

Alumni Feature: Juliane Martin, Assistant Consultant at Boston Consulting Group

When I started my PhD at DANDRITE, I would have never thought that it would lead me to where I am now. I was certain, I would stay in academia. Yet, today, I'm in Copenhagen, about to start my new job as an Assistant Consultant at Boston Consulting Group. As a consultant, I will provide strategic advice to companies of various industries.

I often get the question, what this has got to do with my education, molecular biology. Frankly, nothing. But it got to do with who I am as a person and my hitherto made experiences (inside and outside of work). So, never underestimate your soft skills!

My experiences during my PhD, specifically my personal development, helped me to understand where my strengths lie and how I would like to use these at work. So, if I would have to give advice to young researchers, it would be to pause once in a while and reflect on your current situation. Is this still where you want to be in life? What do you like most at your current position? What does your work environment need to comprise in order for you to thrive? I asked myself exactly these questions at the end of my PhD, and they were a good starting point to think about my skills, strengths and needs. I realized that what I liked most about my PhD was the steep learning curve, structuring and discussing projects (independent of whether it was my own or other's), and the constant trouble-shooting. I also realized that I prefer to work in a team, and that I love to be an active member of a community. Especially, for the latter, DANDRITE provided the necessary freedom to propose and implement my ideas. I think my involvement in Young DANDRITE (YoDa) and co-founding the rainbow club were crucial turning points in my career. Of course, the above-mentioned attributes are important in science, but all of them are also highly valued and nurtured in my current position. So, a second advice I would give is to look outside the box. As scientists, we don't always see or know about the doors actually open to us. And industry can be surprising flexible and has space for many qualities and personalities.

After I identified my qualities, I took advantage of the career services offered by Aarhus University to narrow down my next career step. Specifically, I went to a career fair and to career counselling, which then put me into contact with people who already accomplished what I desired, i.e. transitioning from academia to consulting. I talked to at least one employee of each company I applied to. This gave me a much better understanding of the job, its requirements, challenges and perspectives. It also gave me the opportunity of a first glance at the company's atmosphere and values. The latter is an often overseen, but crucial criteria. Only if you and your employer (company or public institution) are a good fit, can your potential be completely unlocked. In all of my interviews, 50% of the time were spent on getting to know me as a person and evaluating my fit for the company. The remaining 50% were then used to test my skills.

I know my career choice looks unusual from the outside. But in retrospect, it completely makes sense to me. So, the last advice I would like to give here is: be confident about your own skills and personality traits!

By Juliane Martin