



Homogenisation in project management for large German research projects in the Earth system sciences: overcoming the institutional coordination bias

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The interdisciplinary project on High Definition Clouds and Precipitation for advancing climate prediction HD(CP)2 (hdcp2.eu) is an example for the trend in fundamental research in Europe to increasingly focus on large national and international research programs that require strong scientific coordination. The current system has traditionally been host-based: project coordination activities and funding is placed at the host institute of the central lead PI of the project. This approach is simple and has the advantage of strong collaboration between project coordinator and lead PI, while exhibiting a list of strong, inherent disadvantages that are also mentioned in this session's description: no community best practice development, lack of integration between similar projects, inefficient methodology development and usage, and finally poor career development opportunities for the coordinators.

Project coordinators often leave the project before it is finalized, leaving some of the fundamentally important closing processes to the PIs. This systematically prevents the creation of professional science management expertise within academia, which leads to an automatic imbalance that hinders the outcome of large research programs to help future funding decisions. Project coordinators in academia often do not work in a professional project office environment that could distribute activities and use professional tools and methods between different projects. Instead, every new project manager has to focus on methodological work anew (communication infrastructure, meetings, reporting), even though the technological needs of large research projects are similar. This decreases the efficiency of the coordination and leads to funding that is effectively misallocated.

We propose to challenge this system by creating a permanent, virtual "Centre for Earth System Science Management CESSMA" (cessma.com), and changing the approach from host-based to centre-based. This should complement the current system, by creating permanent, sustained options for interactions between large research projects in similar fields. In the long run such a centre might improve on the host-based system because the centre-based solution allows multiple projects to be coordinated in conjunction by experienced science managers, using overlap in meeting organization, reporting, infrastructure, travel and so on. To still maintain close cooperation between project managers and lead PIs, we envision a virtual centre that creates extensive collaborative opportunities by organizing yearly retreats, a shared technical data base, et cetera. As "CESSMA" is work in progress (we have applied for funding for 2016-18), we would like to use this opportunity to discuss chances, potential problems, experiences and options for this attempt to institutionalise the very reason for this session: improved, coordinated, effective science coordination; and to create a central focal point for public / academia interactions.