

◆ New ways of working

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Background

In order to achieve a genuinely integrated model of sustainability science, we need to rethink not only the methods of scientific research, but also the methods used to define public policy within our institutions. With this goal in mind, many institutions are now establishing internal project teams, often known as “innovation labs.” These teams are tasked with overseeing a vast array of actions, from the implementation of structural reforms (strategy shifts, restructuring, decentralisation) to the delivery of targeted interventions (facilitation, ideation, prototyping), not to mention various forms of support and engineering (putting together training programmes, assisting with project design). In the context of a scientific research institution like IRD, we need to promote new methods and approaches allowing for better cooperation and more interdisciplinarity at all levels: between departments, between researchers and support services, and between scientific teams and society at large.

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Further reading

LALOUX F., 2019 – *Reinventing organizations, vers des communautés de travail inspirées*. Diatino.
MARSAN C. et al., 2014 – *L’intelligence collective. Co-créons en conscience le monde de demain*. Yves Michel Éditions.
MÜLLER T. et al., 2007 – *Micropolitique des groupes, pour une écologie des pratiques collectives*. Les Prairies ordinaires.

The argument for an internal network of facilitators within our knowledge communities

Capitalising on collective intelligence is of central importance when it comes to changing the ways we work. Defined as the capacity of a group to ask questions and find answers together, collective intelligence is conducive to decision-making and the resolution of complex problems. Collective intelligence cannot be imposed from above: it needs to be organised, tested and adjusted to the context. It requires the creation and recognition of new roles within institutions. The positioning of “facilitators,” along with their expertise in collaborative methods, establishes them as the guarantors of this collective framework, accompanying the co-construction of projects and fostering the emergence of shared objectives within groups characterised by divergent interests (Struelens Q., 2022 – « Les facilitateurs interdisciplinaires: polyglottes aux interfaces ». *In : Sustainability Science*, Marseille, IRD : 128-131). The knowledge communities (COSAV) established within IRD since 2021 act as forums in which to experiment with new forms of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. This unique positioning also makes them an ideal model for testing the dissemination of methods and tools promoting the expression of needs, stakeholder involvement, the creation of commons and the structuring of decision-making systems (Mambrini M., Mainguy G., 2022 – « Des communautés de savoirs au fondement de la multi-culturalité scientifique ». *In : Sustainability Science*, Marseille, IRD : 98-101). These methods (moving debates, forum theatre, De Bono’s six

thinking hats, co-development etc.) and positions (active listening, reformulation) may inform the working practices of researchers and support services, as COSAV members, in the interests of sustainability science (research focused on problems rather than disciplines), and inter- and transdisciplinary research projects more broadly. The aim is to recruit volunteers to test these methods during seminars and working groups. The institute’s long-term goal is to establish an identifiable network of internal facilitators, including both researchers and members of support departments, capable of facilitating collective sessions for other teams. The aim is to involve, to federate, to percolate and to update practices over the long term, in a spirit of learning by doing. Having an in-house pool of personnel capable of deploying these skills for our collective benefit would be a real asset for the institution. Structuring such a network would provide opportunities for continuous learning and the exchange of best practices among peers. It would also leave the institute better equipped to face organisational challenges and broader problems that are increasingly complex and multidimensional (e.g. Covid-19).

Supporting the change: an example of reorganising workspaces

Change management methods and collective intelligence are genuine assets when it comes to delivering successful and lasting reforms, reorganisations or other structural projects. A concrete example from recent experience is the restructuring of the IRD’s South-East



Workshop, ideas and plans
for a hang-out space
(Latin America and Caribbean floor).

headquarters and regional delegation in the years 2019-2021. 240 members of staff were affected by this change.

The challenge was to co-construct the project with those directly affected, in order to improve their quality of life at work, to translate new ways of working into spatial reconfigurations, and to ensure that our workspaces reflect our institutional values. Projects involving workspaces are always complex, running up against deeply-rooted individual perceptions and demanding support for and participation from all members of staff. With the support of the general secretariat, this project was overseen by a project team comprising members of different departments from across the IRD's three core divisions (Science, Development and Support). The team worked with both HQ and the South-East delegation to introduce new tools and co-construction opportunities: a guide was published (*New spaces for new ways of working*), an online consultation and call for suggestions were launched, including a poll of proposed options, 'Small step lunchtime' workshops were organised to allow staff to explore prototypes for future shared spaces (social spaces, signage, selecting photographs etc.) and regular consultation and communication sessions were held to explain the progress of the project to all staff. All of these tools made use of tangible objects to promote visualisation and discussion, essential for staff members to engage with and appropriate the project. A service designer was part of the project team, coming up with solutions to ensure that access to the new spaces was commensurate with user expectations. The project was sometimes

tricky and required a considerable investment of effort, with some readjustments along the way, but the new office facilities have already significantly improved working conditions. The communal areas have been expanded, diversified, modernised and personalised: hang-out spaces, a project mode room, a creativity space, co-working spaces, bubbles, new and more flexible meeting rooms, and a breastfeeding and relaxation room. New

digital equipment has also been installed, and each floor is now colour-coded in reference to a geographical zone, reflecting IRD's global scope. Special attention was devoted to environmental considerations throughout the project, with existing materials reused wherever possible. The project was recognised by the Interministerial Fund for Improving Working Conditions (FIACT) as part of its "Public Action 2022" scheme.

KEY POINTS

The principles of sustainability science can be applied to our own research institutions, for example by creating spaces for the co-construction of knowledge, know-how and life skills, or promoting energy-saving measures for research practices. These innovations require processes and tools, as well as working methods and positions which allow a culture of interdisciplinarity to thrive within our institutions, encouraging initiative-taking, promoting collective intelligence and attracting new talent. They also create value, and intersect with major causes such as protecting the environment, gender equality at work and inclusion. Whether small steps or great strides, at every level there are first steps to be taken toward a new paradigm of business-employee-society relations. Facilitation, ideation, service design, collective intelligence, project mode... We all have a part to play in creating new ways of working.

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