academic staff from one of the main Polish universities. The methods employed include individual in-depth interviews with scientists, participant observation during staff meetings, university classes and scientific conferences and auto-ethnography - scrutinising researcher’s own experience as a scholar. The study spans most of the faculties of the University and embraces main activities of employed academic staff, especially, researching, sharing results (publication process and scientific conferences), and bureaucratic duties.