

**MULTIPOS**  
**D6.16 Version 1.0**  
*Best practices and results*

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**Abstract:** This deliverable shows the lessons learnt within MULTI-POS, best practices and results

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## Document Control

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**Executive Summary**

This deliverable shows the lessons learnt within MULTI-POS, best practices and results

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## 1. MULTI-POS best practices and results

The path to a successful and cooperative network is not always smooth. Marie Curie networks are, by definition, networks of people of various technical and cultural backgrounds and with different personalities, individual work and life targets, and personal ways of solving the challenges that each has to cope with. The larger a network is, the more likely it is that some conflict issues or personality mismatches appear, but this is not always a bad thing, and it can be used as a learning and growth lesson. This deliverable addresses the various challenges that were encountered during MULTI-POS implementation and it summarizes the lessons learnt and best practices by both the fellows and the supervisors.

### 1.1 Mobility related observations

A training network, such as the Marie Curie networks, enables wide international interconnections and can offer multiple benefits to its participants, such as open access to different units and different research facilities and equipment, easy contacts with people from various scientific areas, and very good research and mobility funding for the selected fellows. Its requirement to hire only people who have not been living more than 12 months in the 3 years previous to their contract start date in the country of employment can be both a blessing and a curse.

On one hand, creating a large network with a vast cultural background can foster great learning opportunities in terms of social, inter-personal and working style skills and can enable the participants to become more open-minded, more flexible and more tolerant.

On the other hand, adaptation to a new country and a new culture and interacting with the other fellows and supervisors in the network is not always an easy task, and sometimes the administrative and language barriers can make the experience quite difficult.

Nevertheless, in MULTI-POS the positive points triggered by the mobility surpassed the negative points and the overall experience of the fellows has been 92% positive, according to an anonymous web-based survey conducted in May 2016 among the fellows. Moreover, 58% of the fellows, if given the chance to choose again, would repeat the MULTI-POS experience without any qualms and the other 42% of the fellows would be willing to repeat the experience by paying more attention to choosing the host unit, the host country (e.g., by choosing among countries where they have basic language proficiency), and by being more pro-active in the self-management of time and research tasks.

### 1.2 Administration-related observations

The administrative issues are mainly seen from the coordinator and supervisors' points of view.

The first administrative lesson to learn was that although the timing of the project seems very relaxed, as the Early Stage Researchers have three-year contracts in a four-year project and thus one year as error margin in the recruitment stage, it is however very likely to have large recruitment delays. Such long recruitment delays, at worst, would cause the cut of the length of the fellow's duration of employment. The fact that the contracts are not be reimbursed beyond the end of the project made the contract duration flexibility very low. In MULTI-POS case such delays were caused by:

- partner withdrawal, causing a chain of a management decision on the withdrawal, search of a partner to take over the position, another decision on moving the position and related funding, restart of the recruitment process, and finally agreeing on the starting date with the selected fellow.
- difficulties in obtaining a visa and work permit for fellows recruited from outside Europe.

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- resignation of a recruited fellow, leading to management decisions, restart of the recruitment, and matching the starting date to the incoming fellow's situation.
  - delay in obtaining the required degree diplomas (MSc or PhD) by some selected fellows, due for example to various administrative delays in their home country.

The main lesson learnt in the recruitment process was that it may be good to start the advertising of the possible open positions even before the final signatures are in place. This would increase the chance of finding excellent candidates.

Another lesson related to the length of the fellow contracts was that in most of the countries, the PhD studies take more than three years. In this kind of a training network project, the timing is even more challenging, as the fellow will spend a long time in secondment which will practically spread the focus a bit and cause a new learning curve to be taken by the fellow. Additionally, the training in MULTI-POS was more extensive than in most of the PhD programmes in individual universities. So much to do, so little time. As a consequence, most of the universities in MULTI-POS will have to find additional funding to support the PhD completion of the fellows.

From the point of view of the local management and administrative issues at each partner in the network, the implementation of a Marie Curie network requires some learning curve for partners not used to this type of funding. In a Marie Curie network, the funding follows the fellow, and in case there is a need to make a decision to transfer the fellow from one employer to another, there is not such a thing, as the budget dedicated to the company was dedicated to the individual fellow. In MULTI-POS, unfortunately a couple of such transfers had to be made in order to ensure that the planned training will take place. Based on MULTI-POS experience, the standard consortium agreements introduce too time-consuming procedures to deal with acute situations where the fellow needs to be “rescued” to enable the training to continue. The management of regular EU projects do not face similar situations as in the fellow-centric Marie Curie networks.

Some learning was needed also at the financial and/or HR departments of the companies and universities. The requirements to use all the living and mobility allowances to the salary of the fellow and related compulsory employer costs, as well as the freely usable lump sum training and overhead allowances were at first interpreted in different ways and have required some advising every now and then. A financial learning was also that the interim payments have been severely delayed due to a number of clarifications needed from one or few of the partners, which affected all partners in the network.

From above it starts to be obvious that a dedicated project manager is essential in Marie Curie projects. As several changes in the secondment plans had to be made, and new associate partners to host some secondments had to be found and attracted to the network, there has been a lot of effort to follow all the changes in the secondment and associate partner contracts. It proved to be very difficult also to get new associate partners to join the network after its starting date, mostly related to IPR constraints. By default, the IPRs are owned by the employer unless they are explicitly transferred or licensed to the secondment host. A lesson learnt is that the IPR rules and the possibility of transfer or license the results should be very clear and specific from the beginning for each partner in the network, and the secondments plans and possible changes in secondments are also better to be considered with care from the very beginning (e.g., at the network creation).

### **1.3 Science and research-related observations**

MULTI-POS covers a wide and varied range of research topics. This meant that during the workshops, some fellows had difficulties to follow the research issues presented by other fellows working in a distinct area. It was noticed that the best way to address this challenge has been to allocate the fellows into smaller groups of four-five people (e.g. by work package) and to let them present their work to a reduced audience. This proved to encourage networking, brainstorming and being proactive. For instance, this kind of thinking was developed in the workshop in Gothenburg in 2015. One of the outputs of that workshop was a common paper submission by 5 fellows in October 2015. Joint work has also been encouraged during local meetings, for example when several fellows intersected during their work or secondments and during conference and workshop attendance. As a result, MULTI-POS has now 13 joint publications where at least two MULTI-POS fellows worked together, plus other 24 publications where at least two MULTI-POS fellows or supervisors coming from different units worked with each other.

MULTI-POS greatly helped the fellows getting access to top researchers and sharing ideas and thoughts with them. Some fellows confessed to have experienced “personal paradigm shifts” when tackling jointly

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certain research problems, by getting inspiration from the other network members and their collaborators. However, the full potential of the network was not used since the technical skills of each one were used solely towards their own work and not for a common goal. This has been indeed one of the main criticism of the fellows, when asked about their opinion on MULTI-POS, that the inter-project communication could be improved, and working on common goals with higher amount of scientific overlap could foster better the collaboration. It has been also pointed out by the fellows that the sharing of knowledge during workshops could be easier by hands-on experiments instead of sharing the knowledge only through slide presentations.

The fact that most of the network topics were very focused towards specific and novel issues made that the majority of the hired researchers to have a rather low knowledge in the selected research area. This, combined with the relatively small duration of maximum 3 years of the network made some of the fellows to feel that they did not have enough time to absorb all the new knowledge needed or to benefit of a deep learning of the addresses topics.

Another challenge pointed out by the fellows has been the fact that it is not easy to match the academy requirements with companies' interests. In the private sector, which was heavily present both as main hosts and secondment places in MULTI-POS, publications are more restricted, the data sharing is more controlled, and the instructions between the academy and industry supervisors may often be mismatching or even incompatible. The possible solutions to tackle such challenges are to discuss the academic requirements with the industrial units from the very beginning and to agree upon the common interests and to initiate more joint meetings with both academic and industrial supervisors so that there is no risk of misunderstandings.

#### **1.4 Personal and cultural-related observations**

One of the very pleasant lessons was to find out, in a multi-cultural workshop organized as part of one of the training events, that the fellows and supervisors are representing a broad variety of personalities. That depends on the nationality, but also on individual properties. With this take-away from the workshop we have been able to understand and interpret each other much better, and the team of fellows fits very well together at work and in leisure. There have been very few personal adaptability issues even with "extreme personalities".

What was also learned was that the selective process of recruiting the fellows yielded, in general, very good fellows. However, the remote selection of fellows, based only on phone or video interviews is not always an easy task, and, in some cases, the results can be unsatisfactory for both the fellow and the supervisor. In MULTI-POS, following an anonymous survey, 60 % of supervisors said that they have been very happy with their choice of fellows, 30 % were moderately happy and 10 % were not satisfied with the outcome. From the fellows' point of view, 40% have been very happy with their supervisors, 40% have been moderately happy and 20% have been unhappy with the amount of guidance and supervision and the interactions with their supervisors. This shows, on one hand, that there is a non-negligible percent of mismatches between supervisors and fellows, due maybe to different expectations, different work goals and work practices and different personalities, and, on other hand, that fellows tend to have a more critical view on what they expect in terms of supervision in such kind of a program.

A good lesson learnt with positive outcome in MULTI-POS has been to pair and group the fellows to work towards common goals, such as joint paper writing, team work during workshops, or joint book chapter writing. That has triggered more interaction and collaboration between the fellows.

As expected, the recruited fellows have different personalities and may have very different motivations: some more technical, others more scientific, other more "qualitative" oriented. The lesson learnt here is that the network goals and the supervisory support should be flexible enough in order to accommodate all the different needs and to try to make all of the participants happy, or at least, to feel that there is a mutual gain from the mutual effort.

Another important lesson to be learnt has also been that the social skills are as important as the technical skills in such a network.

Some fellows also found challenging the economic conditions in the new country, such as expensive accommodation (or poor quality/price ratio for the available accommodations) and long delays in getting receipts reimbursed after a work travel.



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Some fellows pointed out that the language barrier can be an important challenge in such a network, especially when the fellows have to work in countries with languages very different from their own native language. 42% of the fellows confessed to have acquired at least some basic skills of the language of the country of their host or secondment unit, 8% acquired some moderate knowledge of a new language, 17% acquired advanced knowledge of a new language, and 33% of the fellows did not put any effort and did not have any opportunity to learn a new language in the country where they were staying.

In terms of perceived future employability after MULTI-POS, 80% of the fellows are positive that this training has improved significantly their success in any future career path they might choose. The rest of 20% have no opinion or are not sure whether this network training benefited their career or not.

## **2. Internal network survey regarding best practices and satisfaction within MULTI-POS**

### **2.1 Supervisor questions**

The word "Fresh" is written in a stylized, orange, cursive font.

#### *Lessons learnt, supervisors view*

**1.** On a scale from 1 (very unsatisfactory) to 5 (very good), how would you rate your experience as a supervisor in MULTI-POS?

- 1 (Very unsatisfactory)
- 2 (Unsatisfactory)
- 3 (Indifferent)
- 4 (Good)
- 5 (Very Good)

**2.** If the opportunity arises, would you be willing to participate in another Initial Training Network (ITN)?

- No
- Yes, but only as an Associated Partner
- Yes, but only as a Full Partner
- Yes, either as an Associated Partner or as a Full Partner

**3.** What percentage of your full working time do you feel you had to dedicate to MULTI-POS related tasks? (supervision, traveling, administrative tasks, etc)

- Less than 5%

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- Between 5 and 10%
  - Between 10 and 20%
  - Between 20 and 30%
  - Between 30 and 50%
  - Between 50 and 70%
  - More than 70%

4. In overall, are you happy with your choice of fellow(s) in your group?

- Not at all
- Moderately so
- Yes, very

5. Do you think your professional network has been positively expanded as a result of MULTI-POS? (e.g., measured for example through new projects, more visibility of your research work, more invitations to international events, etc)

- Yes
- No
- No idea/not sure

6. What, in your opinion, should be the main characteristics of a fellow hired in an ITN network such as MULTI-POS (please select maximum 3 among the ones below)

- Good technical knowledge in the chosen field
- Good technical background in fields supporting the chosen research area
- Good social skills/team player
- Ability to work hard
- A friendly personality
- Good presentation skills
- A high willingness to travel
- Good organizational skills
- An easy-going personality
- Open-mindedness

7. If it is to name up to 3 main lessons learnt during MULTI-POS, which are they?

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## 2.2 Fellows questions

# Business

### Lessons Learnt

1. Which have been the main technical challenges you encountered during your stay in MULTI-POS?

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2. Which have been the main non-technical challenges you encountered during your stay in MULTI-POS? (e.g., cultural differences if any, administrative complications, if any, finding good accommodation, interpersonal relations, etc)

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3. Which has been your best experience in MULTI-POS? (think both about technical and non-technical aspects)

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4. What you would do differently if we were to start again? would you even choose to be a part of MULTI-POS?

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5. What main advices would you give to an ESR/ER embarking on a new ITN?

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6. What do you think are the main advantages and main disadvantages when moving to a new country?

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7. In your opinion, have you learnt any new entrepreneurial or leadership skills during your stay in MULTI-POS?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

8. Have you learnt any new language during your stay in MULTI-POS?

- No
- Yes, basic knowledge of at least one new language
- Yes, moderate knowledge of at least one new language
- Yes, advanced knowledge of at least one new language

9. Do you think your stay in MULTI-POS improved your employability and/or your chances of success in your future career?

- Yes
- No
- No idea/Not sure

10. Overall, how happy are you with your supervisors in MULTI-POS?

- Not Happy At All
- Moderately Happy
- Very Happy

11. On a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good), how would you rate your overall experience in MULTI-POS?

- 1 (very bad)
- 2 (bad)
- 3 (indifferent)
- 4 (good)

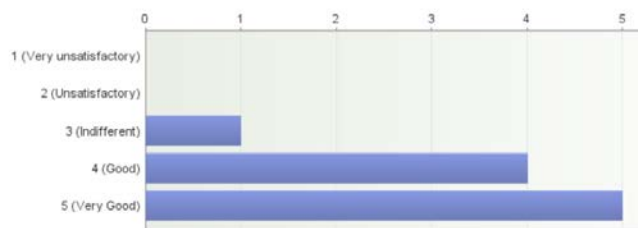
○ 5 (very good)

## 2.3 Snapshots of the results

### 2.3.1 Supervisors' point of view

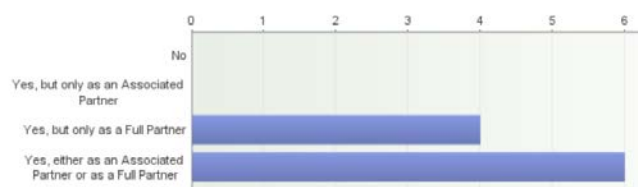
1. On a scale from 1 (very unsatisfactory) to 5 (very good), how would you rate your experience as a supervisor in MULTI-POS?

Number of respondents: 10



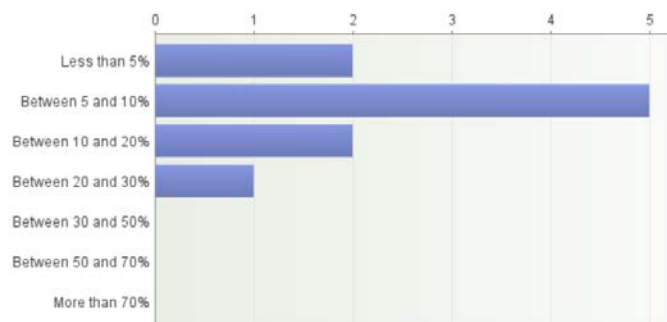
2. If the opportunity arises, would you be willing to participate in another Initial Training Network (ITN)?

Number of respondents: 10



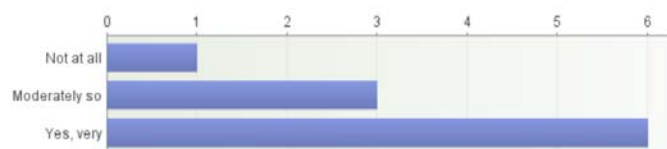
3. What percentage of your full working time do you feel you had to dedicate to MULTI-POS related tasks? (supervision, traveling, administrative tasks, etc)

Number of respondents: 10



4. In overall, are you happy with your choice of fellow(s) in your group?

Number of respondents: 10



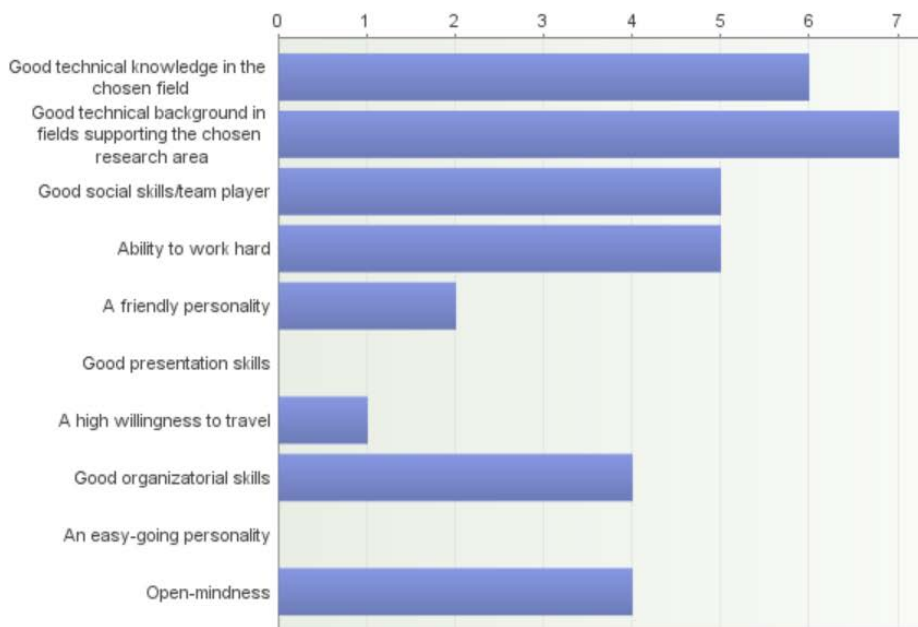
5. Do you think your professional network has been positively expanded as a result of MULTI-POS? (e.g., measured for example through new projects, more visibility of your research work, more invitations to international events, etc)

Number of respondents: 10



6. What, in your opinion, should be the main characteristics of a fellow hired in an ITN network such as MULTI-POS (please select maximum 3 among the ones below)

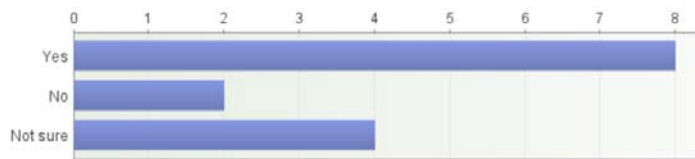
Number of respondents: 10



## 2.3.2 Fellows' point of view

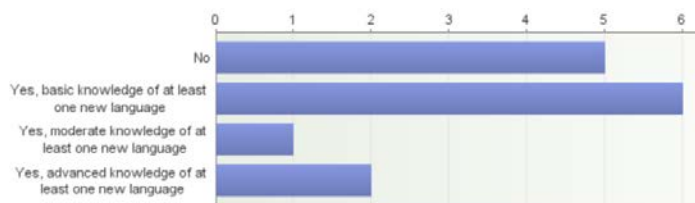
7. In your opinion, have you learnt any new entrepreneurial or leadership skills during your stay in MULTI-PC

Number of respondents: 14



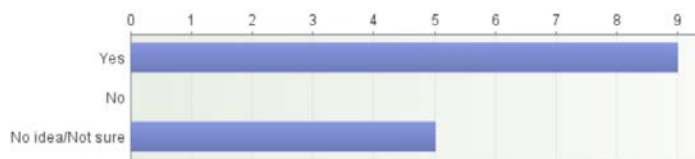
8. Have you learnt any new language during your stay in MULTI-POS?

Number of respondents: 14



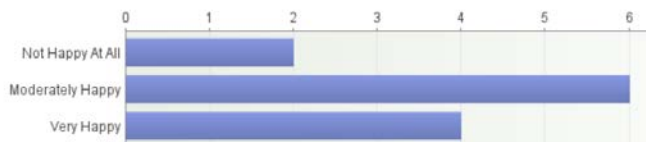
9. Do you think your stay in MULTI-POS improved your employability and/or your chances of success in you future career?

Number of respondents: 14



10. Overall, how happy are you with your supervisors in MULTI-POS?

Number of respondents: 12



11. On a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good), how would you rate your overall experience in MULTI-POS?

Number of respondents: 14

