Engaging Researchers with Data Management
The Cookbook

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5.2. TU Delft Data Champions

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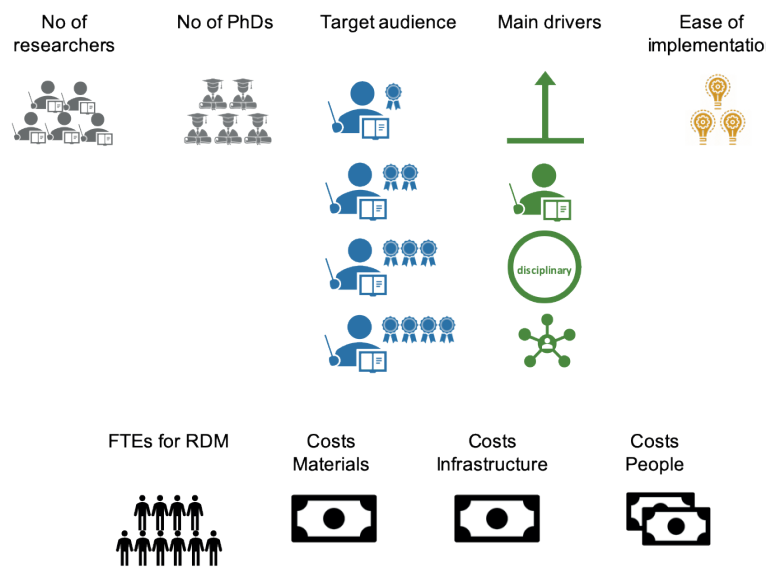
Contributor: Yasemin Türkyilmaz-van der Velden

RDM staff at TU Delft reflect on the value of their network of volunteer Data Champions for engaging with the research community, and explore how Data Champions can be appropriately rewarded for their contributions.



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Inspired by the original University of Cambridge Data Champions programme, TU Delft Data Champions programme was launched in September 2018 to deliver disciplinary-specific support to all 8 research faculties of Delft University of Technology. Sharing the common goal of advocating proper Research Data Management (RDM) practice, both programmes adopt a centrally-coordinated, researcher-led and bottom-up approach to community building.

As described in case 6.1, TU Delft Data Stewards are full-time staff embedded within each faculty with the purpose of being the first point of contact for inquiries relating to RDM practice. However, it is appreciated that Data Stewards will not possess all of the disciplinary experience and will not have all of the answers all of the time. Furthermore, they are unable to reach every single researcher; therefore there is a need for Data Champions to build on the existing infrastructure to create a cohesive web of support.

The Glue that Holds the Community Together

Data Champions are a valuable asset to the TU Delft research community. To date, there are 47 Champions and numbers are continually increasing. Data Steward and Data Champion Community Manager, Yasemin Türkyilmaz-van der Velden, tells us how the programme responds to the needs of Data Champions so that they can cater to the needs of their community: 'We appreciate that Data Champions are volunteers who offer their time, support and expertise out of goodwill. As this is not their full-time position and because time is in short supply, we don't enforce strict requirements on what they must deliver. Rather, we give them the flexibility to make their individual contribution to the community of TU Delft as they wish.'

Reward and Recognition: If They Make It 'FAIR' for Us, We Should Make It Fair for Them

One of the key objectives at TU Delft is to reward the exemplary efforts of their Data Champions by giving them more publicity, which in turn can raise their professional profile. Many researchers

Fig. 5.2 The network of Data Champions meet to discuss ideas and share knowledge at TU Delft. © Jan van der Heul/TU Delft, CC BY 4.0.

are taking great leaps forward to advance open science by making their data 'FAIR' (Findable Accessible Interoperable and Re-usable) but are not widely recognised for their inspiring work. TU Delft want to commend their Data Champions and express gratitude to those who go the extra mile.

A recent internship project is currently underway to publicise the achievements of TU Delft's Data Champions. One-to-one interviews are conducted with Champions to learn more about their research projects, how they effectively engage with researchers, their motivations for becoming Data Champions, and their future goals and aspirations. Following each interview, each Data Champion case study is written and published as an article on TU Delft's 'Open Working' blog (alongside a quirky illustration), under a dedicated tab on the Homepage titled 'Data Champions'.[7] Here are examples of articles written to showcase their stories:

7 Data Champions page on the Open Working blog, https://openworking.wordpress.com/data-champions/

Final Thoughts and Future Steps

Yasemin stimulates further debate over the best way to reward, recognise and incentivise good RDM practice in her final thoughts on the matter. 'To successfully sustain a thriving community of Data Champions at TU Delft we must continue to reward their efforts and explore innovative ways of reinventing the programme to attract new Data Champions and maintain turnover.'

In a recent interview with TU Delft library, Balázs Dukai expressed his feelings of personal satisfaction and accomplishment upon joining the network of Data Champions. 'As an individual researcher, becoming a Data Champion has allowed me to acquire valuable skills and knowledge that I wouldn't have otherwise encountered. As part of a wider research community, becoming a Data Champion has allowed me to connect my group with a diverse network with opportunity for collaboration.' From this we conclude that whilst efforts should be made to reward and recognise Data Champions for their work, simply becoming a member of a supportive community network can be a reward in itself.