

LEARNING CORNER

PROF. NWARU'S CAREER NAVIGATOR

Series 1: The Art of Career Time and Timing

Seizing *kairos*: the courage to act on career-defining moments

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ABSTRACT

The second paper in the series, Art of Career Time and Timing, within Prof. Nwaru's Career Navigator, explored career *kairos* recognition and discussed the four signs through which *kairos* can manifest and discerned. While recognizing *kairos* is an important step in navigating academic careers, recognition alone is insufficient. Without action, *kairos* remains suspended as unrealized possibility. In this third paper of the series, we shift focus from recognizing to seizing *kairos*, examining what it takes to act when timing is narrow, evidence is incomplete, and outcomes are uncertain. Drawing on reflective analysis grounded in my personal *kairos* stories presented in the second paper, the current paper explores the fragility and fluidity of *kairos* and the risks inherent in responding to it. *Kairos* moments disrupt linear career logic, often appearing "too early" or "out of order," and are marked by an asymmetry between inner clarity and external validation. They involve high stakes, irreversible commitments, and relational risk, and demand sustained, embodied engagement rather than detached deliberation. Across these conditions, courage emerges as the central enabling force that converts recognized *kairos* into lived transformation. Courage is understood not as fearlessness or impulsivity, but as the capacity to commit and act under uncertainty, before confirmation arrives. The paper argues that academic trajectories are not reshaped by insight alone, but by courageous actions taken within narrow windows of opportunity, through which *kairos* is transformed from a fleeting moment into a lasting turning point. The paper concludes with practical frameworks for preparing to act on *kairos*: cultivating discernment, practicing smaller acts of courage, building supportive mentors, maintaining readiness, weighing sacrifices realistically, and acting swiftly once conviction is clear. Ultimately, the destiny of *kairos* is transformation. Seized with courage, it accelerates growth and reshapes identity. Missed through hesitation, it becomes a haunting "what if." Acting on *kairos* is thus both the risk and the reward of a life lived fully in step with opportunity.

KEYWORDS:

Academic career development, Courage, Decision-making, Embodied engagement, Inner discernment, *Kairos*, Sacrifice, Risk

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“In the end, we only regret the chances we didn’t take.” - Lewis Carroll

INTRODUCTION: FROM RECOGNIZING TO SEIZING *KAIROS*

Recognizing *kairos* is a necessary first step in navigating an academic career¹, but it is not sufficient. Insight without action leaves opportunity suspended in possibility. While the preceding paper¹ focused on how *kairos* can be recognized and discerned—through the inner witness, inspiration to act, external testimony, and alignment between skills and opportunity—the current paper turns to a more demanding question: how and what does it take to seize *kairos* once it is recognized?

Kairos, by its very nature, is fluid, time-bound, and fragile. It does not wait for complete certainty, perfect readiness, or universal approval. Unlike *chronos*, which unfolds predictably and rewards patience, *kairos* appears fleetingly and calls for decisiveness. The moment may open quietly, but it does not remain open indefinitely. To hesitate too long is often to lose it altogether. Thus, the central challenge of *kairos* is not epistemic—knowing that the moment has arrived—but existential: having the courage to act when the ground is still shifting.

Seizing *kairos* inevitably involves risk. Acting on inner conviction before external confirmation exposes scholars to rejection, misunderstanding, and the possibility of failure. It may require leaving secure positions, disrupting carefully laid plans, or disappointing respected mentors and collaborators. In such moments, the cost of action is visible and immediate, while the cost of inaction is subtle and deferred. Yet it is precisely within this asymmetry that courage becomes indispensable commodity in the career *kairos* journey. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to move forward despite it, trusting alignment more than assurance.

This third paper in the series, **Art of Career Time and Timing**, within **Prof. Nwaru’s Career Navigator**, argues that courage is *kairos* antidote, the activating force that converts recognized *kairos* into lived transformation.

Without courage, the signs of *kairos*—no matter how clearly perceived—will remain inert. Courage enables commitment under uncertainty, decisiveness amid ambiguity, and fidelity to conviction when outcomes are unknown. It allows scholars to act while evidence is incomplete and to accept responsibility for choices that cannot be undone.

Building on the framework of recognition developed in the second paper of the series, this paper examines seizing *kairos* as a practice rather than a personality trait. It explores how courage is cultivated, how risk is assessed without paralysis, and how scholars can learn to act decisively in moments that resist linear logic. By drawing on my own lived experiences presented in the second paper, integrated in a reflective analysis, this paper aims to show that *kairos* is not seized through impulsivity or bravado, but through prepared attentiveness matched with courageous action.

Ultimately, if recognizing *kairos* is about seeing clearly, seizing *kairos* is about stepping forward. It is where discernment meets decision, and where potential becomes a reality. This paper therefore shifts the focus from perception to practice, from knowing the moment to inhabiting it. In doing so, it affirms a central claim: **careers are not reshaped by insight alone, but by courageous response to the right moment at the right time.** This paper is therefore a journey into living your *kairos*.

SEIZING *KAIROS*: WHAT IT MEANS

To seize a *kairos* moment is to act decisively when a meaningful career opportunity presents itself, even though conditions may remain imperfect and certainty is incomplete. *Kairos* moments do not announce themselves with guarantees, detailed roadmaps, or full assurance of success. Instead, they appear as time-sensitive openings that invite response while resisting complete rational closure. They are not suited to prolonged deliberation or indefinite postponement; they call for movement. To seize *kairos* is to recognize that timing matters as much as talent, preparation, or ambition, and that delay—however cautious or justified—can quietly allow possibility to crystallize into regret.

At its core, seizing *kairos* involves the integration of alignment and action. Alignment refers to an inner recognition that a particular moment “fits” you: your skills, preparation, values, and emerging direction converge in a way that feels both demanding and right. This recognition is often accompanied by a sense of disproportion between inner clarity and external evidence. The opportunity may not yet be fully endorsed by institutions, peers, or conventional metrics of success. Action, therefore, becomes the outward embodiment of this inward discernment. It may take the form of applying for a role, accepting an unexpected offer, leaving a familiar position, committing to a risky collaboration, or stepping forward while the window remains open. *Kairos* does not reward passive agreement or silent conviction; it requires embodied decision that translates insight into motion.

Seizing *kairos* also entails the acceptance of risk and sacrifice. Rarely does the right moment arrive without costs. Comfort may need to be relinquished, approval risked, relationships tested, or security temporarily surrendered. These sacrifices are not incidental but constitutive of *kairos* itself. Yet acting on *kairos* should not be confused with reckless impulsivity. Rather, it is bold action informed by vigilance, preparation, ethical reflection, and sustained attentiveness to one’s inner witness. Those who seize *kairos* understand that while outcomes can never be fully controlled, timing can be honored. Ultimately, seizing *kairos* transforms fragile, fleeting moments into defining milestones. When met with courage and discernment, such moments can reorient careers, reshape identities, and redirect the trajectory of a life—not because success was guaranteed, but because the moment was faithfully answered.

NATURE OF KAIROS MOMENTS

Kairos moments are decisive points in time when preparation, opportunity, and calling converge. They are not ordinary stretches of time but brief, opportune windows that carry disproportionate weight in shaping the direction of a career or a life. Unlike *chronos*, which unfolds steadily and predictably, *kairos* arrives unexpectedly, often clothed in the ordinary—a conversation, an email, an invitation, or an inner stirring that quietly says, *this matters*.

One defining feature of *kairos* is its **fragility**. *Kairos* moments are short-lived. They open, linger briefly, and then close. They rarely announce themselves loudly, and they do not wait until we feel fully ready. Because they are subtle, they are easily overlooked or dismissed. A single delay, a moment of doubt, or an attempt to seek perfect certainty can cause the window to pass. When *kairos* is missed, it often does not return in the same form or with the same power. In sum, *Kairos* moments are fragile because they are narrow (short-lived), subtle (easily missed), vulnerable (drowned in distractions, doubts and fears), and may not come back again (**Figure 1**).

***Kairos* Moments Disrupt Linear Career Logic**

Kairos moments rarely aligned with the expected sequencing of academic careers. From my personal stories, by conventional standards, one may reason that I applied “too early,” moved “too soon,” and committed “too decisively.” Each decision appeared to violate the implicit rules of academic pacing, where progression is assumed to be cumulative, linear, and externally verifiable—measured by years spent, publications accrued, or positions held. *Kairos* moments operate according to a different temporal logic—not often the orderly, quantitative time of calendars, milestones, and career ladders—but a *qualitative time*, in which readiness is sensed internally before it can be demonstrated externally. In these moments, preparedness is not the result of accumulation alone, but of alignment. This disruption brought about by *kairos* can create tension. Acting within *kairos* often feels premature when judged by institutional norms, yet delayed when measured against inner clarity. The risk, therefore, is not merely professional miscalculation, but misalignment—either by acting too cautiously and missing the moment, or by waiting for external legitimacy that arrives only after the window has closed. *Kairos* thus reframes career progression from a linear ascent to a series of inflection points. It invites scholars to recognize that meaningful advancement does not always follow predictable sequences, and that some of the most consequential decisions occur at moments that appear, by chronological standards, “out of order.”

Why Kairos Moments Are Fragile



Figure 1. Few reasons why *kairos* moments are fragile and fluid



Figure 2. Lessons deduced from the nature of *kairos* moments

From the four personal stories I shared in paper 2, six sets of lessons can be deduced that highlight the nature

and inherent characteristics of career *kairos* moments (**Figure 2**):

***Kairos* Carries Asymmetry Between Inner Clarity and External Evidence**

One of the most distinctive and demanding features of *kairos* moments in my own career experience was the pronounced asymmetry between inner clarity and external evidence. In these moments, conviction arrived fully formed within me, while confirmation from the outside world lagged far behind—or was entirely absent. The inner witness spoke with precision and insistence long before peers, supervisors, committees, or institutions could see, affirm, or validate the direction I was taking. This imbalance created a unique tension. On the one hand, my internal signal was unmistakable: a calm yet compelling sense of rightness that did not fluctuate with doubt or depend on persuasion. On the other hand, the external indicators that typically legitimize academic decisions—publications, senior endorsement, institutional signals, or consensus—were either weak, ambiguous, or missing altogether. Acting at this stage meant stepping forward without the usual safeguards of approval or proof. This asymmetry is deeply unsettling, particularly in academic cultures that privilege evidence, peer validation, and cumulative credentials. The risk is not merely practical, but psychological: when inner certainty lacks external reinforcement, hesitation can easily masquerade as prudence, and caution can harden into paralysis. In this sense, the asymmetry between inner clarity and external evidence is not a flaw of *kairos* but its defining signature. Those who wait for symmetry may feel safe, but they may often arrive after the moment has passed.

***Kairos* Involves High Stakes and Irreversibility**

Kairos moments are distinguished by the weight of what is at stake and the irreversible nature of the actions they demand. In each of my personal stories, responding to *kairos* required decisions that could not easily be undone: submitting applications that exposed one to judgment, relocating across national borders, declining attractive offers, or accepting tenured positions that irrevocably shaped future trajectories. These were not provisional steps or low-cost experiments; they were commitments with lasting professional, relational, and personal consequences. What makes *kairos* particularly demanding is that it collapses neutrality. There is no safe middle ground from which to observe without consequence. To act is to accept responsibility

for an uncertain future; to delay is often to forfeit the moment altogether. In this way, inaction is itself a decision—one that silently closes doors while preserving the illusion of safety. In short, *kairos* does not invite cautious experimentation but demands wholehearted engagement. Its power lies precisely in the fact that it cannot be safely tested. It must be seized—or it passes.

***Kairos* Often Carries Relational Risk**

The personal stories I narrated highlight the fact that career *kairos* moments rarely affect only the individual involved in the journey; rather they reverberate through relationships that have been built over time. Each of my *kairos* decisions carried the potential to strain professional ties. Supervisors could feel disappointed or unsettled, colleagues confused by unexpected moves, and mentors surprised by choices that could disrupt carefully imagined trajectories. These moments challenge implicit expectations of loyalty, continuity, and predictability that often underpin academic relationships. The relational risk lay not merely in disagreement, but in misunderstanding. Acting on *kairos* often means making decisions before outcomes were visible, and before one could fully explain or justify them in terms that others might readily accept. What feels internally coherent could appear externally premature, abrupt, or even ungrateful. This gap between inner clarity and external perception often creates vulnerability: the possibility of being misread, judged, or temporarily distanced by those whose opinions mattered. Thus, relational risk is not an incidental feature of *kairos*; it is part of its cost. When *kairos* is authentic and acted upon with integrity, relationships are not ultimately destroyed by it—they are tested, recalibrated, and, more often than not, renewed on more truthful grounds.

***Kairos* Demands Embodied Engagement**

In my personal experiences, the recognition of *kairos* was never sufficient on its own. Insight did not translate automatically into transformation. Each *kairos* moment demanded embodied engagement—a full investment of attention, effort, and emotional presence. Once the moment was recognized, it called for intense focus, sustained work, and a willingness to carry the psychological and relational weight of the decision. During *kairos* periods, I experienced an unusual

convergence of energy, clarity, and flow. Ideas emerged with ease, concentration deepened, and action felt both urgent and purposeful. This heightened state was not accidental; it signalled alignment between inner conviction and outward action. *Kairos*, in this sense, was not merely something I observed or interpreted cognitively—it was something I *entered*. The body responded through heightened alertness and stamina, the mind through coherence and decisiveness, and the spirit through a deep sense of rightness, even in the presence of fear.

This embodied quality also reveals why courage is indispensable in *kairos*. Acting in *kairos* requires more than intellectual assent; it requires the willingness to commit oneself fully before outcomes are guaranteed. Emotional exposure, physical effort, and mental endurance become part of the process. The risk is not abstract one—it is felt. Fear, doubt, and anticipation coexist with clarity, and courage is exercised not once, but continuously, as the moment unfolds. Thus, seizing *kairos* is not a single act of bravery, but a sustained, embodied response to a fleeting opportunity. It is through this full-bodied engagement that *kairos* moves from recognition to realization, transforming a moment in time into a lasting turning point.

***Kairos* Does Not Mean the Absence of Fear**

In my own experiences, *kairos* moments were rarely accompanied by comfort or emotional ease. On the contrary, they were often marked by profound uncertainty and an unmistakable presence of fear. This fear, however, should not be interpreted as a negative signal or as evidence that the moment is misaligned. Rather, it is an intrinsic feature of *kairos* itself. Because *kairos* moments are fluid, time-bound, and carry irreversible consequences, they naturally disrupt familiar structures of security and predictability. Importantly, this fear coexists with—rather than contradicts—inner certainty. While the external future remains unclear and outcomes cannot be guaranteed, the internal conviction associated with *kairos* remains stable and persistent. The tension between fear and certainty is not a flaw in discernment but a defining characteristic of *kairos*. Fear arises from the risks involved: the possibility of failure, loss of status, relational strain, or misinterpretation by others. Inner certainty, by contrast, emerges from alignment—

between values, preparation, opportunity, and timing. Recognizing that fear is part of *kairos* reframes how such moments should be interpreted. Instead of waiting for fear to disappear before acting, seizing *kairos* requires accepting fear as a companion rather than an obstacle. The absence of fear would, in many cases, indicate not *kairos* but comfort or routine. What distinguishes *kairos* is precisely its capacity to stretch the individual beyond established boundaries.

COURAGE: THE X-FACTOR IN SEIZING *KAIROS*

Because *kairos* moments are fleeting, fragile, and irreversible, courage becomes the necessary antidote to hesitation and paralysis. *Kairos* disrupts linear career logic, appearing “too early” or “out of order,” and creates a sharp asymmetry between inner clarity and external evidence. High stakes, relational risk, and the absence of guarantees intensify this fragility, leaving no safe middle ground between action and loss. Insight alone is insufficient; *kairos* demands embodied engagement and decisive commitment before confirmation arrives. Fear often accompanies these moments, not as a warning but as a signal of significance. Courage enables movement amid uncertainty, transforming a narrow window of opportunity into lasting change.

Courage has long occupied a central place in human affairs because it enables action in conditions where certainty is unavailable. Classical philosophy defined courage not as rashness or fearlessness, but as the capacity to act rightly in the face of risk and uncertainty². Modern existential thought further emphasizes courage as the willingness to commit oneself despite incomplete knowledge and uncontrollable outcomes³. In this sense, courage is neither impulsive nor reckless; it is the virtue that allows conviction to be translated into action when guarantees are largely absent. Across moral, professional, and existential domains, courage functions as the bridge between insight and enactment, making transformation possible when clarity alone is insufficient. This function of courage becomes especially critical in *kairos* moments because of their fragile and fleeting nature. *Kairos* resists standard timing metrics and formal indicators of readiness. It does not wait for complete

evidence or institutional consensus. Instead, it demands trust in a readiness that is felt internally before it can be externally validated. The narrowness and irreversibility of *kairos* explain why courage is indispensable. To seize such moments requires acting without full assurance, stepping forward while uncertainty persists, and accepting responsibility for decisions that cannot yet be justified by shared metrics or precedents⁴.

Courage therefore bridges the gap between recognition and action. Without courage, conviction remains internal and unrealized; with courage, conviction becomes destiny. *Kairos* rewards those who are willing to act decisively within a narrow window, trusting that the cost of hesitation may exceed the risk of boldness. Importantly, this form of courage is not primarily about dramatic action, but about sustaining trust in the inner witness long enough to move forward—often before others can see what one sees. Courage does not reject external validation; it precedes it. In *kairos* moments, confirmation reliably follows action rather than authorizing it⁵. Seizing *kairos* thus requires the courage to act *in the gap*—to stand in the tension between conviction and confirmation and to move forward before the world catches up. In this way, *kairos* inverts the conventional order of academic and professional decision-making: clarity comes first, evidence later. To act on *kairos* is to tolerate being “right too early,” to move while the path is still invisible to others, and to accept accountability for choices that cannot yet be defended by consensus or institutional reassurance.

Because *kairos* unfolds within uncertainty and does not wait for perfect clarity, courage becomes its necessary counterpart. Courage enables commitment in the absence of guarantees and movement in the presence of risk. It sustains action when outcomes are unknown and when the cost of being wrong feels high. Without courage, the irreversibility of *kairos* induces paralysis; with courage, that same irreversibility becomes the force that converts fleeting opportunity into decisive change⁶. In the relational domain, where *kairos* decisions often disrupt expectations, courage becomes indispensable not as defiance, but as relational resilience. Courage allows one to act without

hostility, to move forward without severing respect, and to trust that integrity will eventually speak louder than immediate explanation. It requires accepting short-term relational discomfort while holding faith in longer-term alignment. Over time, coherence of values, outcomes, and sustained collaboration often restore equilibrium—sometimes deepening mutual respect rather than diminishing it.

Ultimately, the uncertainty inherent in *kairos* renders courage not incidental, but central. Courage is not the elimination of uncertainty, but the capacity to act faithfully in its presence. It enables decisive commitment when emotional reassurance is absent and outcomes remain indeterminate. Without courage, *kairos* remains recognized but unrealized—an insight unconverted into transformation. To seize *kairos* is therefore to move forward with clarity of conviction even when justification lags behind. In this way, uncertainty does not negate *kairos*; it underscores its significance, marking the depth of the moment that calls for action.

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF COURAGE REQUIRED TO SEIZE *KAIROS*

Courage in *kairos* moments is rarely singular or dramatic. It is layered, quiet, and exercised across multiple dimensions rather than in one decisive act. Responding to *kairos* requires more than recognizing an opportunity; it requires the capacity to move forward when clarity is partial, timing is unconventional, and outcomes are still unfolding. *Kairos* seldom present itself as a fully formed path. Instead, it calls for courage that operates simultaneously within the self, in relation to others, in engagement with practical realities, and in trust toward deeper meaning (**Figure 3**). When one of these dimensions is underdeveloped or ignored, the moment may be acknowledged yet remain unrealized. Understanding courage as multidimensional helps explain why *kairos* moments are so fragile and why responding to them often unfolds as a process rather than an instant decision. It is through the alignment of these different forms of courage that *kairos* is not only recognized but embodied and lived.



Figure 3. Four dimensions of courage that operates in seizing *kairos* moments

Personal Courage: Overcoming the Self

Personal courage in *kairos* moments, as I have experienced it, is the inward capacity to act despite internal resistance. It confronts the most intimate barriers to action: feelings of inadequacy, impostor syndrome, fear of premature exposure, and the persistent belief that I am “not ready yet.” This dimension of courage does not deny the reality of limited experience or incomplete preparation. Rather, it reframes readiness for me—not as perfection, but as sufficiency. *Kairos* rarely wait until one feels fully confident; it arrives when growth has reached a threshold, even if self-doubt still lingers. Personal courage requires one to trust their preparation more than their hesitation. It asks one to step forward while still feeling unfinished, allowing action to precede confidence rather than waiting for confidence to appear first. I have learned that the greatest threat at this stage is often self-sabotage disguised as prudence: postponing action in the name of realism or hiding behind conventional timelines that promise safety but quietly delay destiny.

This dimension of courage was vividly present in my first *kairos* encounter—the PhD funding application. By every external metric, it was “too early” for me to apply. I was only nine months into my doctorate, with no publications and mostly preparatory work behind me. Conventional wisdom suggested waiting, and even my supervisor framed the application as a learning exercise rather than a competitive attempt. Yet internally, something decisive occurred. The inner witness did not whisper uncertainty; it spoke with clarity and urgency. What followed was not reckless optimism, but focused action fueled by conviction. My inability to procrastinate, the spontaneous formation of ideas, and the intensity with which I crafted the application all signaled personal courage in action. I trusted that my preparation was enough—even if incomplete—and allowed action to validate that trust. The successful outcome that followed later confirmed what personal courage had already made possible: readiness is often recognized only after we dare to act.

Relational Courage: Facing the Opinions of Others

Relational courage, for me, has meant acting faithfully to my *kairos* even when doing so risks misunderstanding, disappointment, or disapproval from others. Academic careers unfold within dense networks of relationships—supervisors, mentors, collaborators, and institutions—each carrying expectations. Acting on a *kairos* moment can disrupt these expectations, creating tension between loyalty and calling. This form of courage is not about rejecting relationships or dismissing others' perspectives. Rather, it involves discerning when external voices, though well-intentioned, cannot substitute for inner clarity. Relational courage accepts that growth may temporarily strain bonds and that being misunderstood is sometimes the cost of being aligned. I have also learned that approval often arrives *after* action, not before.

This dimension of courage became particularly clear during my first postdoctoral transition abroad. After completing my PhD, staying on with my supervisor offered stability, continuity, and reassurance. She had plans for me and wanted to keep me longer. From the outside, staying appeared wise. Yet internally, the signal was unmistakable: my *kairos* lay elsewhere. Acting on that conviction required relational courage—the courage to move forward without universal affirmation. When a former mentor unexpectedly mentioned an open postdoctoral position, the alignment became immediately clear. Although the role was only for one year and came with uncertainty, I recognized it instantly as my *kairos*. Accepting it meant stepping away from a supportive environment and potentially disappointing someone who believed in me. Still, I chose growth over comfort, calling over consensus. In hindsight, the outcome justified the courage: intellectual expansion, global exposure, and accelerated growth followed. But at the moment of decision, none of this was guaranteed. Relational courage made space for *kairos* by allowing me to prioritize destiny without severing respect. It enabled me to step into a broader horizon—one that later validated the risk this courage required.

Practical Courage: Navigating Change Without Paralysis

Practical courage is the capacity to confront the concrete demands of change without allowing them to become excuses for inaction. *Kairos* moments often arrive wrapped in logistical complexity: financial uncertainty, relocation, family disruption, administrative hurdles, and professional transitions. Practical courage neither ignores these realities nor magnifies them into insurmountable barriers. Instead, it engages them responsibly, step by step. This dimension of courage resists the illusion that all risks must be resolved before action is taken. It pushes one to ask pragmatic questions: *What is the next viable step? What can be managed now, and what must be entrusted to time?* Practical courage acknowledges uncertainty while refusing paralysis. It transforms ambiguity into movement.

My decision to apply for the fellowship that ultimately brought me back home is a clear embodiment of this courage. On the surface, remaining in my prestigious postdoctoral role abroad made professional sense. Yet emotionally and practically, being separated from my young children was unsustainable. The toll of distance, repeated travel, and emotional strain created an inner tension that demanded resolution. Seeking change was not simple. Leaving early could raise concerns about loyalty, reputation, and professional optics. Applying for a highly competitive fellowship meant risking rejection while navigating sensitive relational terrain. Still, when the opportunity appeared, the alignment between my skills, my research trajectory, and my personal needs was undeniable. Practical courage manifested in how I acted: preparing quietly, seeking selective mentorship, refining every detail, and managing the transition deliberately rather than impulsively. Winning the fellowship did not merely recognize my potential—it enabled structural change. But that outcome depended on courage that engaged logistics without surrendering to them. Practical courage ensured that *kairos* became lived reality, not merely recognized possibility.

Spiritual or Existential Courage: Trusting the Inner Witness

Spiritual or existential courage has been, for me, the deepest and most subtle dimension of courage in *kairos*. It involves trusting the inner witness when external evidence is incomplete, timing feels improbable, and outcomes remain uncertain. This courage does not demand absolute certainty; it demands fidelity—to intuition, to meaning, to a sense of calling that cannot yet be fully explained.

In my experience, *kairos* moments often announce themselves internally before they are confirmed externally. Existential courage is the willingness to treat that inner signal as trustworthy rather than illusory. It accepts that understanding may follow action, not precede it. This courage is less about control and more about surrender—to alignment, timing, and purpose.

My encounter with the tenured position exemplifies this dimension of courage with striking clarity. What began as an ordinary email became extraordinary the moment the inner witness spoke: *this is yours*. There was no rational basis for certainty—only recognition. I acted immediately, responding with clarity and openness. What followed unfolded with uncanny coherence: the director's swift response, the natural flow of conversations, repeated invitations, and a deepening sense of fit. Even the silence my colleague received felt meaningful in contrast. Each step strengthened my trust in the unfolding process, even as the stakes grew higher. Accepting the position required letting go of another promising path and declining encouragement to stay where I was. That decision demanded existential courage—the courage to trust alignment over attachment and destiny over comfort. In retrospect, the years that followed confirmed what the inner witness had already declared. This *kairos* was not merely a career move; it was a convergence of preparation, timing, and meaning. Courage transformed recognition into commitment—and commitment into a life-defining reality.

In summary, courage in *kairos* moments is not a single act of boldness but a convergence of four interrelated dimensions that together enable timely action. **Personal courage** confronts internal fears and the illusion of unpreparedness, allowing action despite incompleteness. **Relational courage** accepts the risk

of misunderstanding or disappointment from others, prioritizing alignment over approval. **Practical courage** engages the real constraints of change—logistics, uncertainty, and responsibility—without allowing them to become barriers to movement. **Spiritual or existential courage** anchors the whole response by trusting the inner witness when evidence is partial and outcomes unclear. When these dimensions align, courage becomes not reckless daring but faithful responsiveness—transforming fleeting moments of possibility into lived trajectories of growth and purpose.

ACTING ON *KAIROS* ALSO REQUIRES SACRIFICE

One dimension of *kairos* that is often understated—but consistently present in my experience—is sacrifice. Acting on *kairos* is rarely cost-neutral. It almost always requires letting go of something that is genuinely valuable, not something easily discarded. These sacrifices are not dramatic renunciations; they are quiet, consequential choices that reallocate loyalty, energy, and commitment. In my career journey, every decisive *kairos* moment demanded that I loosen my grip on comfort, approval, security, or timing (**Figure 4**). Without this willingness to sacrifice, *kairos* would have remained an insight rather than a lived reality.

Sacrifice of Comfort

Many *kairos* moments have required me to step away from what was familiar and comfortable. Comfort has often appeared in the form of a supportive supervisor, a stimulating environment, or a role in which I was already known and valued. Staying would have been reasonable. Yet *kairos* consistently pulled me toward the unfamiliar. Leaving the country after my PhD, and later leaving an outstanding postdoctoral environment abroad, were not easy decisions. Each move meant relinquishing routines, institutional familiarity, and a sense of mastery. Comfort sustains the present, but I have learned that *kairos* calls me into the future. Growth, in my experience, has never occurred at the center of comfort—it has occurred at its edges.

Sacrifice of Approval

Acting on *kairos* has also required me to risk the approval of people whose opinions mattered deeply to me. Mentors had plans for me. Supervisors encouraged

me to stay. Colleagues expected continuity. Choosing otherwise sometimes felt like disappointing those who had invested in me. When I left my postdoctoral position to pursue a fellowship that would reunite my family, and later when I declined encouragement to

remain in a strong research environment in favor of a tenured position elsewhere, I had to accept that not everyone would understand my choices. I learned that *kairos* does not wait for consensus. Approval, when it comes, often follows action rather than precedes it.



Figure 4. Types of sacrifices that manifest when seizing *kairos* moments

Sacrifice of Security

Security has been another recurring offering on the altar of *kairos*. Several of my pivotal decisions involved stepping into uncertainty: applying for competitive funding early in my PhD, accepting a one-year postdoctoral contract abroad, or relocating with no guarantee beyond the next step. These moments demanded that I trade short-term stability for long-term possibility. Acting on *kairos* meant trusting that

alignment and preparation would eventually yield coherence—even when immediate guarantees were absent. In hindsight, what felt risky proved formative. Security was not lost; it was deferred and later reconstituted at a higher level.

Sacrifice of Timing

Perhaps most subtly, *kairos* has required me to surrender my own sense of timing. Opportunities

arrived earlier than I felt ready for—such as the PhD funding application—or later than I expected, when fatigue or contentment tempted me to settle. In each case, acting on *kairos* meant releasing my preferred schedule and yielding to a larger, less predictable rhythm. I could not wait until everything aligned neatly with my plans. I had to trust that the moment itself carried its own authority. These sacrifices were costly, but they were never merely losses. They were investments. What I relinquished in the short term—comfort, approval, security, or control over timing—returned multiplied in growth, clarity, and fulfillment. The paradox of *kairos*, as I have lived and continue to live it, is this: to gain something truly greater, one must first be willing to release something genuinely good.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACTING ON KAIROS

Recognizing *kairos* is only the first step; translating recognition into action requires intentional practice. As already said many times in this paper, *kairos* moments are often fleeting and easily lost if one is unprepared to respond. Over time, I learned that acting on *kairos* is not a matter of instinct alone, but the result of cultivated habits, disciplined reflection, and deliberate readiness. The framework that follows distills practical insights drawn from my own experiences of navigating career-defining *kairos* moments (**Figure 5**). It is not offered as a formula, but as a set of guiding practices that increase the likelihood that when *kairos* appears, it can be met with clarity, courage, and decisive action rather than hesitation or delay.



Figure 5. A practical framework for acting on *kairos* moments and navigating career-defining moments

Cultivate Inner Discernment

In my experience, recognizing *kairos* begins with cultivating inner discernment. *Kairos* rarely announces itself loudly; it is often sensed as a persistent clarity, a quiet conviction that remains stable over time rather

than fluctuating with emotion. I learned to attend carefully to these signals through deliberate reflection, journaling, and periods of mental stillness. Writing allowed patterns to emerge—recurring ideas, sustained energy, and a sense of rightness that did not depend on

external validation. In several key moments of my career, including early funding applications and major transitions, the inner witness became clear long before evidence appeared. Without intentional discernment, such signals could easily be dismissed as premature or unrealistic. Developing this capacity helped me differentiate between impulsive desire and genuine alignment, making recognition of *kairos* more reliable and less reactive.

Practice Small Acts of Courage

Large *kairos* moments draw upon habits formed long before they appear. I found that practicing small acts of courage prepared me for larger decisions when timing mattered. These acts included applying for opportunities without guaranteed success, voicing ideas before they felt fully refined, and making choices that stretched my sense of competence incrementally. Each small act reduced my dependence on certainty and increased my tolerance for ambiguity. Over time, courage became less episodic and more habitual. When larger *kairos* moments arrived—such as relocating internationally or changing institutions—I was not encountering uncertainty for the first time. Instead, I was extending a familiar pattern of acting with incomplete information. This gradual training made decisive action feel grounded rather than impulsive, and it allowed courage to function as a practiced capacity rather than an extraordinary demand.

Build a Council of Mentors and Allies

Although *kairos* is first recognized internally, I learned that discernment is strengthened through selective external counsel. Over time, I intentionally built a small circle of mentors and allies who understood my capabilities, values, and long-term aspirations. These individuals did not make decisions for me, nor did they always agree with my conclusions. Instead, they provide informed perspectives, ask clarifying questions, and occasionally offer affirmation at critical moments. In my experience, such counsel was most valuable when it complemented inner clarity rather than replacing it. During pivotal transitions—such as applying for competitive funding or considering major relocations—trusted mentors helped me assess alignment realistically while respecting my inner witness. This council functioned not as a source of permission, but as a sounding board that strengthened

confidence and reduced isolation during consequential decisions.

Maintain Readiness Through Preparation

Kairos favors preparedness. In each significant moment of my career, the ability to act decisively depended on sustained preparation undertaken long before the opportunity emerged. I learned to maintain readiness by keeping my academic profile current, refining my research focus, and continuously developing skills even during periods without visible opportunity. This approach allowed me to respond quickly when timing mattered—whether drafting a funding application early in my PhD, accepting a postdoctoral offer abroad, or expressing interest in a senior position with little notice. Preparation did not eliminate risk or guarantee success, but it removed delay as a limiting factor. When *kairos* appeared, I was able to act without scrambling. Readiness transformed timing from an obstacle into an advantage.

Weigh Sacrifice Honestly

Acting on *kairos* consistently required sacrifice, and I learned the importance of acknowledging this reality honestly. Each major decision involved tangible costs—leaving supportive environments, disrupting family routines, accepting temporary instability, or risking professional misunderstanding. Rather than minimizing these sacrifices, I found it essential to name them clearly and evaluate them soberly. At the same time, I learned not to idolize security. Remaining in familiar roles often felt safer, but over time, misalignment carried its own cost. Honest cost-benefit reflection allowed me to act with clarity rather than denial. Sacrifice, in this sense, became not a deterrent but a diagnostic: when the cost felt meaningful, it often indicated that the decision itself carried significance.

Take Decisive, Aligned Action

In my experience, *kairos* loses potency when action is delayed. Once alignment became clear, the most effective response was decisive movement. This did not imply haste or recklessness, but commitment. Submitting the application, accepting the offer, or responding promptly to an opportunity often created momentum that uncertainty alone could not generate. Hesitation rarely added insight; alignment did. Acting decisively allowed events to unfold in ways that could

not have been predicted in advance. Each step clarified the next. Decisive action converted internal recognition into external reality, transforming *kairos* from an abstract insight into a lived experience.

Trust the Process Beyond Your Control

Finally, I learned that the full consequences of *kairos* unfold over time. Many benefits of my decisions were not immediately visible but emerged gradually through expanded networks, increased credibility, and long-term positioning. After acting, the task shifted from control to trust. Attempting to manage outcomes too tightly often undermined the very openness that *kairos* required. Trusting the process meant allowing alignment to mature, even when short-term results were ambiguous. Over time, patterns became visible that could not have been planned deliberately. *Kairos* did not simply resolve a moment; it reshaped a trajectory. Recognizing this longer arc allowed me to act without demanding immediate confirmation, confident that coherence would emerge with time.

LESSONS FROM ACTING ON KAIROS

***Kairos* Often Comes Disguised as Risk**

In my experience, *kairos* rarely appeared wrapped in convenience or certainty. It almost always presented itself as a risk—applying for funding too early, accepting a short-term postdoctoral contract abroad, leaving an excellent position for an uncertain fellowship, or responding immediately to an unsolicited tenured opportunity. Each moment required me to step away from something secure toward something undefined. What I have learned is that *kairos* does not eliminate risk; it reframes it. The greater risk was not moving, but staying still when alignment was already pointing elsewhere.

Courage Is the Bridge Between Insight and Outcome

Each *kairos* moment in my journey revealed that recognition alone has no transformative power. Insight without courage remains potential. I could clearly sense alignment and still choose inaction. What altered my trajectory was the willingness to act—submitting the application, accepting the offer, or stepping into

uncertainty before guarantees were available. Courage functioned as the bridge between inner conviction and external outcome. Without it, the inner witness would have remained a private intuition rather than a public turning point. My experiences showed me that *kairos* does not reward contemplation alone; it responds to movement. Acting did not eliminate uncertainty, but it allowed possibilities to unfold that would have remained inaccessible otherwise. Transformation occurred not at the moment of recognition, but at the moment of commitment. Without that step, *kairos* would have remained an intuition rather than a transformation. I learned that destiny does not reward recognition; it responds to movement.

Growth Often Requires Leaving “Good” Situations

One of the most counterintuitive lessons I learned is that growth often requires leaving situations that are objectively good. None of my major transitions were responses to failure, dissatisfaction, or crisis. On the contrary, I left supportive supervisors, strong research environments, and promising trajectories. These were places where I was doing well. Yet *kairos* was not calling me away from something broken; it was calling me forward toward something more aligned. This required a particular kind of courage—the courage to relinquish comfort, competence, and recognition. I learned that fulfillment does not always lie in improving what is already good, but in responding to a deeper sense of direction. Growth, in this sense, demanded trust that leaving success was not a mistake, but a necessary step toward a more fitting future.

Sacrifice Is Part of the Package

Each *kairos* moment in my journey demanded sacrifice. I gave up comfort, approval, security, or control over timing—sometimes all at once. Acting on *kairos* meant disappointing mentors, disrupting family routines, or leaving environments where I was already valued. None of these sacrifices were easy, and none were trivial. Yet I have learned that *kairos* never asks for something meaningless. What it requires, it replaces with something greater. The cost was real, but the return—growth, alignment, and fulfillment—consistently outweighed what I relinquished.



Figure 6. Summary of eight lessons learned from acting on *kairos*

Fear Is a Companion, Not a Disqualifier

Fear appeared consistently across all my *kairos* moments—fear of rejection, misinterpretation, loss, or regret. Yet I came to understand that fear did not invalidate these moments. Instead, its presence often signaled significance. *Kairos* stretched me beyond familiarity and predictability, and fear naturally accompanied that stretch. Waiting for fear to disappear would have meant remaining indefinitely in place. Through experience, I learned that fear is not evidence that a step is wrong; it is evidence that the step matters. Courage did not remove fear; it carried it forward. When acknowledged but not obeyed, fear became informative rather than paralyzing. It highlighted the importance of the decision without dictating it. Moving with fear, rather than against it, allowed me to act faithfully rather than cautiously.

Confirmation Builds Confidence

Although *kairos* often begins with an inner witness, I noticed that confirmation followed action.

Encouragement from mentors, unexpected affirmations, smooth unfolding of events, and repeated signs strengthened my confidence along the way. My supervisor's surprise at my funding success, a mentor's enthusiastic response to my fellowship application, or the immediate engagement from institutional leaders all served as confirmations. These signals did not initiate my courage, but they sustained it. I learned that *kairos* often clarifies itself progressively, rewarding movement with reassurance.

Kairos Accelerates Destiny

Looking back, the impact of acting on *kairos* far exceeded what I could have achieved through planning alone. Each decisive moment compressed time—opening doors, accelerating growth, and aligning opportunities in ways that effort alone could not have engineered. The PhD funding stabilized my trajectory early. The postdoctoral move expanded my intellectual reach. The fellowship realigned my professional and personal life. The tenured position anchored my long-

term future. *Kairos*, when acted upon, did not merely advance my career; it accelerated it in directions that are both purposeful and precise.

Over Time, *Kairos* Confirms Itself

The most reassuring lesson emerged only in retrospect. What initially required courage later revealed itself as coherence. With time, the outcomes of my decisions became clearer: growth compounded, opportunities aligned, and fulfillment deepened. What once felt risky began to make sense as part of a larger pattern. This retrospective clarity did not erase the uncertainty that preceded action, but it reframed it. Looking back, I see that the courage I exercised was not reckless; it was faithful to the moment. *Kairos* confirmed itself not through immediate reward, but through sustained meaning. Over time, this pattern strengthened my trust that acting with courage, when alignment is present, leads not to regret, but to coherence.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, an academic career is not a continuous, linear progression, but a sequence of *kairos* moments—brief periods when timing, readiness, and opportunity converged. Recognition alone is insufficient. *Kairos* only becomes consequential when it is acted upon. Without action, even the clearest insight will fade into an unrealized possibility. What consistently transforms these moments into lasting changes is courage: the willingness to move forward despite uncertainty and incomplete assurance. *Kairos* is inherently fragile and fleeting. It does not wait for full consensus, external validation, or perfect conditions. Because of this, courage becomes its necessary counterpart. Courage counteracts hesitation, sustains commitment, and enables action within a narrow window of time. Without courage, *kairos* remains visible but ineffective. With courage, it becomes transformative. In my experience, the outcome of acting on *kairos* was not only professional advancement, but personal development. Each decision required leaving good positions,

accepting risks, and tolerating doubt. Over time, what initially felt uncertain revealed itself as coherence. These moments reshaped my trajectory in ways that careful, incremental planning alone could not have achieved. *Kairos* is both a gift and a responsibility. It cannot be manufactured, but once recognized, it demands action. Recognition without action is incomplete; action without recognition is misguided. Meaningful growth emerges from the integration of both. *Kairos* will appear again. The decisive question is not whether it comes, but whether we are prepared to recognize it and courageous enough to act before the moment passes. When the moment is seized, rewards follow – and that is the focus of the next paper. Look forward to it.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank African researchers whose encounters and collaboration of the last five years have spurred this series. ChatGPT was used to fine-tune the text construction and designing of the included graphics.

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