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WHAT NEXT TTA. THE INSTITUTION I'M WISHING FOR.

Interview with Roberto Gomezel, national representative of Technological, Technical and Administrative staff

On 11 and 12 October, "What Next TTA" L'Ente che vorrei" (The Institution I'm wishing for) took place in Bologna. This was the final event of an effort which lasted for several months, involving over a hundred people in INFN, to identify and select operational proposals to improve scientific research support services. We talked about this experience, which was in many ways innovative and interesting also for its radically bottom-up approach, with Roberto Gomezel, national representative of INFN Technological, Technical and Administrative staff.

What is What Next TTA?

It is a project that stems from the Staff General Meeting, consisting of representatives of the Technological, Technical and Administrative staff of INFN facilities, which led to the establishment of a working group to study the possibility of improving technical and administrative work through the sharing of good practices, the optimisation of those already existing, the recovery and sharing of unused skills and the standardisation of procedures. In short, the project aims to investigate the possibilities of "networking" to improve the efficiency and quality of work, and the well-being of those who carry it out, and to allow ever greater excellence in scientific research and the activities in which INFN is engaged.

How is the project organised?

Working groups were created within the Staff General Meeting to allow the national representative, who sits on the Management Board of the Institution, to contribute to draft the regulations and provisions, as well as to bring out new proposals to improve the work of the staff and their development. Following the What Next initiative, which involved INFN researchers and management in exploring new lines of research in physics for the coming years, we came up with the idea organising an internal workshop to reflect together on new projects that could improve organisational processes, so as to be able to

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accompany and support the new technological and research challenges even more effectively. The project was presented during the directors' meeting that preceded the Management Board meeting of 26 October 2017. The initiative was very much appreciated by the directors of INFN facilities and the President considered that the proposal contained important food for thought and ought to be certainly accepted and implemented.

Who is involved in What Next TTA?

The project was first presented to all colleagues of INFN facilities through their representatives. Following the authorisation of the Management Board, the work plan was presented, which should have involved all the staff concerned, organising a videoconference kick-off meeting, to which all INFN facilities were connected. In this first meeting a phase named "call for ideas" was launched, during which all those who thought they could contribute to the project, not only bringing an innovative idea or a good practice to share, but also reporting system inefficiencies and solutions to solve them, were invited to submit proposals using a web platform made available for the project. A total of 130 people took part and brought their contribution to the project.

On which topics did you work?

Many topics were addressed covering all areas of services and activities supporting scientific research. This highlighted the need to divide them into general areas of interest which were administrative, management and scientific secretariats, external funds, relations between Central Administration and facilities and new ideas for Central Administration. In addition, the areas of organisation, well-being and human resources, worker safety and radiation protection, electronics, IT, mechanics, cryogenics, accelerators, technology transfer, outreach, training, quality, evaluation and transparency and "everything I would like to add"! A total of 64 abstracts were presented, subsequently summarised in the 21 projects presented at the final workshop that was just held in Bologna during the two days before the INFN 2019-2021 Three-year Plan meeting.

How did you work in these months?

In order to achieve this result, we immediately identified the coordinators of the various areas, who had the task of developing a work schedule and planning video-conference meetings, necessary for discussion on the various topics. Indeed, the people involved came from all INFN facilities, and the use of video-conferencing and INFN systems for document management meant that all the activities took place without people having to travel and move around. A total of 100 video-conferences were

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organised, managed by 15 coordinators. Moreover, at the beginning of each month, video-conferences were planned to guarantee verification of the timing, compliance with the plan and support for the coordinators. In addition to this, the coordinating group also had to take care of the final organisation of the workshop in all its aspects.

A very positive aspect, which I am pleased to highlight because I think it is equally important, is that all the work is the result of a collective effort, made possible by the enthusiasm of the people who took part. Each person, as in an orchestra, played his score to contribute to the final result that was presented at the What Next TTA event. I believe that each of us felt very motivated and expressed the sense of belonging and sharing of the INFN mission, which is scientific research of excellence. What emerged the most was the desire to share experiences and proposals, overcoming the distrust that can sometimes develop often without even realising it. We worked as a cohesive team, despite the difference in points of view and opinions, we created a significant amount of energy that triggered a process of change not only for the project, but also for the individual participants.

What are the results that were presented during the two-day workshop?

The president and the executive committee supported the idea for the two days to be organised in the same venue of the 2019-2021 Three-Year Plan. This was done to encourage the participation not only of those who contributed to the project and of the staff, but above all of the managers of the Central Administration, of the directors and the INFN management. It was decided to dedicate the entire day before the Three-Year Plan and the morning of 12 October to the event. The first day was divided into three sections, in which the 21 projects were presented according to the TED talk formula. This involved more work for the speakers who were not used to this mode of communication, and who therefore had to learn its style. At the end of each section, public interventions were scheduled, which were then used to define the work carried out in the parallel sessions on the various areas, which were held at the end of the plenary session (the recording of the entire event is available at: http://server11.infn.it/video/multimedia/Whatnext-2018/Main_Page.html, ed.). During the morning of the second day, the President and the national researchers' representative spoke on the project and its possible developments, followed by a round table discussion to evaluate how to proceed with the project.

So what are the next steps of What Next TTA?

During the round table it emerged that the project has illuminated certain thematic areas, proposing some improvement actions, both in terms of work organisation as well as overcoming certain critical issues. Moreover, it also emerged that, without an immediate operative proposal to give substance

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to some of the suggested actions, there would be the serious risk of not reacting to the significant commitment of many people and not following up on a process already started. For this reason, the responsibility of the work group and coordinators becomes even more demanding: the project must enter a new phase that outlines the actions to complete some of the proposals in the various areas. Of course, the path is complex and not without risks, but I think that the brainstorming of these months was able to start a virtuous process that will allow us to consolidate a new vision of services and good practices, and to see people's work appreciated. ■