Cooperative Research Projects – Challenges and Opportunities

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Motivation

The three BMBF funded cooperative research projects (Verbundprojekte) MiKlip, HD(CP)2, and PalMod have a different focus but are all dedicated to Earth System Modelling. They are set in the same infrastructure, include similar partners, and use similar computational resources. The tasks of the scientific project managers (PM) are to a large degree identical, so it is obvious that all projects would benefit from a regular exchange among those.

Challenges

- Sub-modules have own funding
- Almost no enforceable obligations and dependencies towards the management
- Funding bottom up vs. directives top down

Challenges for the PM:
- Sometimes weak communication between modules and the management
- Changes within the module strategy and staff often insufficiently communicated
- Hierarchical position not per se established (LOD)

Opportunities

- Commitment due to consortium-led project design
- Collected expertise and effective usage of infrastructure
- High possibility for an outstanding synthesis and synergy due to size of the project, that leads to a large chance of making a big leap in the field of research
- Tailored research products for project needs

Opportunities for the PM:
- Little overhead in paper work (work contracts, budgeting, etc.)
- Work close to research and still member of a larger research community
- Good opportunity to build professional network

Recommendations

- Involvement of PM already in project planning phase
- Establishment of PM in the very beginning of the project (inauguration) → clarify role of PM
- Regular exchange with other PMs
- Establishment of a network for PMs, e.g. CESSMA

CESSMA aims to integrate PMs from different phases and experience levels to create a central place with institutional memory for optimal central science management. The network will organize a series of workshops through BMBF funding to improve science management in Germany. The first workshop of this series will take place beginning of June 2017 in Lübeck, Germany.