From administrative burden to research excellence: getting researchers to take data management seriously

IASSIST, Lawrence, May 26th, 2017

Alexandra Stam
Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences
...and realize it’s more than (data) housekeeping!
Agenda

- The increasing importance of DM
  - A changing research environment
  - The development of DMPs
  - From DM planning to DM practice
- Data management at FORS
  - FORS data service
  - Our DM vision and strategy
- Pilot study
  - Description of the pilot
  - Organisation of the pilot
  - Main foreseen outcomes
- Conclusions
The increasing importance of data management
A new research world

- Digital world
- Open Data movement
- Research ethics
- New research dynamics
- Increasing requirements from funders & journals
A strong emphasis on DMPs

- They get researchers to think about DM
- They get researchers to consider data sharing
- They provide some kind of guidance

DMPs are important, but they have shortcomings

- They are often linked to the proposal
- They often focus on data sharing
- They neglect project management
- They tend to be very general
- They lack fine-tuned customization
- They are often static
Researchers tend to view DMPs as an administrative burden. The focus is too much on DM planning, and not enough on DM practice, including project management. There is the risk that researchers no longer take DM seriously.

Researchers should see the value of data management for themselves first of all.

Open data/data sharing is only a subset of data management.
Research data management

- High quality research
- Re-use by team & researcher
- Open data & Sharing
  - Sharing of used data
  - Sharing of all data, incl. unused data
Data management at FORS
FORS
Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences
- Methodological research
- Large-scale surveys
- Data and research information services (DARIS)

DARIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORSbase</th>
<th>Data archiving</th>
<th>Data access</th>
<th>Data management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New requirements</td>
<td>Direct access to:</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-term preservation</td>
<td>+ 500 data sets</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhance the value of research projects</td>
<td>+ 11,000 project descriptions</td>
<td>Development of materials (i.e. guides)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our data management vision and strategy

Early days: Focus on DM from a data service point of view

- «We want your data» perspective
- «We want you to have fun, and apply good practices» perspective

And then came the Swiss Federal Survey of Adolescents

- We got to run a large-scale survey
- We wanted to make it the best survey ever (with respect to DM)
- We failed to apply the recommendations we were teaching (lack of tools and in-depth practical guidance)
Our data management vision and strategy

Early days: Focus on DM from a data service point of view

- “We want your data” perspective
- “We want you to have fun, and apply good practices” perspective

Current days: Focus on DM from a researcher’s point of view

- “We want you to be able to apply good DM” perspective
- “We want you to see the value of DM for your work above all” perspective

It does not exclude data sharing or fun
The pilot
The pilot study

Goal of the pilot:

to better understand the needs and challenges faced by researchers with respect to applying good data management practices in the frame of their research. This will allow us to:

- engage with research specificities
- study how teams function and what DM practices they apply
- work out together with the teams solutions to specific problems they face
Target studies:

- Projects at different stages (pre-funding, just started, well started)
- Projects with different end-goals (sharing or not)
- Projects from different disciplines within the social sciences
- Projects generating different types of data
  - quantitative / qualitative
  - experimental / survey data
  - sensitive data / not sensitive
  - small-scale / large scale
- Projects with different research dynamics
  - single researcher / large team
  - researchers located within the same institution / different institutions
Organisation of the pilot:

The pilot should be seen as an ‘exchange platform’

- Kick-off meeting with all interested PIs (June 2017)
- Individual consulting with the research teams
  - FORS suggests a DM strategy
- Follow-up meetings to discuss the implementation of the strategy and any other DM issues faced by the team
Expected outcomes:

In the short-term:

- gain a better understanding of real-life DM challenges
- provide customized guidance
- work out solutions together with the research teams

In the medium to longer-term:

- develop practical guidelines and recommendations to share with the research community
- assess existing tools and the need for new tools
- possibly integrate some tools in our FORSbase platform
- deepen our knowledge (what to do when; how far to go with documentation, what’s needed for data sharing versus research quality, etc.)
Conclusions
Conclusions:

- Research data management is often seen as an administrative burden by researchers.
- DMPs are often too focused on funders’ needs, and not enough on researchers’ needs.
- DMPs are important, but they need to be complemented with practical guidelines that go beyond sharing, and take into account project data management.
- There is a need to better understand DM with respect to research specificities, especially ‘what, when, what for, how much’.
- Through a pilot study FORS is hoping to advance knowledge on the implementation of DM practices and get researchers to believe in it.
Thanks for your attention!
alexandra.stam@fors.unil.ch