



Contribution ID: 165

Type: not specified

In case the ‘Happy Accident’ Doesn’t Happen: Training the Next Generation of Senior Managers within European e-Infrastructures

Tuesday, 27 March 2012 11:40 (25 minutes)

Description of the Work

The RAMIRI project was set up in 2008 by Professor John Wood of Imperial College London, a former Chair of ESFRI (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures) and current Chair of the European Research Area Board, to address a perceived training requirement for RI-managers (and those working within national ministries) involved in setting up and managing research infrastructures, of all kinds, but with a focus on those working within contexts of less experience (particularly in the new EU member states, but also in new projects, many of which –in both cases –were distributed/e-infrastructural in nature). Now in its second phase of funding, the project offers a structured introduction to RI-management under six headings: 1. making the case (understanding the difference between research, development and innovation, and making the case for national investment in open-access facilities); 2. financing; 3. legal and governance issues; 4. project planning; 5. HR management; and 6. strategic planning in established facilities (in areas such as technology transfer, evolving user communities and upgrades). Places are offered to mid-career managers who can benefit from a broad exposure to challenges, questions and best practices delivered over two 3-day courses, led by a team of expert practitioners, as well as invited speakers, through presentations and scenario exercises.

While by no means comprehensive, the RAMIRI learning programme does appear to offer an experience currently unavailable elsewhere. Neither a generic nor organisational leadership programme, it is also different to the very specific training (eg. in specific project management protocols, such as PRINCE2) offered within universities or as commercial courses. The networking effect of meeting around 40 other European RI-managers over two occasions (and thereby really getting to know each other, something not often achieved in bigger conference environments) has also proved especially powerful.

Conclusions

A number of insights have emerged from the RAMIRI project. Originally framed around the ‘traditional’ (single-site, typically physical science-focused) facilities, it became clear that the questions emerging specifically from the distributed and e-infrastructures (in areas such as IPR, data management and in the sheer scale of user communities) pointed the way to new management issues needing to be addressed by the wider RI community. At the same time, expertise in areas such as establishing international collaborations, governance structures, and project planning within a shifting and fragmented funding environment, is still to be found in the traditional RIs of longer standing. RAMIRI has created a unique forum in which mid-career managers from these very different environments can share their experiences and learn from each other. The presentation will report on the successes and insights of the RAMIRI project, as well as indicating areas of challenge and further work.

Impact

The importance of management competence within the European Research Area is a new area of focus in Horizon 2020. Two aspects of the DCI landscape lend particular weight to this assertion: as institutions and projects funded largely by taxpayers, and directed ultimately towards social goods (the furthering of human knowledge and solving social problems), we are obliged to ensure that funds are managed responsively and effectively, to operate with increasing transparency, and to communicate both objectives and outcomes to a broad range of stakeholders both within and outside our immediate research communities. There is at present no clear pathway to senior management within the world of research infrastructures and the DCI community. Perhaps, that's as it should be: after all, leading research and DCI facilities are by their nature complex and novel organisations that seek to develop new kinds of knowledge and new ways of working. A one-size-fits-all approach to management training could not encompass the specific and idiosyncratic realities of the new e-I landscape. Nevertheless, the absence of management programmes for e-I and RI-managers entails two missed opportunities specific to the European context: the chance to learn from the considerable historical experience that already exists within the EU in the many well-established and world-leading international and national facilities established since the WW2; and secondly, the possibility of learning from the many facilities –again, at both national and European levels –currently in the process of being set up. The ESFRI roadmap, as well as the increasing number of national roadmaps, offer a ready-made community of aspiring and established managers working within a diverse panorama of different kinds of facilities, different scientific fields, and different national and cultural contexts.

URL

www.ramiri.eu

Overview (For the conference guide)

How do we train the next generation of senior managers within European e-infrastructures? Does the DCI community do enough to support the development of the next generation of senior managers, or do we rely on 'happy accidents'(coincidence and serendipity) to develop both our own and others' careers? What can the DCI community learn from Europe's established 'traditional' research infrastructures, and vice versa?

This presentation will discuss these questions in the context of a specific European project, RAMIRI (Realising and Managing International Research Infrastructures), that has tried to develop a basic, structured training programme for mid-career research infrastructure managers from both 'traditional'(single-site) research facilities and distributed/e-infrastructures. Whilst we remain a long way off developing an 'MBA for e-RI managers', the successes and challenges of the RAMIRI project over four years provide a number of insights, recommendations and future possibilities.

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Session Classification: Sustaining the EGI ecosystem

Track Classification: Coordination and Communication