Chapter 6
The Research Environment and Our Values

After setting up the teaching process, research is fundamental to reach international recognition. Setting up from zero, an effective research process takes time. What assessment system should be created to motivate and incentivize researchers to perform their work at best? How to motivate professionals to join, stay, and work effectively? In this chapter, we analyze these questions and provide some answers based on our experience.

6.1   The Context

Innopolis University is a research active institution aiming at reaching visibility at the world level within the scientific community and placing high on the international rankings. In order to reach these objectives and increase the reputation, faculty engage in individual and community efforts to publish articles in high-impact venues following rigorous internationally recognized ethical standards. The building up of the environment is essential, but a good incentive system is a mechanism that cannot be missed in human environments.

6.2   The Values of the Environment

Hiring people from different cultures and academic systems, aggregating them, building a unified culture, and making them productive is not an easy task. Creating such a unified and motivated environment at the faculty level is then of fundamental importance to transmit the same values to young researchers, to PhD students, and, ultimately, to every new person who will be hired.

To succeed in this enterprise, the first moves are critical, i.e., how the environment is built since the beginning and what practices are agreed and shared between colleagues. Respect and sharing are they key values here; however, it is also important to build processes that can keep the values even in the presence of turnover and when people, for professional or personal reasons, have to leave the university. The system should allow those who are leaving to leave a legacy that can be taken by the newcomers.

The construction of such a "human system" requires very long time, and its development is still ongoing. We cannot say that its stabilization has been fully realized, but we can see excellent signs that we are on a good track. The most visible evidence is the friendly cooperation between the faculty members, between the professors and the students, and between the students themselves (for not to forget the pleasant interactions with the administration).

The group is compact, and the processes are working smoothly, apart from some frictions that happen on a daily basis and are part of every human environment. However, every issue is settled before the sunset, and it does not drag along creating resentment. This is what we can personally experience and that shows a positive trend. We hope this can continue in the future, and we are working hard on this, with attention on the details.

6.2.1   Founding Principles

Faculty, student administration, and any other member of the Innopolis community should share some founding principles determining a code of conduct based on mutual respect as a pillar and a few others:

1. Respectful treatment of others
2. Individual freedom
3. Academic freedom
4. Intellectual integrity

Respectful Treatment of Others

Individuals' expectation of fair and respectful treatment by faculty and students applies not only to interactions with one another but also to administrators, staff, and others with whom they interact in their role as members of the academic community.

Individual Freedom

Individual freedom means that each individual has virtues and importance. All individuals have equal rights.

Academic Freedom

The notion of academic freedom lies at the very heart of the academic enterprise. In the "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure", the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) states, "Academic freedom [...] applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning".[1]

Intellectual Integrity

Intellectual integrity involves using sound and ethical methods in the pursuit of knowledge, as well as embracing honesty in the dissemination of knowledge.

6.2.2   Code of Conduct

Here we cover in more details the main aspects of conduct that researchers at Innopolis University, and worldwide, may see challenged during their work. In any case, they should follow the founding principles presented above.

Plagiarism

Representing the ideas, words, or data of another person or persons as one's own constitutes plagiarism. Thus, a person's words, ideas, or data, whether published or unpublished, must be acknowledged as such.

Acknowledgment of Contributions

Acknowledgment of the contributions of others means appropriately recognizing and crediting those who have contributed to a scholarly work whether the work is a manuscript, exhibit, or performance. Depending on their contributions, such others, including students, may be deserving of credit ranging from acknowledgment in a footnote to co-authorship.

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[1] https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure.

Data

Researchers must acknowledge the source(s) of their data and accurately describe the method by which their data was gathered. Moreover, the fabrication or falsification of data or results constitutes a violation of professional norms.

Conflict of Interest

Research funded by corporate sponsors potentially leads to a situation in which a conflict of interest may arise. Scholars must not let the source of their funding nor the sponsors' goals cloud their own professional and scientific judgments regarding their research.

Confidentiality

Researchers should protect the confidentiality of any professional or personal information about persons involved in research and scholarly activities.

6.3   The Incentive System

A research incentive system, in a context of experienced and highly qualified specialists, can work only if its nature is mostly endogenous, i.e., employees are self-motivated. To achieve that, the hiring process is fundamental. It is unthinkable to put in place a system of carrot and stick and expect that it can work in the long run. This is not how research works.

In the attempt to guide researchers, especially the juniors, the faculty council keeps up-to-date a list of publications ranked in two tiers (A and B). Venues indexed by the largest commercial databases such as Scopus of WoS are, in general, suitable targets too. The list maintained by the faculty has an advisory role and cannot limit the choice of the professors who ultimately are experts in a specific field and know their community. However, for career development, the faculty members are advised to concentrate the effort on journals and conferences with high impact and strictly avoid predatory publishers. The issue of avoiding predatory publishers may appear obvious to the experienced academics; however, we have seen that, without creating a suitable and informed environment, the problem may appear. In the end, without potential preys, such publishers would not exist. We understood that preys at risk are typically young researchers of organizations which failed to establish a proper culture and lacking role models.

Typically, a good selection of self-motivated individuals, an endogenous incentive system, and soft guidelines can lead the university to gain visibility, locally and

worldwide, without the necessity of a costly, intense, and unpleasant monitoring system.

6.4   The Social Environment

A productive environment is based on trust and friendship. In order to build such environment, it is not only necessary to work together but to play together too. Innopolis University since the foundation has been always a catalyzer of moments of aggregation: from faculty international trips (e.g., in Italy in 2016, Fig. 6.1, and 2017 or in the neighboring regions of Russia) to dinners at the dean's place or in local restaurants and to playful situations organized to create and develop relationships in an informal context. Figure 6.2 shows one of these moments (May 2021).

Fig. 6.1   University trip to Italy in 2016

Fig. 6.2 Manuel Mazzara, Mirko Farina, and Giancarlo Succi: playing together