

# **IM2 SUMMER SCHOOL 2010 WORKSHOP REPORT (short version)**

**Facilitator: Katherine Foster**

**[fosterkat@gmail.com](mailto:fosterkat@gmail.com)**

**078 710 6605**

## **A) OVERVIEW OF WORKSHOPS**

### **1) PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS WORKSHOP**

The explicit purpose of this workshop was to have groups of IM2 researchers who normally do not work together to interact, use visual clues and key-words to discuss, consider and provide a brief description of potential practical applications of research. The implicit purpose was to strengthen teambuilding, networking and communication as well as to compel researchers to consider without 'over analysis' the practical aspects of their research and options for individual career paths.

### **2) CAREER RELAY RACE WORKSHOP**

The explicit purpose of this workshop was to build networking skills by compelling researchers (PhDs, PostDocs, Supervisors and Representatives from Start-Ups) to efficiently and effectively communicate their background and the area of research in which they are working. The implicit purpose was to strengthen individual communications skills, build upon their actual network and consider their career path. In addition teambuilding was a major underlying rationale for the exercise whether or not the individuals found the process useful for them individually. The sense of chaos, discomfort and time pressure leads to a sense of bonding in the exercise.

### **3) NEW PRODUCT WORKSHOP**

The explicit purpose of this workshop was similar to the first workshop in terms of compelling individuals from IM2 to work with new contacts and to consider practical applications as well as potential 'target clients' for present and future research. The implicit purpose was to build upon networking skills, teambuilding and consideration of the breadth of practical applications and potential employers or clients overall.

### **4) WORK-LIFE BALANCE WORKSHOP**

The explicit purpose of these workshops was to have teams of researchers who normally do not work together consider various issues which affect work-life balance. The implicit purpose was to consider the breadth of issues which affect career development for individuals from different backgrounds and situations, explore the issue of responsibility regarding individual versus 'management' capacity and obligations, and to consider concrete resources and approaches to address the various issues.

## 4. A) WORKSHOP SCENARIOS AND RESPONSES

### Working Group 1. Establishing a Mentoring Structure

Scenario: a meeting of Supervisors and researchers / students to establish a formal and structured mentoring program for your researchers / students. Over the past year a number of issues have been noted by students including financial insecurity, career path, integration (self and partners), parenthood and child-care.

#### Recommendations

ISSUES	RESOURCES	METHOD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career Planning</li> <li>• Personal Training / Counselling</li> <li>• Financial Planning</li> <li>• Language Issues / Cultural Issues</li> <li>• Employment / Career Development</li> <li>• Child Care</li> <li>• Social Issues</li> <li>• Spousal /Family Issues (including above for spouse)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Internal:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative Representatives</li> <li>• 2-3 Academics</li> <li>• Human Resources</li> </ul> <p><u>Internal/External:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language Lessons and Resources</li> <li>• Cultural Counselling</li> <li>• Financial Counselling</li> <li>• Institutional Networks</li> </ul> <p><u>External:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite Local and Community Administration</li> <li>• (Unemployment Office, Community Organisations for spouses and parents, language training etc.)</li> </ul>	<p>Group Meetings (regular bi-monthly)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• success stories</li> <li>• open discussions</li> <li>• agenda with specific issues</li> </ul> <p>Individual Meetings (regular) Appointments</p> <p>Other Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentation</li> <li>• Social Wikis</li> <li>• Webpage resources</li> <li>• Language Courses</li> <li>• Feedback mechanism to management about common problems and possible solutions.</li> </ul>

The combined response to the specific situation involved establishing a counselling/mentoring network with well defined contact points. Counselling on various issues should be offered using both internal and external resources (colleagues and people with professional training) including:

- Co-workers and colleagues (internal, external and alumni)
- Financial advisors
- Career counsellors and psychologists
- Language and cultural experts (issues of integration and adaptation)
- Social network (internal and external for teambuilding and knowledge transfer)
- Management and administration (human resources and others)

Methodologies would include:

- Regular meetings between PhD and PostDocs and HR representatives and management.
- Training, workshops involving practical advice and success stories
- Language courses open to employees and partners
- Links to commune and city (each institution should establish a resource list)
- Feedback mechanisms to management on common problems and possible solutions.
- Establish an internal network that keeps links to internal and external resources (One person's job to gather information ex. A LinkedIn group).

## **Working Group 2. Baby Boom in Start-Up or Research Group**

Scenario: a small start-up or research group of 3-4 people in which norm is to work day and night and most weekends. Key colleague with tied funding expecting / adopting baby within 5 months and requests change to working hours and culture to allow more family time.

### **Recommendations**

Initial Response:

- Hold team discussion to reassess planning, strategy and working hours of the start up. (Dynamic and culture of the group is not sustainable and should change overall).
- Discuss directly with individual (and perhaps spouse / partner) the personal situation.

Solution 1)

Maintain group structure but introduce the following changes:

- Reduce or shift responsibilities (share in workload and supervision)
- Reduce the pressure
- Move or relax the deadlines
- Offer remote work possibility
- Offer flexibility in terms of schedule (working hours)
- Offer support regarding child care (financial or human i.e. even co-workers could step in)

Solution 2)

Bring in temporary assistance: extra person (early enough to insure smooth transition and to take over during maternity leave)

Solution 3)

Continue without this person (probably would imply bringing in a new person)

## **Working Group 3. Potential Funding Cut due to Gender Imbalance**

Scenario: Two female colleagues raise concerns over sense of exclusion and “boys-club” approach within the team. If the colleagues quit, the group will lose gender-tied funding. No new female PhD students have applied to the program.

### **Recommendations**

The initial reaction was to the notion of being threatened and to the possibility that this was being framed in through a ‘gendered lens’.

Staying late and working weekends are issues that are not gender specific.

Instead the team needs to discuss and analyse how and when it works; is this a group culture or lack of efficiency?

Response related to the urgency of the situation as well as to the long term strategy included:

- Talk with every team member to evaluate the situation (discuss issues of gender and racism as well as working culture).
- Hire a mediator or facilitator
- Organize a professional teambuilding event to integrate the team (*take Katherine Foster, otherwise e.g. <http://www.ten80events.com/corporate-events/corporate-team-building.html?gclid=CPr8iYSZiaQCFO4eZwodNSRHlg> (sic)*  
Mandatory weekly internal lunches for all team members paid for by the company.
- Use professional coaching and mentoring.
- Recruit more female PHD-students, to increase women in the team (added benefit that women will not feel sense of minority).
- Rethink the recruiting strategy, think about changing the list of requirements (search advise from the committee for equal opportunities of the university for advice and for a course in sensitizing advisors in this topic, e.g. <http://www.unifr.ch/fem/fr/index.php?page=523>)

## Working Group 4. 'Complicated' Candidates

Scenario: here are top four candidates for two new researchers / post doc positions (for a two-year contract). The candidates have equally outstanding qualifications, publications and references. Group A) represented a hiring committee which had to consider what if any weight the personal situations carried in terms of candidate choice, and what resources the team or institution would be able to provide to support the successful candidates. Group B) represented the actual candidates meeting with mentor(s) to discuss in total confidence their individual situations, what rumours or issues to address directly with the hiring committee and what if any, resources they would consider asking from the team or institution to support them in their situation.

## Recommendations

The Group A) initial decision was to firmly state that the job is extremely demanding and candidates must be ready to stay the two years and begin immediately or in the near future. Some resources for managing career, work and personal situations should be considered.

The Group B) response was to address to the rumour with the hiring committee and to state what they do individually to manage their situation and what resources they would request from the team or institution.

The combined response covered three main points:

1. Any Post-Doc candidate should before hiring be given the opportunity to talk over phone or come directly physically to the institute.
2. The mentor group should have career counselling sessions, which include discussions where PhDs and PostDocs are guided on how to have a good career and balance their personal life.
3. At Idiap (in Martigny), almost all PhD and Post-Docs are given L-permit for 2 years. L-permit makes several discriminations as against B-permit (for example: signing a contract for apartment, post-paid mobile connection etc. Also, when married couple want to move jointly, it is almost impossibility for the spouse to come and find a job, as most employers mention: B,C permit or Swiss citizenship as mandatory for applying for the job). Maybe this problem could be addressed if the contract is given for 2 or 3 years and discussing with the foreign office regarding the rules.

## Working Group 5. Family Friendly versus Special Treatment?

Scenario: The annual meeting has been planned, confirmed and booked to take place on a Wednesday-Thursday in two months. It is to be located within 2 hours drive / train ride. However four key people in the group have now signalled they may not be able to attend due to personal situations relating to child care. Aside from the conference date nearly 1/3 of the research staff has ongoing child care issues and it has having impact on the advancement of your project/research as some people are not putting in the same extra hours (evenings and weekends).

Five years ago everyone working day and night was the norm and family life was rarely discussed. Now however 'personal scheduling problems' seem to be discussed daily. The others in the group are growing resentful of the 'special treatment' and lack of availability.

### Recommendations

The initial reaction involved three possible approaches to the immediate 'child care problem' on the conference date:

1. *Management is not responsible for making personal arrangements and will have to accept that some participants may not be able to attend...*
2. *Hire a babysitter for conference so that participants can attend and bring their children to the conference; and*
3. *Organize internally (among participants) or externally (as individuals) child care for the date.*

With regard to the longer-term aspect two issues were addressed:

1. Address the organization of future conferences and events:
  - *Prevent conflicts*
  - *Consider school vacations and Wednesdays are particular challenges.*
  - *Avoid the problem*
  - *Location of Conference*
2. Address the internal team problem and improve the working culture

The combined recommendations included primary objectives and actions:

- 1) Objective: Improve child care offer for parents: availability, flexibility, affordability.  
Actions: List external entities, create partnerships with them, inform employees and do some political lobbying.
- 2) Objective: Increase flexibility and tolerance in daily group life (small research group of 5 to 20 persons): everyone has to understand that some will spend more/less time at the office but that the team must still be cohesive and operational.  
Actions: A) Establish some team working rules and continuously remind the group of these rules. Main rules include:
  - decide in advance (for a whole year?) on regular timeslot (e.g. Tuesday 2PM to 4PM) where
  - everyone must be always free for group meetings if you are absent from the workplace most of the time, you must take particular care of being available for discussion when you are at work and as much available through e-mails apart from these rules, only high level objectives are fixed (this must be repeated, reminded at every weekly meeting or so)B) Allow people to officially work part-time (again need to establish and remind the group of what is part-time in practice).

- 3) Objective: Increase awareness and openness at the big-group level (e.g. Idiap level): discussing together about these different choices (child/no-child/...) increases general openness and tolerance.
- Actions: Organize group discussions and workshop like IM2 summer institute. Given the turnover in the field, a yearly basis for such meetings is adequate.

Suggested Resources:

- for 1) The Red Cross provides help to handle exceptional child care
- for 1) YMCA might also provide child care
- for 2) "teach" the supervisors/team-managers to do it
- for 3) group animation specialists like Katherine Foster are needed to make annual group discussions happen well (*sic*)

## B) WORK-LIFE BALANCE RESOURCES

“For many scientists, work-life balance means career and family. For others, it's job and social life. Regardless of the type of balance you're seeking, it's tricky to manage and takes a lot of self-discipline.”<sup>1</sup>

### Work-Life Categories and Definitions

Work-Life Category	Definition
Work Time	Enabling employees to manage the time spent working for the organization
Work Location	Managing the physical location of employee work
Family	Supporting the family and other dependent responsibilities of employees
Development	Offering opportunities for the personal development of employees (not including traditional training programs)
Services	Providing financial, retail, and other services for employees
Health	Supporting and maintaining the health of the workforce

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For each of the categories and definitions outlined above there are resources available to individuals, groups and institutions as well as in professional and personal contexts through community (local neighbourhood, church, expat groups, church, etc.) , government (municipal, commune, national, EU etc.) and institutional (university, SNF, other funding bodies and programs, research associations, forums etc.) structures, programs and resources.

A key general resource available to researchers in Europe is Research\*eu (<http://ec.europa.eu/research/research-eu/>): the monthly magazine of the European Commission Directorate-General for Research providing information on a variety of developments within the EU (results, programmes, events, etc.). It is available in English, French, German and Spanish. A free sample copy or free subscription can be obtained via e-mail: [research-eu@ec.europa.eu](mailto:research-eu@ec.europa.eu) .

One of the most practical and readily accessible general resources on careers in research and science, as well as on work-life balance for those engaged in such a career, is the [AAAS Science Careers Magazine Website](#)<sup>3</sup>. The site offers articles, personal stories, forums, a facebook page and links to practical resources worldwide.

<sup>1</sup> Travis, Kate; [Feature Index: Work and Life in the Balance](#) , December 7, 2007 (<http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org>)

<sup>2</sup> Source: Women in Science and Technology: Creating Sustainable Careers, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document\\_library/pdf\\_06/wist2\\_sustainable-careers-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/wist2_sustainable-careers-report_en.pdf) , Directorate-General For Research, Science, Economy and Society (2009)

<sup>3</sup> <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org>

**Please also see the long report for a list of specific articles, resources and links on the following topics:**

1. GENERAL RESEARCH INSTITUTION RESOURCES
  2. GENERAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES
  3. MENTORING
  4. PART-TIME WORK / RESEARCH / FUNDING
  5. CAREER RE-ENTRY PROGRAMS AND FUNDING
  6. WOMEN IN SCIENCE
  7. LINKS FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE
  8. PARENTING AND A SCIENCE CAREER
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