

SystemsX.ch Postdoc Workshop 2016



A different approach to supporting young scientists

A postdoc's role is demanding and multifaceted. It brings a lot of responsibility, for example when supervising students, without embodying a formal leadership role. Postdocs find themselves in a sort of "sandwich position" between research group leader and student, and are expected to simultaneously teach and conduct their own studies. Besides that, they also have to concentrate on furthering their own careers.

The participants at this year's Postdoc Workshop in Gerzensee in February learned how to identify and cope with the different roles required of them as postdocs. The workshop, titled "Leadership and Management Skills for Postdocs", was run by hfp consulting, a company which exclusively focuses on training and coaching for life scientists. Under guidance from the coaches, the researchers addressed issues such as key communication skills, conflict management and the efficient organization of their own work process.

Anil Kumar (PSI) attended the course to prepare for his future role as a research group leader: "Through comprehensible models and team exercises, we learned how to motivate, engage and activate others in a group in order to harness the maximum potential of each and

engage and activate others in a group in order to harness the maximum potential of each and every team member.” Ozlem Ipek (EPFL), too, found the leadership workshop to be beneficial: “I now have a much clearer idea of how to effectively set goals and deadlines and be a proactive leader.”

In the competitive environment of scientific research, where scientists have to work closely together, conflicts cannot be avoided. How to solve them when they arise, as well as how to design a productive collaboration process, were also highlighted in the workshop. “I am now more aware of the relationship between a person’s feelings and needs in communication,” says Ozlem after the course. An important skill that was practiced in this context is active listening, which means thoroughly concentrating on what your collaborator has to say in order to understand their needs. “I particularly liked learning the essence of what it takes to be a good listener during discussions. Throughout the exercises, it was impressive to experience that just by adopting a simple skill like active listening, so many issues can be resolved,” says Anil.

Important aspects of managing one’s own work process are how to set goals and priorities (see SMARTIES, right column) and subsequently delegate tasks. The importance of delegation as a tool for efficient time-management was one of the take-home messages for Anil: “It is a rarely-considered aspect of time-management and yet it can truly be life-changing, if used appropriately.” Ozlem found the exercises in smaller groups very valuable, where participants worked through concrete cases from their own experiences. “I am now much more appreciative of the power of peer feedback,” she says.

A further SystemsX.ch Postdoc Workshop is planned for 2017. Anil explains why it’s worth taking part: “Six weeks after the Postdoc Workshop 2016, I can see that the methods I have adopted as a result are bearing fruit and I can see a clear difference in my life. This is why I strongly recommend this course to people not just in leadership roles, but to everyone who wants to be a constructive team player.”