

Challenges and opportunities of multi-disciplinary, multi-national and multi-sectoral projects

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Collaborative research projects e.g. funded or supported by the European Commission are by nature multi-national. Often EU calls bring together different scientific communities to jointly tackle challenges that can only be addressed through the convergence of previously separated disciplines in one research consortium. Some work programmes even necessitate to team up as different disciplines as natural sciences, social science, legal science and economic science. Examples for such multi-national, -disciplinary and – sectoral projects are the EU projects ECO₂ (FP7, concluded), AtlantOS (H2020) and MiningImpact (JPI Oceans). Project managers of such projects need to develop skills beyond the common technical and management skills namely go into the domain of partners and stakeholders psychology and be able to maintain different perspectives on communication and interaction needs regarding cultural-, discipline- and sectoral background. Accordingly, the project manager has besides his or her technical role as manager at least three further roles: that of a communicator, that of a mediator and that of a person convincing partners of the necessary and selling the project products to the stakeholders. As the typical project manager has not too much power and authority by his or her position he or she has to use the power of smart communication and persuasion to overcome potential dissension between disciplines, national reservation or potential conflicts regarding different sectoral views. Accordingly, the project manager of such complex projects would try to arrange the ideal working environment by considering cultural feel, the cooperation of disciplines, information and the control of resources. The way he or she develops such ideal working environment is by reflection of past, present and future experiences/needs.