

Learning from the insights of Principal Investigators (PIs)

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Inspiration for the project

- Test assumption about Principal Investigators (PIs) being viewed as the ‘big bad wolf’
- Investigate the lived experience of being a being a PI in research intensive institutions
- Find out more about the career journey from PhD to first substantial research grant
- Support and inspire other researchers to make the transition and to understand the current context
- Inform researchers what is it like to be a PI



Overview of the project

To investigate the lived experience of PIs who have successfully achieved researcher independence to understand the causes of and impediments to progression.

- To use action research methods to identify ways of supporting researchers at this key 'hairpin' transition point in their career.
- To produce grounded data which will resonate with researchers and PIs.
- To conduct a needs analysis to inform the researcher development agenda for postdocs/research staff

Project details

- Project involves 3 research intensive Universities: Leiden (Netherlands), Cambridge, Imperial College London
- Interviewing 50 Principal Investigators across the STEMM and AHSS disciplines who:
 - have secured substantial grant funding in last 5 yrs
 - employ others & manage the research budget
 - lead the intellectual direction of the research

Generic research questions

- How do PIs prepare for and deal with the significant 'leadership transition' to PI'?
- What are the challenges faced by researchers as they move from doing research under close supervision to having more autonomy once research independence has been achieved?
- **Analysis of interview transcripts, journey plots and CV's**

Focus on specific sub-questions

- What advice would you give to a postdoc aspiring to become a Principal Investigator?
- What advice would you give to someone who has just become a Principal Investigator?

Literature Scanning

- Beyond CROS and PIRLS results

Researcher's perspective

- Researchers' roles, functions, career prospects
- Knowing, thinking, living in contemporary research

Defining success: a financial perspective

- Success/ productivity; securing long term productivity
- Scholarly enterprise
- Models for grant funding
- The research game

Methodology & Analysis

- 14 interviews from STEMM across 3 research intensive institutions; representative sample
- Thematic analysis
- Initial coding procedure identified 22 themes
- Final categories based on frequency of themes, not prioritised

Research Categories

Category	Definition
Seek support and feedback	Engage with peers, senior colleagues, internal and external
Engage in networking	Be sociable, be open, build relationships locally, nationally, internationally
Drive your own success	Be clear on what success means; be strategic about career ; develop plan
Seek out and set up collaborations	Diversify research lines, multiple projects internationally & multidisciplinary
Communicate research to others	Increase visibility via talks, conferences , social media, websites
Publish!	Maximise your output through your research team or group
Recruit people you want to work with	Build an effective research team
Measure the cost of success	Understand impact on time, family, friends and life

RDF mapping

Category	RDF Mapping
Seek support and feedback	Personal effectiveness
Engage in networking	Personal effectiveness
Drive your own success	Personal effectiveness
Seek out and set up collaborations	Research governance & organisation; Engagement, influence and impact
Communicate research to others	Engagement, influence and impact
Publish!	Engagement, influence and impact
Recruit people you want to work with	Engagement, influence and impact
Measure the cost of success	Personal effectiveness

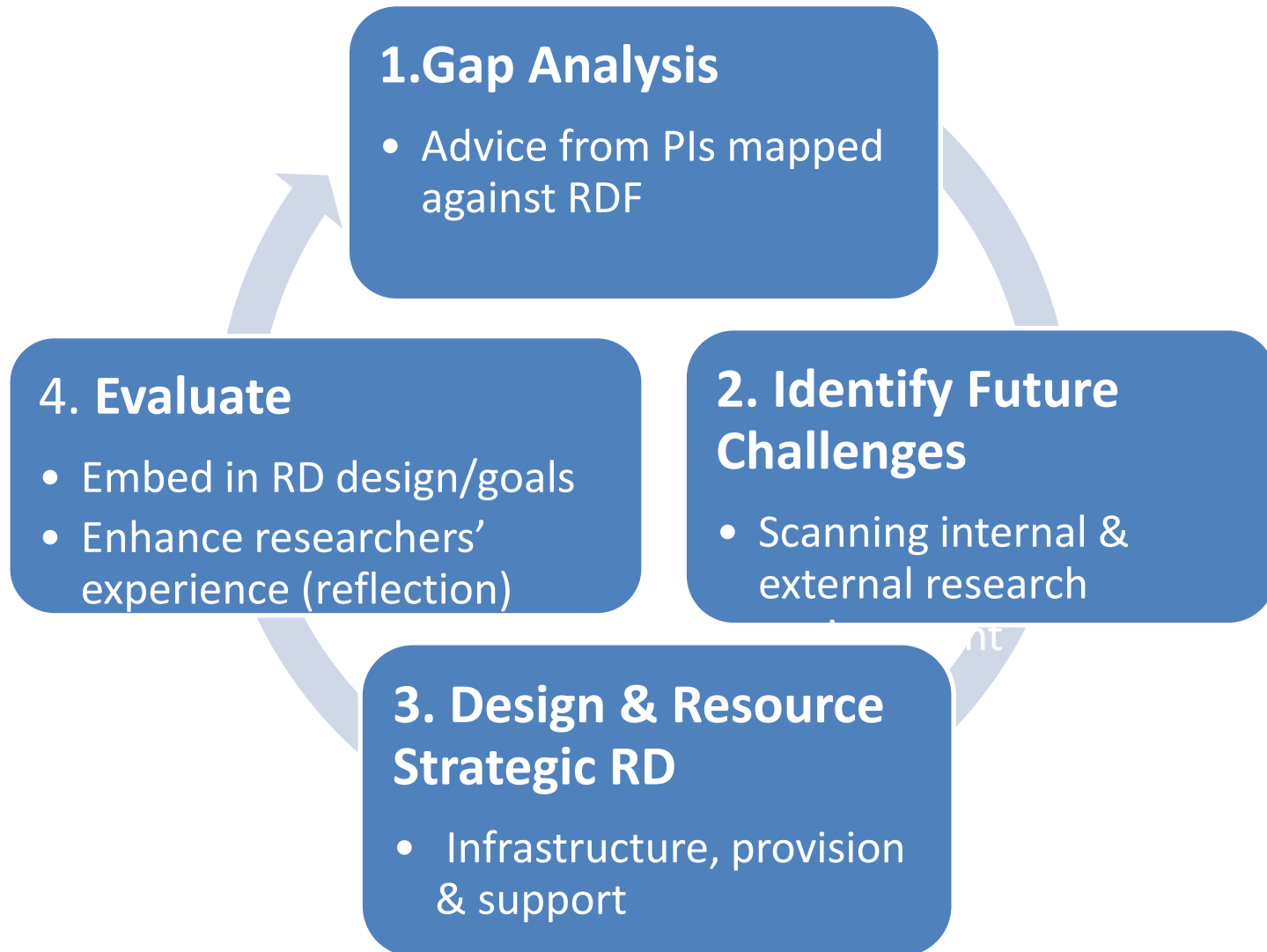
Our initial reflections

- PIs advice made limited reference to researcher development provision
- PIs made correlation between effective research team/group and research output
- PIs 'learning by doing' once grant had been obtained

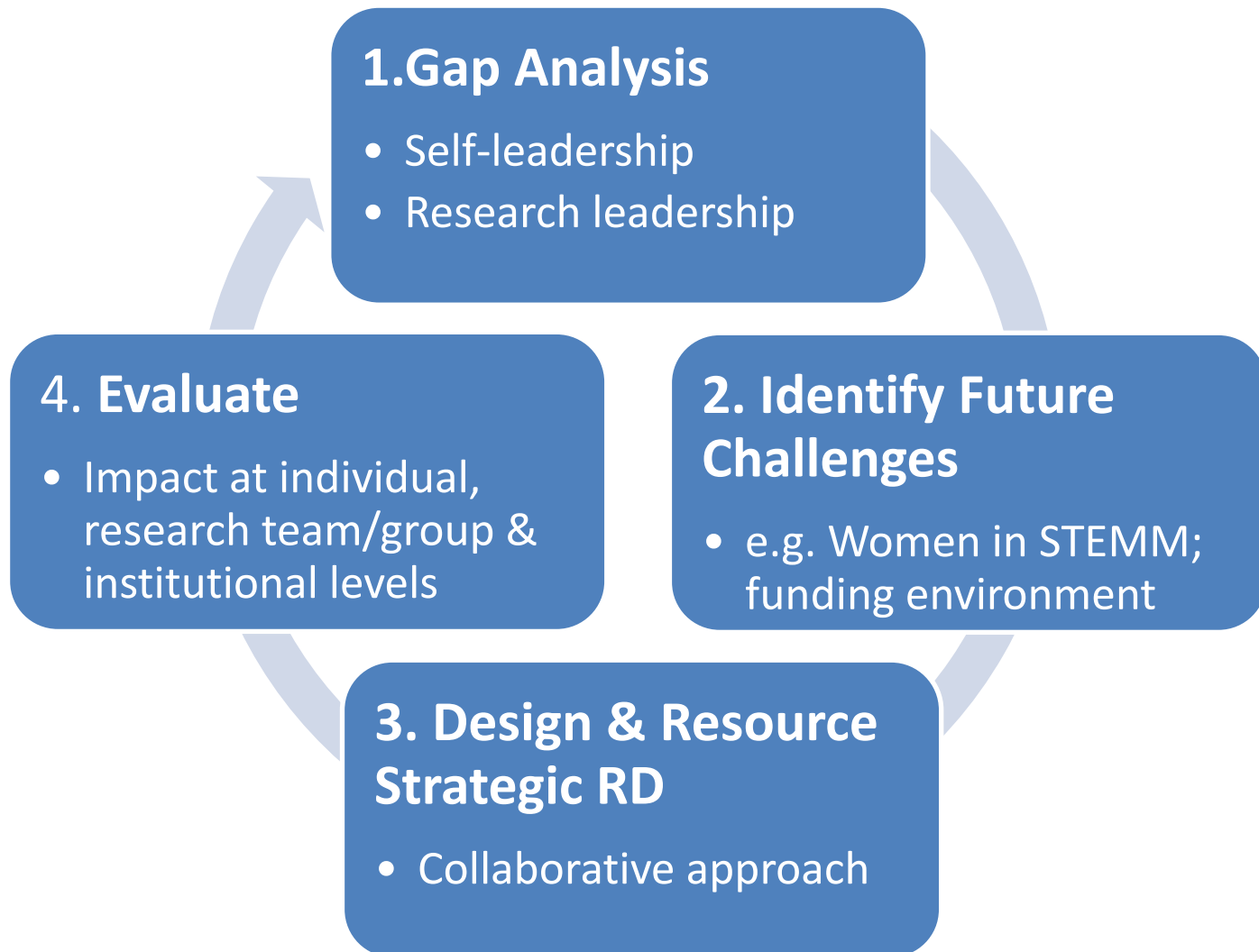
Reflection and discussion

- what are your reactions to these findings? (green)
- what are you surprised about? (yellow)
- how does this link with your current researcher development provision? (orange)

Framework in progress



Framework in action



Activity

- using the framework, work through an identified researcher development need or gap
- is the framework useful? Why, why not?
- how could the framework be improved?

Next steps

- Finalise the research interviews (n=12)
- More in-depth analysis of interview data using MAXQDA qualitative software
- Discrete analysis of CVs and journey plots
- Dissemination through conferences, talks internally and externally to host institution
- Establishment of project website
- Development of case study resources for use in RD provision

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