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Make research data management policies work: report from the Breakout groups

Breakout Tutorial Group 4 on using the LEARN Policy Toolkit

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Paolo Budroni (PB) begins with slide presentation

a) The world of data. Within the world of data there are different levels (processed, inconclusive, negative, positive, shared, released, published...). In the past 15 years focus was on OA data but in nowadays institutions learn that other data have to be managed and curated for the long-term too.

b) What are policies? PB explains policy-making process with respect to a larger framework of institutional values.

- Taboos > principles > policies > rules
- Important: FAIR doctrine is a principle not a policy. (positive assertion).
- Policy = a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization.
- Rules prescribe specific conducts or actions.
- Rules are only valid during a specified period of time.
- Rules can be created to comply with the exact language of a policy without complying with the spirit of a policy. Example how a rule is adapted absurdly, however, with applying to the policy.
- This framework can be extended with further concepts. For example: KPIs, guidance, dissemination, revision, etc.

Question from Sarita Albagli [?], Brazilian Institute of Technology

- Distinction between top-down and bottom-up policy development is very important
- LEARN Policy Toolkit is best though of not as the end of a process but the beginning of a process with a lot of diverse realities.
- Open access can be thought of as a set of movements, not all the same
- There are diverse and conflictive interests across the field, in national contexts, and within specific organizations; there are convergent interests too
- Barriers: there are linguistic barriers, With the partner ECLAC we are in the lucky position to approach certain language issues.
- We should be sure to include PhD students, they are our future colleagues.
- Bottom line: we need increased awareness of the realistic complexities that exist in the policy-making process at all levels (international, national, organizational).

[Response from PB]

- LEARN worked very hard not to be Eurocentric in its approach
- Trying to deal directly with linguistic barriers
- Adapting and using the LEARN framework to help bridge the continents

- Rights are also a barrier to policy and access; LEARN is trying to develop a “Schengen space” where open data can move freely across national and other cultural divide.

Question from person at University of Venice

- The beginning of LEARN felt like the start of something grassroots
- But after 1.5 years most of the work has been done on the “upper level” (reference to “top-down” policy making in the previous question).
- Universities in other countries are not fully autonomous to develop policies (this autonomy is however assumed by the LEARN Toolkit)
- Concern: Individual universities cannot handle RDM alone because it costs too much; each university invests a lot of money
- Not every university can develop the level of expertise necessary to develop RDM as per the Toolkit
- Therefore a consortium of universities may be the best approach: universities should not isolate themselves on RDM
- Also there is so much transformation in technologies, which makes it even harder
- Maybe private companies can give support (for ex training) on RDM issues?

[Response from PB]

- One way to manage down costs is to redefine the scope of policy so that not every kind of expertise is required; that is, reduce data size to reduce costs
- In fact, big data is not the issue: most universities deal with data stores < 1TB
- Also, working from small beginnings is effective: start with pilot projects with narrow scope, grow from there as appropriate or possible

[Response from Eva Eva Méndez Rodríguez, UC3M]

- Yes, universities don’t deal with big data so much as the “long tail” of data
- Infrastructures (often national) exist for big data
- Consortia are a good idea for dealing with both cost challenges and expertise challenges
- But it’s important to remember that researchers don’t want *perfect infrastructure* but rather *effective infrastructure*
- You do not necessarily have to build a repository if you implement a policy.

Question from unidentified person from the United Kingdom

- Our problem is that we already have a policy environment, and it is very complex
- We operate on a half-dozen different policies from different levels of management and university offices:
    - Funder policies
    - Core business offices
- Our goal is to *rewrite* policy based on:
    - What people think they do
    - What people actually do

Question from Danny Kingsley, Cambridge University

- We have found encouragement to share must begin earlier in the research process
- For effective RDM you must deal with the beginning of the research process
- Policy is really about training staff from the very beginning, when they conceive of a research project
- Policy is very easy to write: implementation and compliance are the hard parts

PB wraps up

- Take a look at what LEARN has put together, let us know if you have any questions.
- Thanks to everyone.