

LØFT

The danish term LØFT means LIFT pivoting around increasing some aspects of research quality in the work of the research group

For heads of research with a clear ambition to take their team's results to the next level

LØFT III is under development and subject to change



Introduction

LØFT is a network-based programme focusing on the development of research groups through research management. LØFT participants are driven by an ambition to increase their own research group's research quality and external funding in practice. The initiatives in LØFT concern research activities and processes and not the research itself. Examples of managerial work in LØFT include:

- Decisions on common ambitious goals for research, including the selection of some research interests over others and the consequences of rejection
- Decisions on increased collaboration across research groups, including prioritising collaborative relationships internally and externally and across disciplines
- Decisions on increased specialisation of non-research skills, including mobilising resources from others and developing skills and abilities within the group itself

Heads of research with a greater mandate

Research management is currently changing from the concept of 'One professor = one research unit' to the management of larger and more complex organisations with multiple professors, each with their own small group led by a head of research with a greater mandate. This requires more from the head of research in terms of the ability to navigate strategically and lead using a top-down and bottom-up approach in organisations. Therefore, there is a need to boost the heads of research responsible for the large units.

The steering committee for LØFT III are: Heads of Department Kirsten Kyvik, Department of Clinical Research; Rikke Leth-Larsen, The Department of Regional Health Research, Jakob Møller-Jensen, Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Christian T. Veje, Department of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, Jens Ejbye Schmidt, Department of Green Technology

Target audience

The programme is targeted at heads of research with ambitions of raising the research quality of their group to the next level, with strategic focus and increased community around research. Improved research quality can mean greater societal impact, efficiency, research excellence and innovation. Participants often have 2–5 years of experience as heads of research.

Purpose

The purpose of LØFT is for the head of the research group to embark on a long-term, strategically focused effort to increase the group's research quality and external funding. A LØFT programme consists of different elements or initiatives, which can be handled individually but must be considered together over time.

Elements of LØFT can occur without being planned, with a manager monitoring and keeping the group on track. A LØFT programme is based on a conscious decision and ambition to complete it.

Selection for LØFT

Participation in LØFT is agreed with the HoDs. To create the most value for participants, they must fulfil the following criteria: heads of research of a group of which at least two members hold a position *above PhD level* (careers anchored at SDU, including the head of research themselves), recognition by the participant of the need for strategic focus, willingness to advocate for improvement of research quality, success with funding applications, experience with interdisciplinary collaboration, and willingness to accommodate others.

The entry requirement is a written draft ambition/vision statement that has been discussed and accepted by the head of department. Templates have been developed for this work and the consultants on the programme are happy to help.

Benefits

After the networking programme, participants will have...

- formulated an ambition for the group's long-term development
- agreed framework and managerial capacity with the necessary senior managers and partners
- conducted a series of open discussions with the group to identify and delineate at least one key idea for a fairly large joint research project
- developed a central idea or cluster of ideas into one or more research projects where the majority of the group members can anchor parts of their research with concrete contributions
- started work on writing applications for funding, to which several members of the group contribute or are otherwise involved in
- based on the involvement of the group members, formulated a five-year plan to achieve the group's ambition, including career plans and a plan for acquiring new necessary skills

The participant's programme may see changes in conditions and frameworks that either create barriers or promote the LØFT. Implementation and realised benefits are therefore differentiated, take place locally and at different times. The goal is for participants to either succeed with the strategy or get ready to succeed.

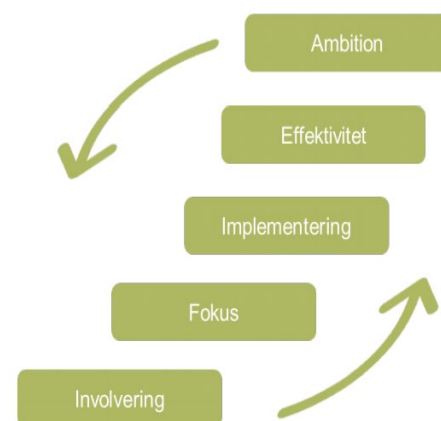
Approach and didactics

The focal point is the group's concrete development in practice. As illustrated on the right, the programme consists of 6 sessions that serve as a platform where participants get inspiration, feedback and access to experiences and resources. The LØFT programme is a network for exchanging experiences around practice.

Each 4-hour session has the same format: follow-up and exchange of experience, introduction to theory and tools, thematic discussion with various experienced heads of research, and preparation for the next session.

A number of research-based theories and concepts form the didactic basis of the programme:

- Leadership identity, management space and task
- Research group phases and constellations
- Motivation theory related to researchers
- Group development and dysfunctions
- Different types of management of researchers (opportunity and strategic management)
- Process and project management (mobilisation of skillsets, organisation, facilitation, meeting management and decision-making)
- Organisational understanding (management paradigms, framework management, organisation and change management)



For pedagogical reasons, the illustration shows a linear process. In practice, it will happen through a series of iterations with varying amounts of time spent on the different elements. The focus of LØFT is to cultivate a mindset and ability to work in these different ways.

Preparation and assignments between sessions emphasise practice. The tasks take the form of implementing activities and processes that are relevant to the research group's LØFT.



Programme content

Progress in the programme is created through the participants' own ambitions, knowledge sharing and idea generation with like-minded peers, inspiration from stories by seasoned heads of research and handling of challenges in practice, and structured facilitation with a focus on the next element of LØFT.

Ambition

To work purposefully with the group, a head of research will at some point start building a long-term ambition or vision. 'Ambition or vision' refers to the desire for a different future state, such as increased quality and collaboration. An ambition will initially be loosely formulated and often driven by a concrete idea for a research project that can bring together all or most of the group. In this initial phase, attention is paid on different aspects. For example, whether I as a head of research am ready to take on the long haul, whether I have been given management authority by the group and whether my knowledge of the group is sufficient to let me consider the big picture in the form of flagship projects in which each researcher can see themselves.

Keywords for the head of research's work with this element

- Ambition, a guiding idea, finances, common interests, identity as a leader and courage

Programme	Content keywords
Preparation	Draft ambition
Experiences	Peer feedback on ambition
Presentations	Leadership identity, research group phases and organisational understanding
Storytelling	Long-term thinking and patience
Setting up	Seek group feedback on ambition

Involvement

In this element, the ambition and principal idea are presented to the group for open discussion. Involvement is necessary to activate the group's commitment and skillsets. This can happen in a variety of ways depending on the dynamics of the group. Sometimes it is possible to bring the group together first and sometimes the idea is sounded out on key people first. This phase requires a sense of process and process organisation, and there may be a need to return to ideation if an idea doesn't have the necessary support and momentum. The work consists of facilitating dialogue and holding meetings, and it is crucial as a head of research to be agile in order to put 'ambition' before 'person'.

Keywords for the head of research's work with this element

- Group relationships, process, involvement, pressure testing, followership and positioning as a leader

Programme	Contents
Preparation	Relationship mapping of group members' interests
Experiences	Group dynamics and ideation
Presentations	Motivation, group development and process organisation
Storytelling	Shared ideation and getting people to follow
Setting up	Involving and mobilising support

Focusing

With an aligned commitment to ambition and a concrete project, the focus shifts to a purely academic focus, where the project is described in preparation for an application. In order to realise this ambition, multiple people need to contribute with input and specific contributions. Often, the head of research must take the lead and be willing to compromise. With strategic focus comes opt-outs – both for the individual researcher and for the head of research. There will often be a need for a value-based clarification that not everyone can do everything. This focusing process often takes place in a joint seminar, because a realistic application needs to be balanced in terms of time, resources and academic interests.

Keywords for the head of research's work with this element

• Application, funding landscape analysis, strategic focus, protocol, joint seminar, resources, commitment

Programme	Contents
Preparation	Stakeholder and risk analysis and application strategy
Experiences	Opportunities and risks of strategic focus
Presentations	Opportunity and strategic management
Storytelling	Strategy on research quality, finances and skill development
Setting up	Feedback from management and strategic partners



Implementation

Realising ambitions depends on many external factors. A group's development therefore has a long time span. Assuming a major application is successful, the nature of the work changes again as the idea and finances need to be put into practice. Successful implementation requires a clear framework in the form of agreements with management and clinics, transparent processes for task distribution, negotiations on contributions and prioritisation of time. The head of research will develop a clear style and will have to handle any conflicts that arise. During this phase, there may be a certain vulnerability in the group because a common binding framework has now been established where individual autonomy is at stake.

Keywords for the head of research's work with this element

- Change management, negotiation, prioritisation, framework management, conflict management, collaboration with clinic

Efficiency

Once the first flagship project is launched, the next ones will follow in a longer-term plan to fulfil the group's ambition. Improvement culture, efficiency and co-creation are a given for most professionals. Nevertheless, becoming effective as a group requires a lot of effort. In this phase, the head of research will work to crystallise the roles of each researcher so that everyone can contribute in the best possible way based on their own potential. Long-term development also includes organisation and planning, such as a five-year plan, plans for recruitment, careers, application strategies, building infrastructures and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Effective meetings and a systematically organised approach are crucial to realising the ambition at this level.

Keywords for the head of research's work with this element

- Strategy development, organisation, supporting internal processes and structures and framework development

New ambitions

When one or more long-term initiatives seem to be on the path to success, further long-term thinking is needed. A sustainable group that achieves critical mass must constantly consider the next initiatives and their prioritisation. Many partners invite collaboration and want contributions from the group, and rigorous strategic thinking is needed to maintain, manage and develop collaborative relationships based on the long-term strategy. The strategy involves a focus on recruitment, expanded international networking, collaboration on major grant applications and how the research agenda can be aligned with the group's expertise and interests.

Keywords for the head of research's work with this element

- Sustainability, critical mass, strategic interpretation of the environment, international collaboration, research policy

Programme	Contents
Preparation	Action plan and observations of the group's development
Experiences	Discussing feedback, delegation and follow-up
Presentations	Managing conflict and change, leadership styles
Storytelling	Change, negotiation and conflict management
Setting up	Bilateral conversations with key people about progress

Programme	Contents
Preparation	Evaluation of milestones and supporting structures
Experiences	Distributed leadership, role and long-term development of the group
Presentations	Framework management, organisation, meeting structure and facilitation
Storytelling	The quest for time and resources and anchoring around purpose
Setting up	Continued strategy development, support, networking and international collaboration

Programme	Contents
Preparation	Five-year strategy
Experiences	Barriers to implementation, continued discussions/feedback and learning
Presentations	Leadership identity, group phases and organisational understanding
Storytelling	Divisions, mergers and expanded horizons
Setting up	Reporting and evaluation

Continued implementation after the LØFT programme

After participating in LØFT, participants have a five-year strategy and concrete action plan for the next 1–2 years, which includes:

- Ongoing feedback from the coordinating head of research, head of department and head of section, e.g. via systematic leadership development review
- Continued participation in participant networks around LØFT with access to counselling
- Continued participation in discussion/feedback groups

Follow-up also involves evaluating the effects of LØFT. The evaluation results are used to qualify the programme for the next participants.

Story from a LØFT programme: Getting people on the same page

'I have joined a department with a large number of talented researchers. Researchers are often characterised by a high level of commitment and drive. They are driven by a passion for their profession. At the same time, they have a very strong interest in protecting their research areas. Their academic identity is linked to their subject area. That's why it can be challenging to get people on the same page. To succeed, you firstly need to have an idea of where each of the researchers in the group can anchor their research. Secondly, it takes money. If the finances are in order and they can see the sense in the idea, they'll go with you.'

As a starting point, I wanted a joint research project to give the department a unified research and clinical profile. First, I had an idea for an elite centre for ageing and hormone therapy. We had an open discussion in the group, but not enough people could see themselves in it. Subsequently, I had a new idea about doping. In an ongoing dialogue with other researchers, we formulated a project on doping and transgender athletes. There was broad support for this. In a seminar, we jointly formulated a protocol for the project. The choice of project idea meant that another seasoned researcher became the academic spearhead. I was primarily responsible for collating the group's contributions and writing the final application. We managed to get a grant.'

Among the lessons learnt as a head of research, you need to keep the department's results in focus. And you have to lead the way and be willing to compromise and change course in order to succeed. We are a small department with a strong dedication to specialisms, and I believe that working together makes us much stronger and more resilient. We'll have more strings to our bow. The next step is to become even better at writing applications. It needs to be systemised, so we can submit in a timely manner.'

Story from Jan Frystyk, Clinical Professor of Endocrinology at Odense University Hospital and the University of Southern Denmark.

Speakers and consultants in the programme

At each session, participants will have the opportunity to listen to and talk with experienced heads of research about their own LØFT programmes. The sessions are facilitated by consultants from Research Support and HR Service, SDU. The role of consultants is to facilitate and catalyse LØFT in practice

Further assistance can be provided by the joint secretariat for IRS and KI with regard to, for example, communication, social media and recruitment.

Additional courses offering various tools

Participants can choose to supplement the programme with additional targeted tool courses

- Project management for researchers, HR Service, SDU
- Funding Academy, SUND, SDU
- Courses offering tools in conflict management, negotiation, stress management, meeting management, process management
- Customised courses, HR Service, SDU

Dates and times for 2024

All course days are from 10am–2:30pm including a 30-minute lunch break

- 8 March, 19 April, 31 May, 29 August, 27 September and 8 November

The programme is run once a year. Dates will be announced well in advance.

Location

All the course days will be held at SDU Odense, Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense

Room: [OD SUN M1.10 \(V04-612a-1\)](#)

LØFT is part of a comprehensive range of programmes for heads of research. See the SDU management portal or contact

Organisational Consultant Martin Karstoft, karstoft@sdu.dk, mobile: (+45) 60 11 27 90

Facilitators of LØFT

As a programme, LØFT is anchored in HR in collaboration with the departments

- Course coordination, registration, practicalities: Dorthe Magnussen, Administrative Officer
- Academic development and facilitation: Carsten Salling, Senior Consultant, HR Service, Organisation & Recruitment

Registration

Please contact your own head of department

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