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Strengthening EPPCN?

Summary

1. This paper examines the history of EPPCN, assesses its success to date, and proposes a series of specific questions for discussion.

The network

2. The European Particle Physics Communications Network (EPPCN) was established by CERN Council under the 2006 European strategy¹ process, and its existence was endorsed in the 2013 strategy update².
3. EPPCN members represent the funding agency and/or the major particle physics facility in each Member State of CERN. Some Member States have not nominated a representative.³
4. Although a majority of members are professional communicators, some Member States are represented by researchers and there is some overlap with the International Particle Physics Outreach Group (IPPOG)⁴.
5. EPPCN holds bi-annual meetings rotating between CERN each November and a Member State in Spring. Recent meeting agendas are dominated by presentations from CERN or about CERN-based activity. EPPCN presents an overview of communications activity by member state representatives to CERN Council each September.

Purpose:

6. When establishing EPPCN in 2006, CERN Council proposed a specific model in the accompanying discovery document⁵. While this model is reflected in the Mission, objective and specific tasks outlined below, it has not yet been achieved in practice. The 2006 document states:

*On the European scale, the creation of a network of communication officers from each Member State, **along the lines of the global InterActions network of laboratory communication officers** (emphasis added) and complementary to (IPPOG) could play this role. The formalization of such a network would help to ensure that maximum benefit is secured from the considerable, but disconnected, effort already being made at the national level.*

¹ <http://council.web.cern.ch/council/en/EuropeanStrategy/ESStatement.pdf>

² <http://council.web.cern.ch/council/en/EuropeanStrategy/esc-e-106.pdf>

³ <https://espace.cern.ch/forum-EPPCN/default.aspx>

⁴ <http://ippog.web.cern.ch/>

⁵ <http://council.web.cern.ch/council/en/EuropeanStrategy/ESDiscussion.pdf>

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InterActions:

7. The InterActions Collaboration⁶ referred to in the discovery document is a formal network of heads/directors of communication from the world's major particle physics laboratories (almost all of which are now also multi-disciplinary). Membership criteria include that the participating laboratory/facility employs professional communicators, and contributes financially (or in-kind) to a collective budget.
8. EPPCN members CERN, IN2P3, DESY, INFN, NIKHEF and the STFC are also members of InterActions.
9. InterActions operates the Interactions.org website as a global portal for particle physics news, information and background, as well as the Quantum Diaries blog-site, and the Interactions Newswire.
10. The Collaboration has formal protocols for sharing information between members, including the distribution in advance – on an embargoed basis – of relevant news releases or announcements. It is co-Chaired by Fermilab (as the host of the website) and by the host of the annual Spring budget/planning meeting (eg STFC for the Spring 2016 meeting at RAL).
11. Its success is based on direct bilateral connections between individual members, who are in most cases the head of the relevant communications function and thus able to commit resources and enter into policy agreements without further referral.
12. InterActions differs in these regards from EPPCN which relies on CERN to act as a central hub/information source, and whose members are not usually heads of function.

EPPCN Mission:

13. EPPCN's mission is set out in the paragraph 15 of the 2006 strategy:
Council will establish a network of closely cooperating professional communication officers from each Member state, which would incorporate existing activities, propose, implement and monitor a European particle physics communication and education strategy, and report on a regular basis to Council.
14. Additional objectives and tasks are outlined in the 2006 discussion document, which identifies the goal:
to strengthen the communication of particle physics in the Member States of CERN through communication officers in the Member States and at CERN working together.
15. EPPCN is assigned specific tasks in the discussion document:
 - a) Strengthen communication between communications officers in the Member States

⁶ <http://www.interactions.org/cms/?pid=1000025>

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- b) Review existing communications practices at CERN and in the Member States with a view to sharing best practice and maximising benefit in the Member States
- c) Offer constructive advice on communication issues to Council based on consensus decisions made by the network
- d) Prepare and implement communication activities based around the start-up and results from the LHC
- e) Propose, implement and monitor strategies designed to foster long-term support for sciences related to CERN's mission, in support of the European strategy for particle physics.

Progress against the Mission Statement:

- 16. EPPCN currently only partially fulfils its mandate from Council.
- 17. As noted above, membership of the network is not limited to professional communication officers and the network does not currently represent all Member States. Most significantly the network has not – and currently does not plan to – *“propose, implement and monitor a European particle physics communication and education strategy”*.
- 18. However, EPPCN does provide a valuable mechanism for communicators from across Europe to meet and discuss promotion of the discipline, and to foster personal connections across the Member States, although this is usually only in the content of EPPCN meetings and not bilaterally (objective and 14a).
- 19. Network meetings include informal sharing of best practice ideas between members but the network itself rarely plays any formal or coherent role (14b). EPPCN has on occasion, but irregularly, provided a collective view on issues (14c).
- 20. EPPCN did play an important role around the LHC start-up, Run1 and Higgs announcement, including a valuable ‘lessons learnt’ exercise (14d), but while it has discussed the necessity of a communications strategy it has not attempted to formulate any strategies (14e).

Relations with CERN

- 21. The discovery document recommended, and Council agreed, the network should not be dominated by any one laboratory. It proposed a collaborative endeavour with co-chairs from CERN and the Member States, and proposed communications collaboration in areas such as training of academics, setting of messages, sharing of information etc.
- 22. In recent years, however, EPPCN has become the vehicle by which CERN communicates to member states, with little cross-sharing across the network – despite efforts by CERN staff and individual EPPCN members.
- 23. CERN quite rightly operates its communications function primarily to promote CERN, and also quite rightly the decision to restructure CERN's communications unit was made entirely by CERN

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management. In addition, CERN's efforts to develop a communications strategy are limited to CERN itself.

24. However, particle physics in Europe is not limited to CERN. The continent hosts at least 16 Dark Matter experiments⁷ of which the LHC is just one, and research by the Interactions Collaboration has identified 13 European-based neutrino experiments with none at CERN. Council, when establishing EPPCN, envisioned a comprehensive *European particle physics communication and education strategy* – of necessity this must be wider than CERN.
25. For example, the search for Dark Matter, and science goals involving neutrinos, were identified in 2013 by the InterActions Collaboration as the key global communications targets post-Higgs. As a result, InterActions published a dark matter hub and plans a neutrino hub, and is sharing information, communications material, and plans on these matters.

The case for change

26. This paper was prepared to assist discussion at EPPCN in a session titled *Reinforce and share information within the EPPCN network*. The session title presupposes some change is required in EPPCN's current methods of working.
27. This paper proposes that the case for change depends on attitudes toward the need for a *European particle physics communication strategy* as envisioned by Council in establishing EPPCN. An effective strategy would require input to and implementation support from the entire particle physics community and all member states – it could not be 'CERN-only' or 'CERN-centric'. Council itself recognised this imperative (section 11 of discovery document), and explicitly noted its separate roles in overseeing the operation of CERN itself, and as the custodian of the European strategy for particle physics (and therefore also the communications strategy).
28. While EPPCN is not achieving CERN Council's stated objective or stated tasks, nor has CERN Council indicated a desire for more from EPPCN than it receives from the existing arrangement. It is possible that the apparent lack of interest from Council is deliberate. It is also possible that Council's attitude is based on lack of knowledge of alternatives.

Discussion

29. This paper suggests that it would be helpful for EPPCN members to seek clarity on the points raised in para 28 and therefore it proposes three questions for discussion and agreement, in order:

A. Do Member States see the need for a European particle physics communication strategy?

⁷ <http://www.interactions.org/cms/?pid=1034004>

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If the answer is in the negative, EPPCN could focus discussion on possible improvements to existing processes such as advance notice of CERN activity, rather than on structural or strategic reform.

B. If Member States see the need for a European particle physics communication strategy, should the development and implementation of the strategy be formally assigned to CERN's communications group?

In determining an answer to this question, discussion should include issues such as the role of Council in monitoring and evaluating the strategy, the future role of Member States in communicating particle physics, the need for and status of EPPCN, the process for agreeing and amending key objectives, work goals and actions plans, budgets and staffing requirements for the CERN communications group, etc

C. If Member States prefer to maintain an ongoing national role in the development and implementation of the strategy, what should be the balance of roles between CERN's communications group and Member States/EPPCN members?

Discussion of this option should include issues such as the role of Member States in communicating particle physics versus the role of CERN in communicating activity at CERN, as well as those identified in B.

Proposed Action

30. It is recommended that:

- a) EPPCN consider and debate the issues identified in this paper
- b) Provide a clear and unequivocal answer to the question/s in para 29
- c) Agree a clear series of subsequent actions, and assign responsibility and timescales for each action