

Making scientists better managers

Since 2004, **EMBO LABORATORY MANAGEMENT COURSES** have delivered benefits to almost a thousand young scientists. These increasingly popular courses are helping scientists to improve their management skills in a wide range of research situations.

A typical lab situation: A group leader is demanding the results of an experiment to be presented at the next team meeting. Yet the postdoctoral researcher needs another week to prepare them – and leaves his boss perplexed. Is it better to stay rigorous and insist on seeing the results or rather to accept the delay and grant an extension?

Managing people, producing results, building a reputation – starting an independent research group involves a lot of pressure for aspiring group leaders. Many of them feel ill-prepared and overwhelmed by the challenges they face. Training tailored to their particular needs is scarce.

This is where EMBO Laboratory Management Courses come in. Over the last nine years, nearly a thousand young group leaders and postdoctoral researchers completed the workshops developed by EMBO. They have been taught how to build and manage a team, how to communicate with their team members in a constructive manner and support them to become independent scientists, how to manage their time and stress levels, hire people and build and maintain collaborations. “Such training is not widely embedded in university study or in postdoctoral programmes, the courses have therefore an important role in the career development of scientists,” says *Anne-Marie Glynn*, programme manager. The length of the courses and the scope of topics have developed since its inception in 2004. Initially conceived for EMBO Young Investigators, they are now offered to group leaders and postdoctoral researchers too. Most of the participants are from European countries, but some travel from destinations in South America, Asia, Africa and Australia. The interest is growing each year:

“(the courses) are relevant for anyone who will have leadership or management responsibilities”



Since most of the courses scheduled for 2013 are oversubscribed, additional courses may be added later this year.

EMBO is successfully filling a gap. Last December, the organizers conducted a survey among postdoctoral researchers and group leaders who attended the workshops between 2010 and 2012. The results were overwhelmingly positive. 95 percent of the nearly 200 surveyed group leaders would recommend the course to their colleagues – or have done so already. 94 percent think that their performance as a group leader has improved after the course. And 93 percent say that the course met or exceeded their expectations.

EMBO is the only organization worldwide to offer regular laboratory management courses to hundreds of scientists annually. The successful format has been adopted by other institutes in Europe and beyond. The Gulbenkian Institute of Science in Portugal and the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, among others, have hired the EMBO trainers to teach similar courses on site. Many institute and department heads strongly recommend taking management training to their newly recruited group leaders. Also senior scientists from the United States appreciate the high standards: “The EMBO Laboratory Management Courses provide an invaluable opportunity for young scientists to learn the skills that are necessary for running an independent laboratory,” comments *Ron Vale*, Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator at the University of California in San Francisco and EMBO Associate Member.

Recurring topics. When asked about what they perceive as the biggest challenges as group leaders, most of the surveyed scientists mention three recurring topics: motivating group members, time management and dealing with personnel issues within the group. *Hilde Janssens*, herself an active scientist at the Centre for Genomic Regulation in Barcelona and one of the course trainers, confirms the tendency. “Better people management and social skills combined with some business knowledge increase the chances for a successful career; whereas twenty years ago a good scientific idea seemed to be enough.” For her, creating a stimulating atmosphere is key for the success of a research lab.

“Topic selection was excellent. I especially liked how the presenters tailored the topics based on participant feedback.”

The course programme is expanding its scope further: For the first time this year, EMBO is offering a course specifically tailored to the needs of female leaders in science. Participants will learn to identify and build the tools that will help them to lead a research group in a traditionally male dominated environment.

INFO

In 2013, EMBO offers five lab management courses for group leaders and seven for postdoctoral researchers all of which are currently fully subscribed. To see the exact schedule go to:

www.embo.org/programmes/courses-workshops/lab-management-courses.html

“Allowed me to better analyze and understand myself as a leader and a manager...”

