

Summary of Interviews with Data Stewards

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This translated summary of the report *Gespräche mit Data Stewards: Anforderungen, Kompetenzen, Aufgaben* (<https://doi.org/10.25365/phaidra.241>) from 16 December 2020 gives a brief overview of the results of interviews with data stewards in Austria and other European countries in October 2020. The interviews were carried out both for the FAIR Data Austria project (2020-2022) and for a working group within University of Vienna concerning Data Stewards. The aim was to get a snapshot which tasks, skills and competences are expected of data stewards.

The persons interviewed became data stewards in a variety of ways. No one has undergone specific training to become a data steward. Rather, they entered the field of data management through their – mostly very data-intensive – degree programs, their dissertation or through project proposals in the context of their subsequent research. A few have acquired the relevant skills motivated by their private interest in the topic of research data and have worked their way into the field professionally. Professional training only took place in the context of their employment as data stewards.

The interviews also showed that for the tasks, a professional specialisation in terms of data management is essential. This should be both goal-oriented and demand-driven since data stewards have to talk directly to researchers and help them in a practical way with their data management. But the needs and requirements from a wide range of disciplines are as diverse as the disciplines themselves. For example, researchers from biology have different needs regarding their data management than those from historical research, and these in turn have different needs than those from mechanical engineering. Even within one discipline, like in history, there can be completely different requirements regarding research data. This makes it difficult to develop a universally valid data management system for all research disciplines.

Data stewards also take on a mediating role between research, technology, library, and other service facilities of universities, which is why communication - in all its facets - is very important for their daily work. The essential goal is to make researchers' work easier and to give them practical advice, or as one interviewee put it: "*Researchers are happy when you help them*". However, researchers are expected to manage, analyse, and secure their data themselves. Data stewards therefore do neither data management nor data evaluation, they rather take on an advisory function. Data stewards are on a more general level concerned with data, but much more with the analysis tools of data and the long-term archiving of data.

In any case, the way to become a data steward lies in a combination of study and research experience with a willingness to learn by doing in practice, or to quote another of the interviewees: "*You have to take matters into your own hands and work it out yourself or at least ask people who know how to do it*". All the interviewees therefore actively educate themselves through courses, training or

conferences and learn in practice from other people and other institutions working in this field. All interviewees stated that the activities of a data steward are subject to a constant learning process.

Finally, it was interesting to note during the interviews that half of the data stewards - without being explicitly asked - stated that they had found personal fulfilment and meaningful work in their current job compared to scientific research.

Reference

Gänsdorfer, N. (2020). *Gespräche mit Data Stewards: Anforderungen, Kompetenzen, Aufgaben*. Version 1. <https://doi.org/10.25365/phaidra.241>



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