

TRAINING SCHOOL REPORT

COST TARGETED NETWORK 1302 BESTPRAC

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDER
THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT-LIFECYCLE:
PERSONAL COMMUNICATION
SKILLS FOR EU RESEARCH
ADMINISTRATOR 20.04.2015 – 1.06.2015

TH NÜRNBERG



Background

Delivering research administration support for European-funded research projects can put communication skills to the test. Administration of intercultural and often virtual research teams in this context is highly characterized by facilitating interactions amongst diverse partners – while at the same time functioning as a gateway that defines the quality and efficiency of a project’s life-cycle.

It is therefore paramount for Research Administrators to build trust and respect in order to maintain efficient long-term working relationships. This holds true for the relationships with Principal Investigators (PIs) as well as for all other stakeholders involved in the project, such as project officers, internal and external service partner and the general public.

To be a successful Research Administrator, one has to have excellent communication skills to work efficiently, while maintaining their work-life-balance in this highly dynamic work environment. Success in this highly dynamic work environment is seldom a straight road: it almost always involves detours and sometimes even dead ends. That is why being a great Research Administrator also means, to have a strong sense of who you are and what it takes to recharge and nurture yourself as a person and as a professional.

Objectives

The Training School on “Engaging Stakeholders throughout the project-lifecycle – Personal Communication Skills for EU Research Administrator” equips Research Administrator with hands-on knowledge and personal strategies in order to be ready and able to act as effective communicator and facilitator for large European funded projects and their stakeholders.

By the end of the Training School, participants:

- ★ Understood the scope, rights and responsibilities that build the core of effective communication in Research Administration.
- ★ Appreciated the different roles that academic, research manager and administrator and institutions play in the communication process.
- ★ Gained insight into different aspects of individual work-life-balance.
- ★ Had the opportunity to share challenges in their practice with peers.

TRAINING SCHOOL REPORT

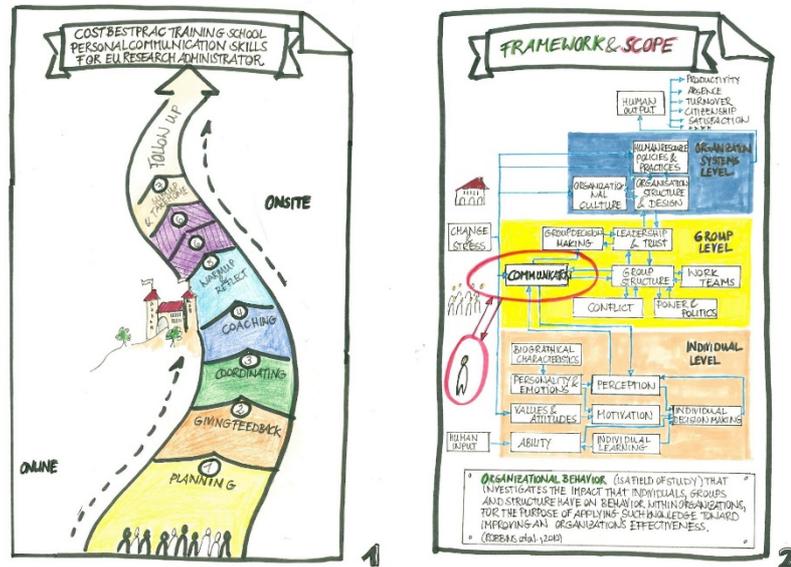
Summary of Contents

Engaging Stakeholder Throughout the Project Lifecycle – Personal Communication Skills for EU Research Administrator

The Training School “Engaging Stakeholder throughout the Project Lifecycle – Personal Communication Skills for EU Research Administrator” has been delivered in a Blended Learning format. That means – in addition to the onsite training in Nuremberg – the participants benefitted from 4 online modules.

The online phase started at April 20th 2015 and ran until May 24th. Participants spent approximately 4 hours per week engaging in individual and group activities before they met for a four-day onsite training in Nuremberg, 29.5. – 1.6.2015.

The online phase of the training was based on input and exchange via a WordPress BLOG moderated 24/7 by the trainer team. Since the BLOG didn’t offer a way to share documents, it was complemented by a shared Google Drive space. The Google Drive space was put into use as well for sharing on demand video tutorials and reading material as for (co-)writing tasks.



Examples: visualisation in online module 1

Online Phase, April 20th – May 24th 2015

Module 1 (April 20th - 26th 2015) Planning for ground-breaking – initial contact with your stakeholders. In module one, participants entered in a dialogue about systematic ways in adapting

TRAINING SCHOOL REPORT

specific communication strategies to their stakeholders' needs. By the end of the first week participants were asked to write a short communication plan for a stakeholder of their choice.

Module 2 (April 27th - May 3rd 2015) Giving constructive (written) feedback in the writing process. The structure of providing written feedback is significantly different to that of verbal feedback. In module two, participants gave one another feedback on their communication plans using the insights gained from writing research and didactics about effective ways to support writing processes with written feedback.

Module 3 (May 4th- 10th 2015) Supporting effective communication within large consortia. Module three invited participants to discover and reflect findings from social psychology, highlighting communication issues that are unique to large consortia. The participants were randomly split in groups. Every individual group member was tasked with a - more or less unknown to his fellow group members - job he or she had to perform.

Module 4 (May 11th- 24th 2015) Preparing for "difficult communication" with the help of a team. The participants experienced in module four in teams of six – based on a self-defined case – how they can tap into team resources with the help of a method originating from systemic coaching to get prepared for complex and difficult communication. The teams presented the cases they have worked on at day one of the onsite training.

Onsite Training, 29.05. – 1.06.2015

Onsite Training Day One – Friday, 29.05.2015

Day one of the Onsite Training was to first and foremost fulfil the need and excitement to get to meet the fellow participants and ease the group into an open and collaborative learning mood. The participants followed up on the material presented online (Intercultural Communication / Virtual teams). Onsite, at the Nuremberg Institute of Technology, the participants met with a team of four trainers, specialized in interpersonal communication, organizational behaviour, and resilience. Based on further input on "Intercultural Communication" and "Virtual Teams", the participants were invited to reflect on their experience in the Online modules. Finally, the four groups from online module 4 presented and received feedback for their case studies.

Social Program: Formal Reception and Meet & Greet Barbecue at the Energy Campus Nuremberg

Onsite Training Day Two - Saturday, 30.01.2015

On day two the participants revised and at communication strategies ("Meta-Communication", "I-not-you", "no generalisation", "Questions"), reasons why communication can go wrong and how to

TRAINING SCHOOL REPORT

communicate more effectively (“Drama-Triangle”, “The 5 Cs of Effective Communication”, “Give and get Feedback”). At the end of day two every participant was invited to work on an individual case.

Social Program: Guided City Tour (2,5 h)

Onsite Training Day Three - Sunday, 31.01.2015

Day three featured “conflict” and “resilience”. The participants learned about modes of non-violent communication, how to avoid conflict in the first place and about possible ways to react when communication seems to have hit a dead end (Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument, “How to say no”, “dealing with passive aggressive people”, “positive adaption after stressful events”, “strategies to deal with a stressful moment”). The participants teamed up in couples to support and coach each other in their effort with a self-defined area of future better communication.

Social Program: Good Morning Yoga Class / Guided Evening Walk at the Nuremberg Zoo

Onsite Training Day Four – Monday, 1.06.2015

The last onsite (half) day the participants met with two local experts in science communication and learned their unique insights into successful (intercultural) communication with and for science. In a final session the participants were invited to write letters to their future self, including reminding them about their arrangement with their learning buddies. Trainer team and participants also spent some time discussing possible ways to stay in touch, follow up and give back to the BESTPRAC community.



Examples: Visualisation at Onsite Training Day 1 and 2

Foundations

The Workshops content builds on a triad view of the building structure of a career in Research Administration. According to that, an individual career has three equally important components that account for overall success.

- ★ The person itself,
- ★ the current function the person holds in a specific work environment
- ★ the profession, it's specific tools (and tricks) of the trade.

The 360° perspective on Research Administration as a career offers reliable insights towards an individual's decision, in which area he or she might benefit the most in the future in terms of communication skills training.

The Workshop delivery aims for learning on three different levels - with the ultimate goal to generate actionable knowledge for the participants. Knowledge is actionable, if it is useful for the world of practice and robust to the world of scholarship.

The three levels of learning experience for the participants are:

- ★ 1st person practice - learning about self
- ★ 2nd person practice - learning in collaborating with others
- ★ 3rd person practice - contributing to practical knowledge for the professional community

Participant Feedback

See also video feedback: „BESTPRAC Training School Personal Communication Skills – The Movie” external access on request via shared Google Drive.

Agnieszka, Poland: „I am still telling my colleagues how wonderful Training School in Nurnberg was and encouraging them to participate in BESTPRAC! It was great to meet you all in person!”

Andi, Cyprus: „Everything was perfectly organized. The knowledge we gained and the time we all had together is something that will remain with us. The most amazing was that at the end we all became friends. Actually I got this feeling of familiarity from the online modules when working together as a team. And that was one of the most interesting parts of the school. Everything was great!!!”

TRAINING SCHOOL REPORT

Klara, Israel: "I want to thank you for your hospitality and for so good organized training! It contributed a lot for our daily work."

Toni, Croatia: „I would like to seize this opportunity to say how wonderful job you did with organizing this training school in Nurnberg! You were/are a magnificent host and friend. The social programme was so great that we all became friends at the end. We learnt a lot, and we had a very good time. I really don`t know what else to say to emphasize your organisational skills and to say „THANK YOU“ for everything you did for us.”

Delphine, Norway: „...it was a great pleasure to finally meet you all! It has been a really intense and exciting experience!! I hope we can do it again!! Thanks to everyone for being so open...”

Alice, Italy: „As everyone said, it was “simply” perfect! I`ve learned a lot and all the tips received will be useful also in my private life, not only at work. I had the opportunity to look deeply into myself and to look outside with new eyes. Thanks! ... Thanks everyone for sharing your experiences, opinions, thoughts and time! I really hope we will keep in touch.”

Lasse, Finland: „I`m already using my new communication skills when I`m trying to write a comment letter to an EC audit report.”

Dorothy, Malta: „It has been a wonderful experience to be part of the BESTPRAC training. I enjoyed getting to know you and your work. I am also working on giving a presentation of the work done to my colleagues in the coming weeks. The content we learnt was too good to keep to myself.”

Marloes, Netherlands: „For the ones that were in the same group as me during the case practice: I managed to fix my case :-) I've sent an email to the web-developer using the feedback rules. She replied within 15 minutes apologizing for what she did and she immediately changed the logo :-) So thank you for helping me with this case!”

Rachel, Ireland: „ I`ve been telling my colleague about the training school and so many of them said they would love to do similar training – even a few of the academics!”



Participants

A maximum of 24 participants were able to apply for a block grant of 900 EUR covering travel and accommodation costs for the Training School. A selection procedure was set up to come to an informed choice and fair selection of participants.

First, interested Parties were invited via www.bestprac.eu to fill in an application form by the deadline April 7th 2015. Apart from more general information, they needed to offer written insight about their organisation, working environment and job profile. Candidates were asked also to describe briefly three different situations from their work environment where they would benefit the most from the input and learning they expected from the Training School. By the deadline, 46 applications had reached via e-Mail the COST BESTPRAC grant holder.

The committee in charge of coming up with a final selection consisted of:

- ★ Martina Pöll (Grant Holder)
- ★ Anne Katrin Werenskiold (Transversal Task Force Manager Training School)
- ★ Rebekka Steinmann (Training School Host)
- ★ Ellen Schenk-Braat (WG 1 Leader)

The selection procedure aimed at:

- 1) Identifying those applicants, who would prospectively benefit the most, evidenced by their written statement.
- 2) Making a balanced choice between colleagues working primarily in pre- and post-award.
- 3) Making a balanced choice towards countries of origin of the participants.
- 4) Making a balanced choice in regards to gender.

The selection committee members first ranked the applications individually. The final selection was done by comparing and settling the individual ranking to a shared list of 24 participants. Twenty-one female and three male Research Administrator from Higher Education Institutions working almost equally (14/12) distributed in pre- and post-award services from a total of 15 countries (total of 8 participants from COST inclusiveness countries) were finally invited to participate.

Distribution in countries of employment: Austria (1), Croatia (2), Cyprus (1), Finland (2), Germany (1), Iceland (1), Israel (1), Ireland (2), Italy (1), Malta (1), Netherlands (5), Norway (2), Poland (3), UK (1). One of the invited participants asked to be replaced by a colleague from its work team. Another one cancelled very last minute before the Training School started and was replaced by an interested German Research Administrator, but without granting a cost reimbursement.

TRAINING SCHOOL REPORT

Contact

For further information on the Blended Learning Training School “Engaging Stakeholder Throughout the Project Lifecycle –Personal Communication Skills for EU Research Administrator”, feel free to get in touch with:

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