

Developing Science Communication Leaders in the Mediterranean and the Middle East

By Anne-Marie Bruyas and Ayman Elsayed

Many parts of the Mediterranean and the Middle East once thrived in the prosperity of scientific and technological ideas and advances. Today, many places in these regions have become more often consumers than producers of science and technology. To combat this trend, many nations in these areas need to reinvigorate their citizens' involvement in these fields. Science centers can play an important role as agents of change to build stronger partnerships with people, support democratic transformation and institution-building, and deliver sustainable and inclusive growth and job creation.

Against that background, two networks of science centers—the European Network of Science Centres and Museums (Ecsite, www.ecsite.eu) and the North Africa and Middle East Science Centers Network (NAMES, www.namesnetwork.org)—came together with some of their members¹ in 2012 to create the Euro-Mediterranean and Middle East Summer School for Science Communication (EMME Summer School). The first edition was held in 2013 in Granada, Spain, and the second will be in Alexandria, Egypt, later in 2015.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The EMME Summer School aims to build capacity for the management of science centers and museums and related programs. It targets the staff of existing science centers and other professionals interested in developing science communication activities, programs, or centers. The goals are to provide a program where people can reinforce their abilities, learn from each other, and foster dialogue,

as well as to increase the community of players working for public engagement in science in Europe, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean.

The target participants are middle managers, who are a critical part of any organization. Middle managers lead the frontline staff, managing the day-to-day implementation of the organization's strategic direction and maintaining links between staff and upper management.

PROGRAM CONTENT

EMME 2013 Summer School had 55 participants, including both experienced and young professionals from Algeria, Egypt, France, Italy, Kuwait, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. Half of the participants were staff with middle-management tasks at existing science centers and half were from other organizations (e.g., cultural associations, nonprofits, and universities) with programs for public engagement in science or projects to develop new science

1. Partners included Ciencia Viva Pavilhão do Conhecimento, Lisbon, Portugal; Città della Scienza, Naples, Italy; Museo delle Scienze, Trent, Italy; Natural History Museum, London; Parque de la Ciencias, Granada, Spain; Planetarium Science Center, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt; the Scientific Center of Kuwait, Salmiya; and Universcience and Universcience Partenaires, Paris.



Home nations of the science centers and museums that partnered to create Euro-Mediterranean and Middle East Summer School for Science Communication (EMME Summer School) and participated in EMME 2013

Additional nations and territories represented by the participants in EMME 2013

centers.

EMME 2013 featured experienced speakers and facilitators from science centers around the world and included seminars, interactive workshops, and small-group sessions. The fantastic team at Granada's science museum, Parque de las Ciencias, also gave practical sessions, including an overview of the behind-the-scenes work involved in their exhibitions and science labs. The range of skills covered during the five-day program were as follows:

- **Strategic planning**, including how to identify core values, define objectives, plan programs, and establish partnerships. Also discussed were informal and formal learning practices.
- **Management**, such as recruiting staff, planning budgets, marketing, and fundraising.
- **Exhibition development**, including concept development, techniques, and workplans.
- **New technologies**, such as social media and other internet tools, and how they can be leveraged for exhibitions, marketing, and programming.

- **Learning**, including the role of explainers in science centers and the development of workshops, demonstrations, school activities, and professional development.

The participants especially appreciated the workshops and brainstorming sessions for the exchange of concrete expertise. Most of them reported returning to their organizations with skills enabling them to be more effective in their jobs or to take on a new position. One participant, Marwa Gaber, head of the events unit at the Planetarium Science Center (PSC), which is affiliated with Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt, stated that EMME 2013 helped her become acquainted with the broader picture of managing a science center and how it involves not only the center's staff but also the community at large.

EMME 2015

The second edition is being organized by the PSC and will be held September 5-10, 2015. Drawing on its more than 12 years of experience in the field of informal education and the experiences gained from



EMME Summer School 2013 group photo in Granada, Spain.

the program's first edition, the PSC has prepared a program highlighting the main points relevant to science center operation and management.

The content and format will include some of the same topics discussed in 2013, with a focus on strategic planning. The 2015 program will introduce real tools such as science shows, science idol competitions, and success stories from the local market, as well as a social program to give participants a chance to enjoy the beauty of Alexandria. The PSC also intends to follow the progress of participants after

the program concludes. Registration will be open from May 3 to July 8 at www.bibalex.org/emme2015.

As Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries tackle the reinvigoration and development of their economies, science centers and museums can play an important part in helping to create jobs, increase science literacy, and establish a new vision for these regions. The EMME Summer School provides a package of tools for furthering the impact of science centers and related science communication activities. ■

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EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BY MIDDLE MANAGERS

Here are a few tips for navigating a middle-management role:

- **Determine how best to convey your organization's strategic plan.** You are the key to executing strategic plans, and you are also the leader of your frontline staff. You must find the right balance between the direction you receive from upper management and the direction you give to your staff.
- **Plan your actions.** To be effective, you must prepare and be organized. Ideas with no planning will have negative results.
- **Put yourself in others' shoes.** Before you make any decision, consider how it will affect and be perceived by your staff or by upper management.
- **Care about your team.** Defend them and keep developing them. Your team's work reflects your efforts and skills.
- **Keep developing yourself.** Make continuous learning a priority for yourself as well as your team.
- **Know when to delegate and when to coach.** These actions differ and results will depend on which one is needed in a given situation.
- **Identify priorities.** Listen, filter what you hear, and execute the most important tasks. Some things can wait. —A.E.