CHAPTER 42

HOW TO COMMUNICATE AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT?

Communication within and on interdisciplinary projects inside the scientific world and to the public

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Abstract: New opportunities and global problems often involve an interdisciplinary approach when they are tackled. In this context there are a number of barriers to interdisciplinarity that need to be solved. Amongst these barriers several have been identified in the area of research communication. Integration of disciplines can only be accomplished through initiation of communication among and between the respective scientific communities and practitioners. The forum “How to communicate an interdisciplinary project” provided an opportunity to explore different aspects of communication within and on interdisciplinary projects inside the scientific world and to the public. The objectives were to learn about the experiences of others and share own success stories. Issues that were discussed concerned management and communication structures within interdisciplinary projects including barriers and advices specific to them. In addition, good practice for communication to the scientific community and to society in general as well as communication tools were explored.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary communication, Management of interdisciplinary research, Communication tool for interdisciplinary research

1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

NEST-IDEA is a European Union funded action which aims to give support to the scientific community and the European Commission regarding new and emerging science and technology (NEST) initiatives and to furthermore promote the dialogue with the research community on emerging scientific and technological developments.

This article addresses issues on management and communication structures within interdisciplinary projects including barriers and advices specific to them. In addition, good practices for communication to the scientific community and to society in general as well as communication tools are presented.

A forum organised at CER 2005 provided an opportunity to explore different aspects on communication within and on interdisciplinary projects inside the scientific world and to the public. The latter involved presentations of successful cases of communication among project partners and instruments of disseminating results by experts and coordinators of interdisciplinary projects.

The article is divided into three main sections. The first section presents basic rules for communication inside interdisciplinary projects as well as to the scientific world and to the public. The second section of the article deals with communication structures within an interdisciplinary project and in this context the example of the CREEN project are presented. The third section concerns communication on an interdisciplinary project outside of the scientific world, towards stakeholders and citizens, and presents the experience of the CONTROL CANCER STEM project.

2. BASIC RULES FOR COMMUNICATION WITHIN AND ON PROJECTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE SCIENTIFIC WORLD

Kathrin Stratmann from the EU-Bureau of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Germany) presented the two different levels of communication relevant to the topic:

1. Communication within the project (with partners, work package leaders, coordinator), with the goal to ensure the flow of information between the project participants.
2. Communication with the outside world (scientific world, laypeople), with the target to present the results.

2.1. Communication within the Project

Within a project, the coordinator has to communicate on different levels with different partners (e.g. the project partners or the European Commission). For this, it is important to keep in mind that a consortium always incorporates a variety of partners (different personalities, countries, cultures, institutions, levels of experience).

In interdisciplinary projects additional problems may occur concerning the different approaches, the personal scientific background and the different (discipline-specific) languages of the project partners.

It is recommended to establish a common language at the beginning of the project. Constant communication throughout the project is essential for its success.