Experience of a FP7 ICT project coordinator

H2020 – InfoEvent ICT/FET/NMP
June 18, 2015 – Neuchâtel

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My experience with EU projects

- Computer systems and distributed systems
- Experience with FP7 projects — all STREP
  - 1 project funded (SRT-15) as partner
    - Oct 2010 - Apr 2013
  - 1 project funded (LEADS) as coordinator
    - Oct 2012 - Sep 2015
- Other EU funding scheme: chist-era
  - FET ERA-NET: consortium of funding agencies including SNSF
    - Funding agencies funded under FET program of FP7
  - 1 project funded (DIONASYS) as coordinator
    - Jan 2015 - Dec 2017
LEADS project

- http://leads-project.eu

- Project writing started mid December 2011
  - Submitted on 17/01/2012
    - Call: FP7-ICT-2011-8
    - Objective ICT-2011.1.2 — *Cloud Computing, Internet of Services and Advanced Software Engineering*

- STREP, budget 4.05 M€, EU funding 2.9 M€

- 400 Person-Months effort

- 3 universities, 3 large companies, 1 SME

- **Objective**: build a shared Big Data platform to collect, store and process large amounts of public Web data and private data
Outline

• Writing a proposal as coordinator
• Project negotiation
• Roles of the coordinator
  • Scientific coordination
  • Project coordination
  • Administrative coordination
• Dissemination and exploitation
• Project reviews and relations with the EC
• Relations with other EC projects
• Conclusion
• Questions and answers
Proposal writing (I)

• About 1 person-month (PM) for the writing coordination — 2 PMs for first proposal
  • Start early to benefit from feedback from grants office and euresearch

• Important to get a clear ‘big picture’ of the project before drafting the project structure
  • Writing work packages (WP) independently and then merging leads to difficulties in project implementation and inconsistencies

• Key aspects (scientific/technical part)
  • A good and simple story (first 2 pages): motivate reviewers to read on
  • Map explicitly between objectives in the call text, and how project reaches these objectives; do not expect reviewers to guess this
  • Coherency: works better if coordinator collects and integrate her/himself rather than editing collectively
  • Position proposal against existing EU and international projects
Proposal writing (II)

- In FP7, **three aspects** graded
  - A — 1/3: scientific content
  - B — 1/3: implementation (administration, composition and structure of the consortium)
  - C — 1/3: impact and exploitation

- Easy to neglect B and C…

- Key points
  - B: risk planning, management structure, relations with the EC, coherency and completeness of consortium
  - C: companies/SMEs must have convincing plans to exploit results; openness of results a big plus
Proposal negotiation

• First meeting with the Project Officer (PO) in Brussels
  • Main contact point between the coordinator and the EC
  • Crucial to establish a good relation with the PO
  • Discuss with your PO to know her/his expectations
  • Establish regular discussions and feedback with the PO during the lifetime of the project (not only during reviews)

• Negotiation requires amending the proposal according to reviewer comments in order to prepare the Declaration of Work (DoW), part of grant contract
  • Take opportunity to fix problems in DoW before project starts (task, WP, deliverables allocation, personnel change etc.)

• Consortium Agreement (CA): start early, takes time
Roles of the coordinator

- **Main contact point between project and PO (EC)**
- **A:** Scientific coordination
- **B:** Consortium and project management
  - Tracking progress, coordinating deliverables production, ensuring information flows, troubleshooting
- **C:** Administrative management
  - Reporting, financial aspects
- Difficult to have different persons for A and B
  - May work for C but overhead > gain for small projects
Section 2: Implementation

2.1 Management structure and procedures

The governance structure outlined below shall assure a fair and transparent project management involving all partners. Its lean organisation is quite common for small and medium size projects and as such well adapted to the LEADS project.

High priority and attention will be given to the crucial area of project management. The project partners are fully committed and agree to work together with the utmost cooperation for the timely fulfilment of their responsibilities. It will be an advantage that all partners already have been involved in numerous international cooperative projects, and that most partners already participated to cooperative projects funded under the FP7 programme.

The overall management principles for LEADS are:

- A fair representation of all the members of LEADS in the decision making bodies of the Consortium,
- A management of the Consortium that shall be completely transparent to its members and to the European Commission,
- A management that shall be flexible and responsive to the need for change as the Consortium progresses with its work.

Figure 10: Organizational structure of the LEADS consortium showing the communication channels within it and between the consortium and the European Commission.

The organisational structure and associated communication channels are described by Figure 10. The organisational structure of the Consortium shall comprise the following Consortium Bodies:

- **Project Coordinator (PC)** as the operative project manager and the intermediary between the consortium and the European Commission,
- **General Assembly (GA)** as the ultimate decision making body of the Consortium with one representative of each partner,
- **Management Support Team (MST)** as the supervisory body for the day-to-day work performed in the Work Packages. The members of the MST are responsible for the management of the Work Packages. The MST shall report to the PC and the GA. It shall also be accountable to the GA.

**Typical project structure (DESCA)**

- **WP1 leader** Distributed Data Collection
- **WP2 leader** Consistent Distributed Data Storage
- **WP3 leader** Distributed Data Processing Engine
- **WP4 leader** Scheduling and Data Placement
- **WP5 leader** Validation and Evaluation
- **WP6 leader** Dissemination and Exploitation
- **WP7 leader** Project Coordination

**European Commission**
A. Scientific (or technical) coordination

- Can differ between FET (long-term research) and other projects (innovation), and presence of industry

- Set up information flows early: main risk is participants working separately and deviating from plan
  - Open mailing list (private discussions slow down projects)
  - Common knowledge base: wiki or shared document repositories
  - One plenary meeting a month is a minimum

- Technical integration (common prototypes) as in LEADS drastically increases the amount of work for the coordinator
  - Sending reminders for content, comments, approvals …
  - Often requires to be the one specifying APIs, service definitions, etc.
  - Some projects (SRT-15) prefer to have little integration
  - Use-case driven coordination works
B. Consortium and project management

- Adopt a Consortium Agreement with clear and solid rules
  - Need to back you up as coordinator is something goes wrong
    - Our CA improves DESCA with the possibility for the coordinator to keep 20% of initial funding from EC as a mean of pressure: highly recommended
    - Establish clear rules for ownership or foreground and background, and licensing and exploitation rules
  - But keep management structures simple enough to be used in practice

- Adopt a quality control procedure within the project before the EC reviews any production
  - Internal review: produce all deliverables 20 days before deadline, allow one round of comments/modifications
  - Coordinator generally reviews all documents for consistency
C. Administrative management

- Reporting: collect resource usage from all partners, aggregate and produce consolidated report
  - Recommended to get updates from partners mid-term between review periods to spot deviations early
  - May need to decide to re-allocate resources (requires an amendment, vote of the consortium and approval of the PO/EC)

- Financial data might be collected by an administrative assistant (overhead!) but the planning of the project and checking if resource usage is ‘on track’ is the coordinator’s duty
Dissemination

- The EC insists on the project results being visible
  - Scientific community (publications) — not enough
  - General public (press release, talk to media)
  - Industry (participate in fairs, publicize in company communication)
  - EC organized events, e.g. for ICT:
    - Future Internet Assembly
    - Digital Assembly

- The project website must be live and up-to-date
  - Make sure the partner in charge of dissemination is doing the job
  - Give visibility to other EU projects and EC events, get some in return

- Some EU projects exist only to help other projects with visibility
  - e.g. CloudWatch project for Cloud computing projects
Exploitation

• Need to have convincing exploitation plans
  • In particular from companies

• Try to identify key, identifiable outcomes of your project early
  • Focus the exploitation plans on these key outcomes
  • Classify outcomes exploitation difficulty and present plans for after the project end to foster adoption
  • Do not pretend all results of the project will turn into products if this is not the case

• Publishing papers is *not* exploitation

• Creating a startup is the EC’s grail
Project reviews

• Reviewers might have various backgrounds and expectations
  • Better not go too technical
  • These are not research presentations
  • Demos (when applicable) work great

• Show the reviewers that their comments helped and that the review and feedback process participates to the project success
  • Avoid adversarial stance

• Format and project unity matter a lot
  • Use common slides templates and presentation formats
  • One day rehearsal before the meeting is mandatory
  • Swisscore (https://www.swisscore.org/) has free meeting rooms in Brussels — Book early!
Relation with other projects

- EC values collaboration between projects
  - Establish contacts early
  - Leverage coordination actions (e.g. CloudWatch)
  - Participate in coordination events in Brussels
    - Organized by coordination actions
    - Good for networking
    - Highly valued by LEADS PO (and others)
  - Organize common events (workshops, project meetings)
- Position against other projects during project lifetime (not only in proposal)
Conclusion

• Use the valuable help from euresearch and local grants offices
• Take time to check deliverables, dissemination and exploitation actions from other successful projects
  • Easier to understand EC expectations
• Adopt a common and simple project storytelling and stick to it
• Coordinating a EU project is a demanding task but one learns a lot in the process
• For a SME, coordinating may lead to higher potential for exploitation (more control on project implementation)
  • But do not underestimate amount of work involved (need a dedicated collaborator)
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Questions

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Do not hesitate do drop me an email!