

The Leadership and Management Development Programme for Researchers: a case history

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Abstract

From September 2010 until October 2011 I worked at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) as Research Support Officer, having a background experience of five years as post-doctoral researcher. One of my responsibilities was the planning and organisation of the Leadership and Management Development Programme (LMDP) for Researchers. The aim of the programme is to alert researchers to the importance of the leadership and managerial aspects of their career and to give them practical information that will help them to succeed as planners and managers of research programs. When advancing in the academic career, postdocs suddenly find themselves as leaders of a group, an institutional role that you hardly will be prepared for, as highlighted by Kolb et al. 2012. In the present manuscript I will give an overview of the training programme, underlining the most relevant insights that researchers got from the experience, their feedback on the training, as well as organisational aspects and difficulties.

Introduction

In a recent manuscript Kolb et al. (Kolb et al. 2012) pointed out that it would benefit science if universities, funding agencies and public institutions offered on a regular basis leadership courses and other schemes already at the postdoc level. "In this way, individuals who want to go for an academic career path can get a jump-start and avoid many of the time-consuming pits that are open along the way. The time and money invested through these channels will avoid much more costly and time-consuming errors later on, throughout the rest of the academic career".

In this paper I report the case history of a leadership and management development course that was held in Dublin in 2010-2011. At that time I was responsible for all the administrative aspects of a fellowship programme, named CEMP. Among my duties was the planning and organisation of the leadership and management development training course. It is worth saying from the beginning, engaging in an imaginary conversation with Kolb and co-workers (Kolb et al. 2012), that one of the things that most surprised me when organising the training week, was the fact that CEMP postdoctoral researchers were sceptic and even disappointed to leaving their laboratory benches for a soft-non-scientific-skills training course.

The CEMP is a post-doctoral fellowship programme co-funded by the Marie Curie Actions, the Irish Higher Education Authority Programme for Third Level Institutions Cycle 4 and the Italian National Research Council. It run from 2009 to 2012 with the aim to support experienced research fellows at various stages of their career in attaining and strengthening their career prospects to become independent investigators or senior scientists in education or industry. Within the remit of National and Biophotonics Imaging Platform Ireland (NBIP), the CEMP funded and supported research fellows undertaking interdisciplinary research and training programmes in biophotonics and imaging applied to cancer, cardiovascular and neuro-degenerative diseases. Sixteen Marie Curie Fellows had been awarded funding for fellowships, ranging between 12 and 24 months, under this programme. The fellowships awarded were a

combination of incoming and outgoing mobility. Host institutions are third level Institutions and laboratories across Ireland, Italy, France and US. The CEMP fellowship experience was enhanced by the some educational and training initiatives which were made available to the fellows. These initiatives included: NBIP Ireland education modules covering a broad spectrum of topics from microscopy to image processing; seminars, workshops and conferences on a variety of topics such as intellectual property and commercialisation, low cost parallel computing; the Leadership and Management Development Programme for Researchers (LMDP).

The LMDP for was hosted in 2010 and 2011 by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and the Institute of Leadership, in collaboration with the Italian Institute of Culture Dublin (IIC Dublin). The course was divided into two weeks. During the first week training modules included understanding and managing themselves and understanding and managing others. In the second week, modules of the training included funding strategy, skills for researchers and project and research management. Within those modules, fellows were presented inspiring lectures such as: good practice in the supervision of students - thesis supervision and examination, inclusion perspective within the supervisory relationship, strategic planning of research, EU funding programmes, success in grant writing, success in publishing, project management overview, financial management & reporting (lifespan of grant)/financial governance, intellectual property handling/commercialisation.

In this manuscript I am going to focus on the second week of the training, which is the one more science related. It was the one I was deeply involved in and that I had the chance to entirely follow from the beginning.

LMDP Overview

Supervision of students - thesis supervision and examination, inclusion perspective within the supervisory relationship. This session of the LMD programme was a round table guided by course providers from Dublin City University and Trinity College Dublin. Complexity of supervision is pertinently described by Kolb et al. 2012. Nevertheless it emerged in the discussion that

the complexity was not perceived as such by all the CEMP fellows. Some of the fellows were supervising students and they had their own opinions on this subject, having already experimented a code of behaviour in the supervisory relationship. A few of them suggested that the only thing that students need to do is studying, even if it was more popular the belief that supervision is not easy at all. It is not easy to be fair, to be an example of professional competence and work ethic, to guide somebody effectively and be recognised as an authority and a trustworthy supervisor. It is, at the same time, very rewarding when you see students growing thanks to your support.

Strategic Planning of Research. In this session a good leader was featured. Qualities such as having a quick brain, hiring outstanding team, getting the best from each individual, leading effectively in a crisis, forming teams for tough assignments, overcoming obstacles to reach a goal, were recognised as necessary skills when leading a group. Loyalty, discipline, courage, optimism, confidence, diplomacy, tenacity were mentioned as the qualities to perform an effective leadership. Acquire knowledge and read widely, is fundamental. Be daring and look outside the box is what would give you a strategic view. At the same time knowing your limits will help not to chasing goals where you are likely not to succeed or ask for and acknowledge help. Somebody asked if a bit of craziness was also a leader's characteristic. Somebody else would have liked to add endurance and resilience. As a matter of fact, the session offered to the fellows an opportunity for reflection. At first they did not get the point as to why the leadership issue should matter to them or what it had got to do with them. Laboratory benches were still their first thought, even if they are close to the point when they would suddenly find themselves as leaders of a group.

That evening the fellows were invited to dinner, they moved to the Italian Institute of Culture in Dublin, that hosted a reception for the CEMP fellows and their respective supervisors. It was a nice opportunity for networking. They were told by the Director of the Italian Institute of Culture "our future lies in your hands, in your programme research, in your ability to work together effectively toward a common vision of improvement of the quality of living".

Success in publishing. This presentation was more related to fellows' daily work, which made things easier for the course provider. It was a very appreciated presentation. Why me, the course provider asked. He was not a born writer, nevertheless he had published more than 100 hundred papers, he still does, and he had reviewed 30-40 manuscripts. When to start writing a paper, he asked then: when you have a story to tell, which means that you can describe your study in one or two minutes. And also: why publish at all, how to write a paper, how to submit a paper, how to re-submit a paper. We went through any bit of the writing process, from the very beginning to the very end. Every single part of a publication (introduction, materials and methods, results, discussions, conclusions,

pictures, figures' captions) was analysed and discussed, the presentation was very participated. Until the revision process, with suggestions and ideas on what referees want, what is more likely to be successful, best practices when publishing and examples.

Publish or perish: Research is dissemination. But you can do research only if you get funding. So, **how to write a good grant application?** This session attracted much attention. The fellows got very important practical pieces of advice. One for all that they will have to learn to deal with rejection, a frustration that you will face at some stage. As said by Kolb and co-workers (Kolb et al. 2012) "Dealing with rejections and the reviews that come with them needs some mental strength and faith in your own (scientific) abilities". The course provider kindly shared their experience and knowledge with the fellows, showing along the way their own successful proposal.

Following session is the **EU funding programmes.** The national contact point made themselves available for the CEMP fellows so that they had the opportunity to learn about the numerous funding schemes that EU offer to them. A few words of frustrations came from the fellows when they realised the large amount of information they need to know in order to move forward and become independent investigators. They definitely understood that they needed skills and abilities they barely had taken into account so far. They realised the importance of being constantly up to date on what the priorities are for the funding agencies.

In the **project management overview** session they had the opportunity to see and analyse some parts of the funding proposal called, indeed, Career and Enhancement Mobility Programme (CEMP). They saw how much work had to be done behind the scene of their fellowship. Writing the funding proposal, submitting it, the negotiation, the start-up, and all administrative and reporting duties that the CEMP manager had to comply with. Then, working in groups, they were asked to plan and implement the LMDP week for researchers. Interesting to see some disorientation in facing this task.

In the **financial management & reporting (lifespan of grant)/financial governance session**, they were given the opportunity to critically analyse a complicate research budget. Again words of frustration and surprise, as they had overlooked this part of the job so far.

Last but not least they learnt about **intellectual property handling/commercialisation**, the legal issues associated with it and disclosure policies. They observed that from their point of view, post-doctoral researchers, a patent means research results blocked for a year or two. They rather publish an article than ask for a patent: maybe they were not looking outside the box, not yet. It is worth it mentioning that a few of them were interested in the career-path of the course provider. They found it amazing the opportunity to dealing so strictly with Research without properly doing Research. In this respect I think that a training course such as the LMDP opens your mind

not only to a wider range of skills but also to perspectives and opportunities.

Conclusion

The Leadership and Management Development (LMD) training weeks, organized by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in collaboration with the Institute of Leadership, were an opportunity for the in depth analysis of the managerial and administrative aspects of research. The CEMP postdoctoral researchers were given inspiring insights about their future duties. It was rewarding seeing that the majority of the fellows agreed on the importance of topics such as funding strategy, skills for researchers and project and research management, despite some initial scepticism. All the experienced course providers are greatly acknowledged for their availability in teaching how to become trustworthy senior researchers and professors, accurate managers, and to call yourself leader. A few words of frustrations rose, in relation to the numerous aspects to be kept under control when doing research, in particular the high number of funding schemes. Yet all researchers get used to that, sooner or later. Finally, the fellows took the opportunity to meet one another outside the working environment and network, exchange ideas and collaboration routes, that might be useful to the in the years to come.

References

- Information on the CEMP, the full schedule of the LMDP and photo gallery www.nbipireland.ie/education/cemp
- Kolb P., Klappstein V., Tonner R. The 15 things that surprised me most when I started out as an independent group leader. *Journal of Postdoctoral Affairs* Vol. 2 (2), 2012