

SPARK

Strategic Project Management Resource Kit

Fostering **excellence** in the practice of European project management.



Management : Cementing the road to research project success

A road provides the route to the final destination. It may twist and turn, possibly come to a dead end. Likewise the route to a successful research project can be a bumpy journey. SPARK recognised the high complexity involved with project coordination and aspired to take European research projects to a higher level of achievement through the use of sophisticated management techniques and tools.

The borderline between a successful project and one which is under accomplished is tight and one that is not easily identified. Success factors become apparent once a project has been completed, whether it be a success in itself or not. Unfortunately these success factors cannot readily be determined beforehand. However, research has identified that effective project management dramatically increases the likelihood of a project's success.

SPARK project had the ambi-

tion of enhancing the rate of success through the collection of best practices taken from the experiences of R&D project managers across Europe. The codification of this tacit knowledge was then made accessible to all European research project managers and therefore formed a strong foundation for managers of current and future research projects.

This research was only possible through the dedication and full support of LSH managers themselves. It was through this expert support that the identification of proven best practices was possible. This in itself was the clinch that distinguished SPARK project from any other ordinary management tool book. This project went a step further than that—by basing our research on the real existing practices and know-how within the LSH community, SPARK aimed to cross-fertilise these processes across a network of excellence. A well-planned road map to success was what was being put forward by SPARK.

SPARK-LINK Overview

Update 2008 Content summary

Management : Cementing the road to research project success	1
Why this mattered to the LSH community	1
On the road to success !	2
A pragmatic approach to foster excellence	3
Promoting further win-win opportunities	3
Competence sharing meeting	4
Free online tools	5
SPARK project fact sheet	6

Why this mattered to the LSH community

It was the first time that the Commission had chosen to promote a project which aimed to foster excellency regarding management practices. At the time, the improvement of European research was one of the main targets on the agenda of the European Commission which, in 2005, had a budget of 17 billion Euros funding. Management issues were beginning to gain importance as European funding increased (63% for FP7, up to 50.5 billion Euros).

SPARK, a result-driven, EU funded project, underwent the research necessary in partnership with the LSH community, in order to cross-fertilise knowledge in the field of management. With the aim of fos-

tering excellency in the practice of FP6 project management, SPARK established a reference pool of key management processes, methods and tools based on Life Science and Health (LSH) project experiences. The dissemination of best practices enables LSH project managers to optimise their performance.

The essence of the project was to provide the resources from those practices which have been proven to be the most efficient. In such a way, the creation of a toolkit of best management standards offers an excellent approach to knowledge transfer and provides benefits to the broadest possible audience.

On the road to success !

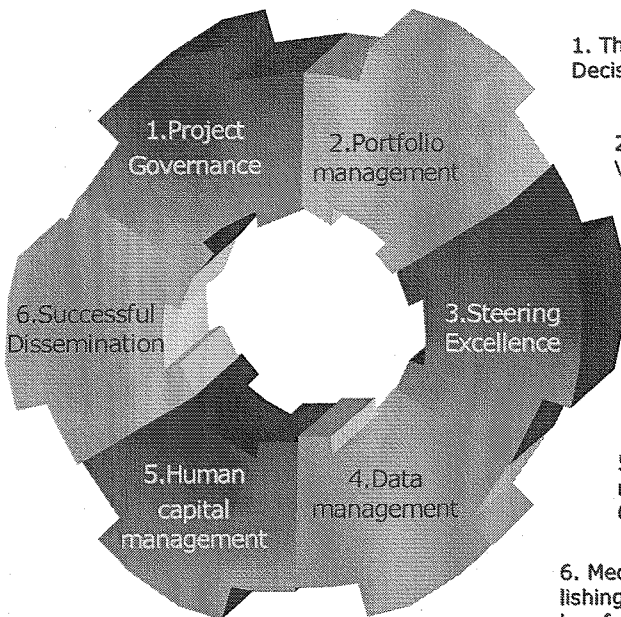
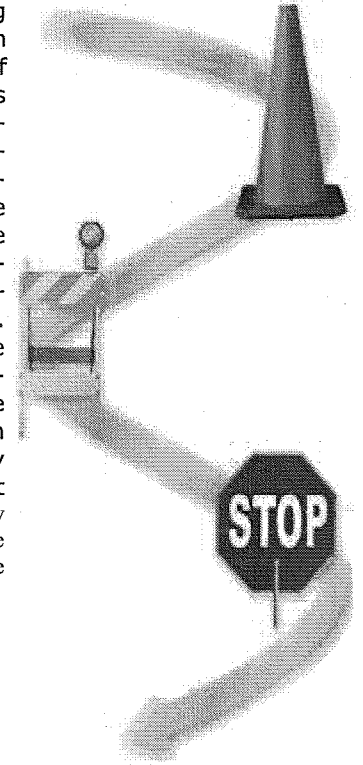


A key first step along the path to successful research project execution is the initial breakdown of the different stages one has to accomplish in order to achieve the goal. Life, Science and Health research, especially in the developing world, requires that research managers be familiar with some general principles and concepts and the importance and use of these principles in order to be able to plan effective research projects and derive the critical information through monitoring and evaluation, which is essential for management decision making. To do this, research managers must be able to develop sound research proposals, design efficient data-capturing, monitoring, and evaluation schemes for their respective institutions, implement the schemes with full support of all stakeholders, analyse the data appropriately, and use the derived information for improving subsequent research. Planning research projects and monitoring and evaluating ongoing and completed research projects are key tasks of the research manager. For ongoing research, the effectiveness of the project and the attainment of its objectives are of critical importance. Through SPARK, the risk of excessive effort being put into projects is minimised.

European projects demand greater re-

sources and skills if they are to remain sustainable in an increasingly international environment. Project coordinators have a long windy road to follow in terms of the management of a research project. Along this road there are many obstacles which inevitably reduces the rate of success.

SPARK, having identified excellence in management as one of the major driving forces of the success of a project, was able to distinguish six different categories to allow the ease of tackling each obstacle through the use of tangible practices (see diagram 1 underneath). This is essentially the road map to the practical applications of these best practices. Through this model proposed by SPARK research project managers can better identify critical objectives, measure and initiatives required to drive performance.



1. The alignment of R&D projects with corporate priorities, Decision making, Partnership, Institutional Management.

2. Prioritisation, Future and emerging technologies, Vision, Valorisation and exploitation of results, Sustainability.

3. Monitoring Project risks, costs, timeliness, and Project Quality.

4. IPR issues, Knowledge and intellectual management, Document/ Information management (virtual library) Competitive intelligence, Technology watch.

5. Competencies and skills framework, Training, Hiring and retaining people: high potential individual, Talent sharing, Creativity Challenging, charisma.

6. Media, Website, Publication External resources. Establishing highly developed external communication links is a key factor in successful research projects.

Diagram 1: The SPARK wheel of best management practices

A pragmatic approach to foster excellence

If European projects are to be successful, it is crucial to have excellence in management in order to achieve positive results. **What do we mean by excellence?** Excellence is achieved when all the partners involved in a project are satisfied. SPARK recognised that world-class excellence exists amongst the practices used in European projects. However, at the time, there did not exist any comprehensive tool which allowed the certainty that all partners would be satisfied and consequently there was no concrete method securing excellence in European research projects. Through SPARK, these tools were identified and made accessible to all European project managers.

What exactly is a tool of excellence used in best practices of research project management? SPARK believed that these tools were:

- easy learning,
- a human resources tool,
- a visual tool that provides a global vision,
- easy regulation and
- confines.

A pragmatic approach to fostering excellence was achieved through the adaptation of a two step approach: Firstly, the process of data collection had to be completed simultaneously with the encouragement of LSH community participation. This was done through the identification of the best practices proven from real experiences. Face-to-face interviews with individual LSH coordinators and various web surveys provided a spread of reliable information in order to carry out our mission. The second phase consisted of the interchange and appraisal of best practice's performance. This phase was intended to secure the validity of the research finding. Through the collection of the powerful tools that al-

ready existed in related fields, specifically on the private market; SPARK helped improve the understanding and competencies of experienced and new project management practitioners. To accomplish this, SPARK challenged then-current practices, assessed them according to a unique framework, identified best-in-class practices within the project under scrutiny and defined, documented and championed the best practices which could be implemented within research projects in order to achieve their goals. In order for SPARK project to be visible, the approach was pragmatic and delivered implementation tools.

European research projects within the LSH community are unique to other projects in the sense that their coordination faces a large array of constraints. The vast range of nationalities offer a multi-lingual and cultural diversity which can pose challenges when managing research projects. Furthermore, the European Commission has to be convinced that the project is worthy of EU funding. Managers are looking to optimise their time and above all obtain the most sought after competencies regarding the management of a research project in the LSH domain. SPARK essentially aimed to create a collection of significantly mastered tools which aid in management decision making.



Promoting further win-win opportunities

SPARK project offered a new horizon for LSH activity and research. Experience proved that project coordinators were intensively looking for powerful management tools and techniques. SPARK essentially aimed to create favourable conditions to increase the impact of research efforts by strengthening the coherence of research managerial activities conducted in Europe. This was achieved through the mutual experiences gained between LSH managers and SPARK.

It is said that management is and will be an indicator for selecting proposals in the future. SPARK has provided research managers with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to make decisions that should be translated into efficient and effective technology generation and development activities. It was the support from LSH communities and their devotion to SPARK that provided the basis for the identification of excellent tools and techniques. The dissemination of best practices and tools with the SPARK initiative resulted in the establishment of a reference pool of excellent practices, which was presented in a series of workshops and an interactive handbook, consisting also of a help-line.

By using excellent tools, project managers can be awarded extra time resulting from efficient management. Consequently, managers are relieved of stress, resulting from reduced uncertainty and wasted-time. In turn, this allows the allocation of more time being spent on the actual research activity and its exploitation and valorisation. SPARK ran for 30 months and provided LSH management teams with improved skills and techniques for handling Research projects.



Competence sharing meetings

Through meetings and training sessions, the SPARK team was able to refine its project and provide tools particularly adapted to the management of European projects.

21st-22nd November 2005, Karlsruhe:

Presentation of the good practices identified and validation

27-28 April, 2006 Barcelona, Spain:

A practical view of practices/tools for the daily work of project managers was achieved with the new focus also on interactive web-tool test sessions and longer discussions during most of the practice presentations. The opportunity to see and test the Self-Assessment and Training Platform provided practical management advice. Altogether, due to the higher number of participants, a much bigger audience of managers/coordinators could be used for the evaluation. Altogether, this workshop gave further insights on how practices can be and are being adopted and/or evaluated by participants.

28 September, 2006 Sophia Antipolis, France:

The meeting led - firstly - to the exchange of best practice between the two consortiums from EC's Life Science and Health Priority which work on two crucial topics of EC projects (i.e. set-up and management of projects) and with different actors (i.e. SMEs, RD actors). This meeting was - secondly - followed by a discussion on how to ensure the sustainability of NoEs and IPs through the involvement of industry (especially SMEs) in EU networks.

29-30 March, 2007 Copenhagen, Denmark:

This event took place in at the Technical University of Denmark in Lyngby near Copenhagen. Extracts from the overall results and findings of the SSA were presented, latest FP7 trends discussed and open plenary sessions were used by participants to intensively exchange experience on FP management issues with European experts in the field. Once again, web-based instruments and software applications for the set-up, management and running of projects were tested interactively. SPARK's "Self Assessment and Training Platform" was presented.

This series of meetings allowed one to count more than 67 experts whose contact details are made available in the tools created by SPARK.



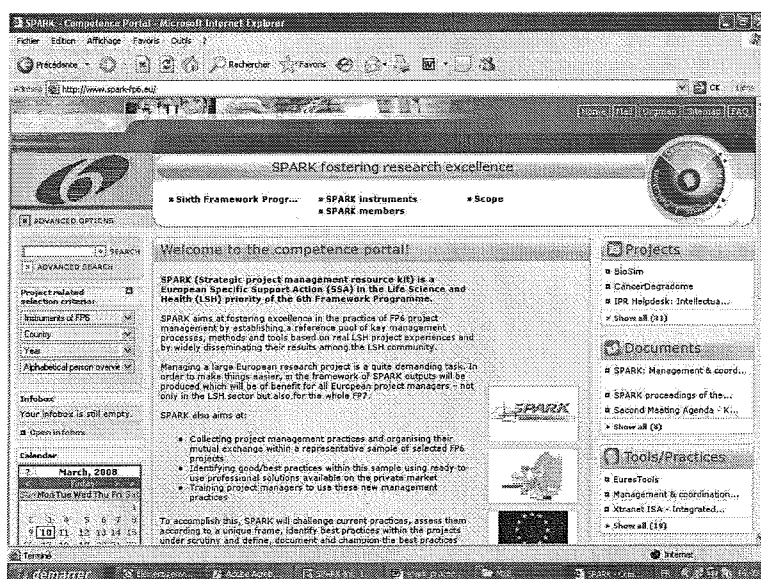
Free online tools: Competence Platform

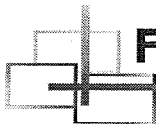
www.spark-fp6.eu

The SPARK project led to two support tools for European project management. The first one gives you access to a set of tools and best practices allowing you to learn to be excellent in European project management. The second gives you access to a set of tools and best practices allowing you to learn to be excellent in European project management. allows you to test your knowledge and competencies in the field of management of European projects. A free online tool, available to managers of European projects which gives access to many existing tools and European project factsheets, news, and a consultant network. Unlike other platforms, the SPARK competence platform is **completely free of charge** and accessible to anyone.

One the platform can be found information on:

- 31 projects,
- 19 tools and best practices,
- 51 organisations,
- 67 experts.



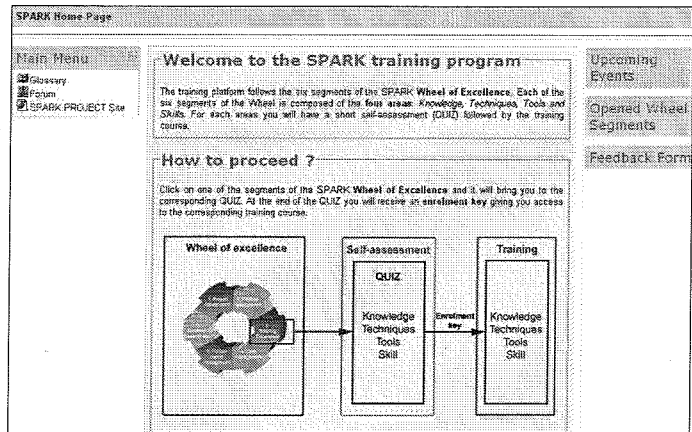


Free online tools: Competence Platform

The free online training platform follows the six segments of the SPARK Wheel of Excellence. Each of the six segments of the Wheel is composed of the four areas:

- Knowledge,
- Techniques,
- Tools,
- Skills.

For each areas you will have a short self-assessment (QUIZ) followed by the training course.



<http://spark.vitamib.com/>

This training platform is **free of charge** and accessible to anyone interested in information regarding the management of European projects.

Course categories include assesement, techniques, projects. Within these subcategories include: project governance quiz, data management techniques, steering excellence quiz, successful dissemination techniques, and over 30 projects.

SPARK project fact sheet

SPARK Context: The SPARK project was funded by the Research Directorate-General of the European Community under the Thematic Priority 1: Life Sciences, Genomic and Biotechnology for Health of the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6).

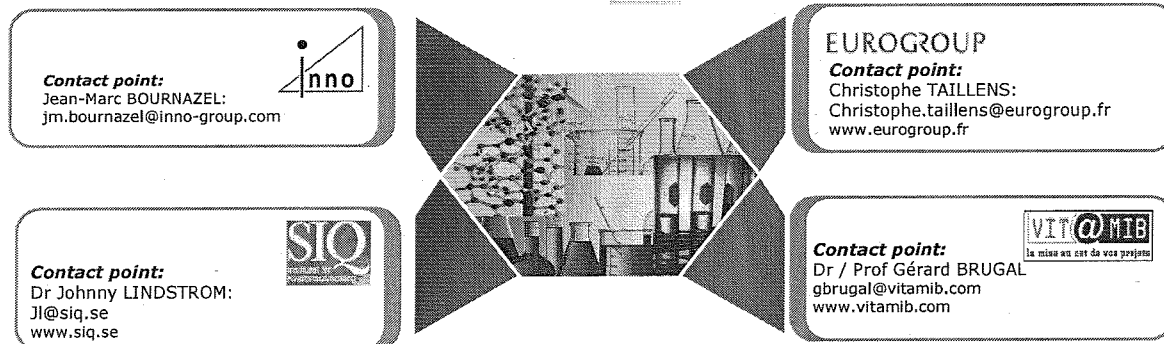
SPARK objective: SPARK (Strategic Project mAnagement Resource Kit) aimed to foster excellency in the practice of FP6 project management, through the establishment of a reference pool of key management processes, methods and tools based on (LSH) project experiences.

Instrument Type: Specific Support Action

Contract number: LSSM-CT-2004-512027

Project duration: 30 months, ending in June 2007

SPARK project partners:



Inno, project coordinator, is a leading strategic management consultancy company operating in all European countries. Inno consists of a highly qualified team of more than 50 consultants. The Inno Company is located in Germany, France, Austria, Sweden and with a representation in Russia. The company serves its clients around 5 strategic themes: 1. Creating value out of public R&D through Private-Public Partnerships (commercialisation of R&D results, IP exploitation, R&D contracts, Start-Ups); 2. Supporting access and participation to EU financed programmes; 3. Accelerating economic development of Eastern European Regions, including in the CIS; 4. Managing European Networks and competence mapping; 5. Assisting in the implementation of public sector investment projects and programmes

EUROGROUP, an independent and leading consulting firm totalling approximately 370 consultants in France (total workforce 420) and specialized in project management and organizational change in large private corporations and public bodies. Founded in 1982, Eurogroup has more than 20 years of experience in project management in complex and often international environments (Banking, Insurance and Welfare, Industry and Services...). Eurogroup's priority is to guarantee customer acceptance, result dissemination and project final success in strategy, governance, project management, benchmarking, organisation, business processes, innovation management, information technology. Eurogroup, with a turnover of 59 M€ (03/04), is the node of the Eurogroup Consulting Alliance, a network of independent consultancies, totalling more than 600 consultants in Europe, for a 110 M€ turnover.

VITAMIB is a spin-off based on the development of tools for collaborative work on the internet. VITAMIB led the training sessions of this project and the assessment of the technicality of the tools identified. VITAMIB consultants have a 20-year experience of initiating and managing European projects in many programmes, accompanying measures, concerted actions, training, as well as sustained development initiatives.

SIQ, Institutet för Kvalitetsutveckling, is a foundation set up by the Swedish government is an industrial research institute operating in the field of Business Excellence. They were in charge of validating the methodology approach ensuring successful project management.

SPARK Project Contact

Jean-Marc BOURNAZEL

e-mail: jm.bournazel@inno-group.com

Tel: +33 492 38 84 14



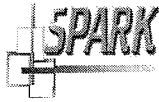
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European Commission



Annex – Plan for using and disseminating the knowledge

The overall project is user oriented and therefore encourages totally the interactions and dissemination by using all sources of media.

Exploitable Knowledge (description)	Exploitable product(s) or measure(s)	Sector(s) of application	Timetable for commercial use	Patents or other IPR protection	Owner & Other Partner(s) involved
<i>1. Best Practices for Scientific Project Management</i>	<i>Management Toolkit and Practices</i>	<i>1. Research Project Management</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Training Program</i>	<i>Management tool kit and practice competence portail http://www.spark-fp6.eu/ and training plateformeht tp://spark.vitamib.com/</i>	<i>1. Research Project Management</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>



Planned / actual Dates	Type	Type of audience	Countries addressed	Size of audience	Partner responsible / involved
YES, linked to date of workshop	Press release (press) Copenhagen (March 07) http://www.fys.dtu.dk/Nyheder/Seneste_nyt/Spark_workshop.aspx	Research & Higher Education	DK	DTU scientific community & networks	Coordinator / host of workshop DTU
NO	Media briefing	Higher education	/	/	/
YES, two times during operation	Conferences, Seminars KoWi Info Workshop on FP6, Berlin (July 06) http://www.spark-fp6.eu/index.php/kb_1546/io_1773/io.html?print=1&pdf=1 = SPARK & NATIBS Workshop: inno-group Conference, Sophia Antipolis (Sep. 06)	Research & Higher Education Research, Industry, Politics - "triple-helix"	GER many EU countries	120 25	Coordinator Coordinator
NO	Exhibition	Industry (sector x)	/	/	/
YES, ongoing during project	Publications all-embracing proceedings of SPARK Workshops (incl. Plug & Test Events): Paris/F (June 05), Karlsruhe/GER (Oct. 05), Barcelona/ES (April 06), Copenhagen/DK (March 07) SPARK Training Platform (online) http://spark.vitamb.com	Research (main focus), Industry, Politics - "triple-helix"; everyone interested in the management practices of FP projects; European Life Science Community as a whole	mainly EU countries	not possible to be specified precisely	Coordinator, all partners Vitamb, all partners
YES, launched winter 05/06	Project web-site http://www.spark-fp6.eu	European Life Science Community (mainly coordinators, researchers)	www - therefore "everyone", mainly EU countries	not possible to be specified precisely	Coordinator, all partners



Planned / actual Dates	Type	Type of audience	Countries addressed	Size of audience	Partner responsible / involved
NO	<i>Posters</i>	/	/	/	/
YES, <i>prepared at beginning of operation</i>	Flyers <i>SPARK Project Fact Sheet / Brochure (4-page flyer)</i>	<i>European Life Science Community (mainly coordinators, researchers)</i>	<i>mainly EU countries</i>	<i>not possible to be specified precisely</i>	<i>Coordinator, all partners</i>
YES, <i>during whole project - linked to dates for promotion of workshops</i>	Direct e-mailing <i>mailing list of all FP projects run under Life Science/Health + additional "non-LSH" contacts arising from national/EU networks of project partners</i>	<i>European Life Science Community (mainly coordinators, researchers)</i>	<i>most EU countries</i>	<i>around 300 direct contacts (updated regularly)</i>	<i>Coordinator</i>
NO	<i>Film/video</i>	/	/	/	/

