

Enabling FAIR Data through Peer-to-Peer support: The Brussels-Wallonia Federation Data Ambassadors Network

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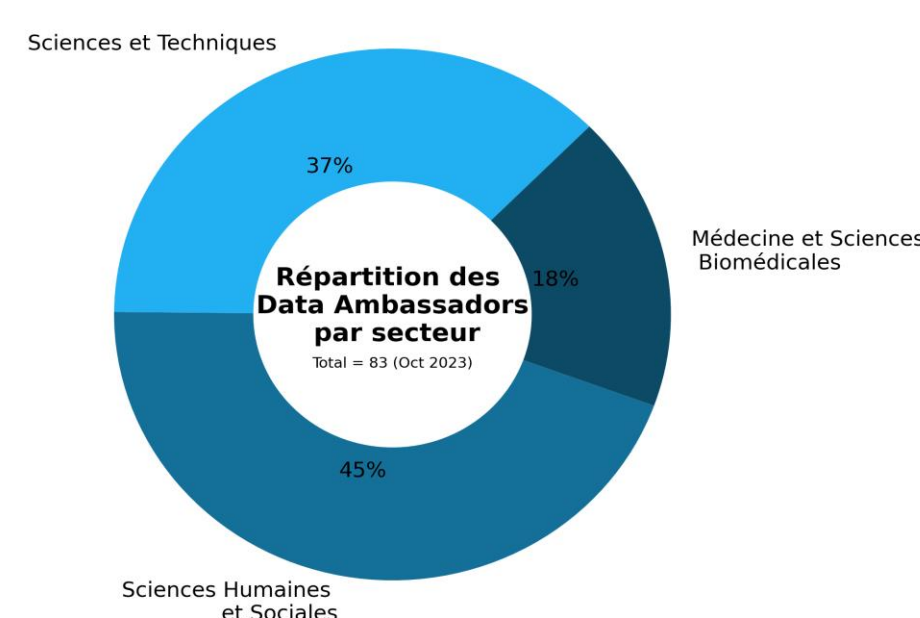
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Introduction

- Open Access Evolution and Response:** Since the Open Access Decree in 2018, FWB research organizations have embraced open access and are now extending it to open and FAIR datasets. Inspired by Cambridge and TUDelft, Research Data Officers (RDOs) in Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB) Universities built a **network of Data Ambassadors (DAs)** in a bottom-up fashion to promote FAIR data principles and data management with discipline-specific expertise.

- Community Growth:** Starting with 51 in 2021, the network **expanded to 83 members by 2024**, across all sectors. Initially with a mostly local impact, the network has broadened its scope with remote events, reaching beyond FWB to the international research community.



- Consolidation and Expansion:** To sustain the network's rapid growth, RDOs of all FWB universities work to continuously ensure the satisfaction and effectiveness of the DAs, and specifically, the match between their experience and expectations.

Method

- Objective:** **Understand and evaluate** the DAs' experience and satisfaction after the first two years of operation, identify their needs and expectations in order to define priorities for the future of the network.
- Method:** **A comprehensive online survey** was submitted to all DA's during the last two weeks of March 2024. The survey includes 26 questions covering both **facts** (activities, day-to-day tasks, ...) and **perceptions** (self-definition of their role, feeling of recognition, self-evaluation of skills, ...). The answers to the questions are examined from a quantitative and qualitative point of view.
- Sample:** **18 members from the network** provided data through the survey (N=18), with 6 questions for which only 13 answers were collected (N=13). The small number of respondents means that the results cannot be generalised from a statistical point of view, but it does meet the objective of understanding and evaluating the experience of Data Ambassadors.

Conclusions

- The community of FWB Data Ambassadors has grown to include a wide range of members with different profiles and statuses.
- Even though they are not regularly consulted and report **a time investment of less than a day/a few days per month**, several DAs have already put **initiatives** in place (mainly on-demand support and seminars).
- Certain DAs sometimes face practical **obstacles**, but also resistance to the very philosophy of open data within their work environment.
- The **upskilling objective** seems to be mostly achieved on an **individual** level. The next step is to **support DAs empowerment** to **scale it up** to a collective level.
- To that end, DAs report the **need to be made more visible** and provided with **tools for their autonomous work**, such as training material.

Caveat: Because of the low proportion of respondents, who may be the most motivated in the larger sample, the results may be skewed towards a higher need for visibility and empowerment. Regardless, RDOs believe that a strong core of visible ambassadors will help transitioning into new data management practices collectively.

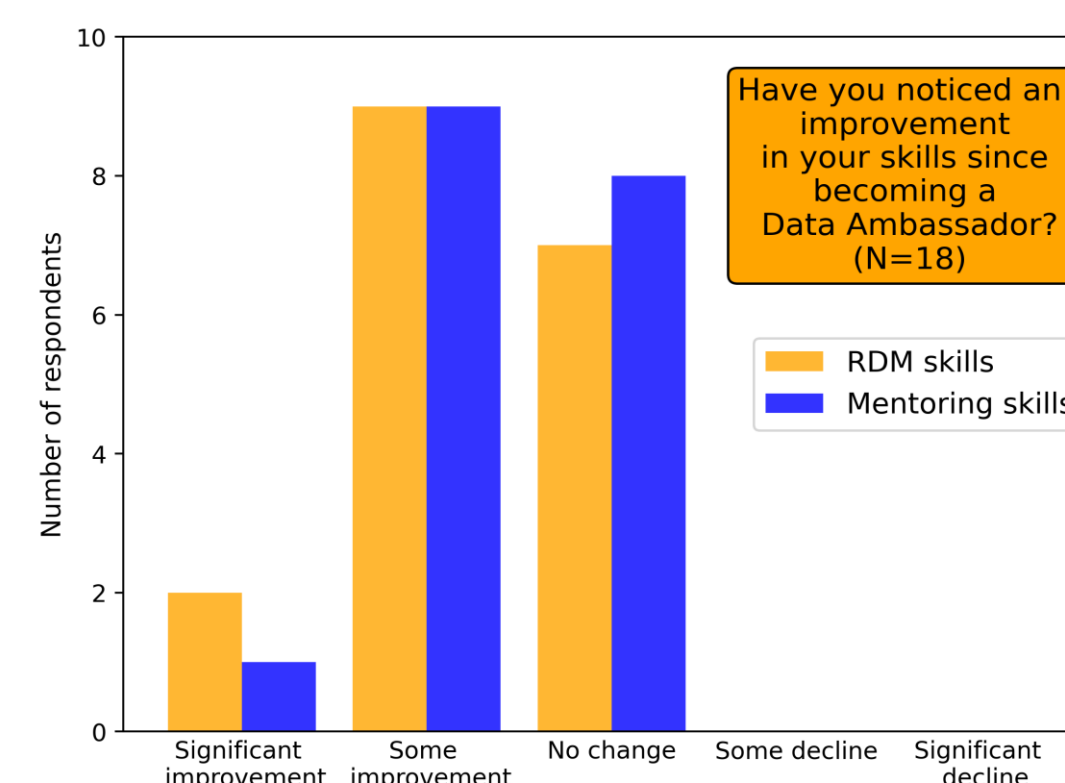
What's next ?

After its first couple of years, the network is **moving from its learning phase to its action-oriented phase**. For 2024-2025 it aims at :

- Reinforcing communication about the DAs individually and about the network
- Setting up a more visible web page and advertise DAs in their roles within their institution
- Creating a visual identity (logo, profiles, etc.)
- Provide DAs with tools that they can reuse autonomously in their communities, such as template training material

Results

Skills improvement and time invested

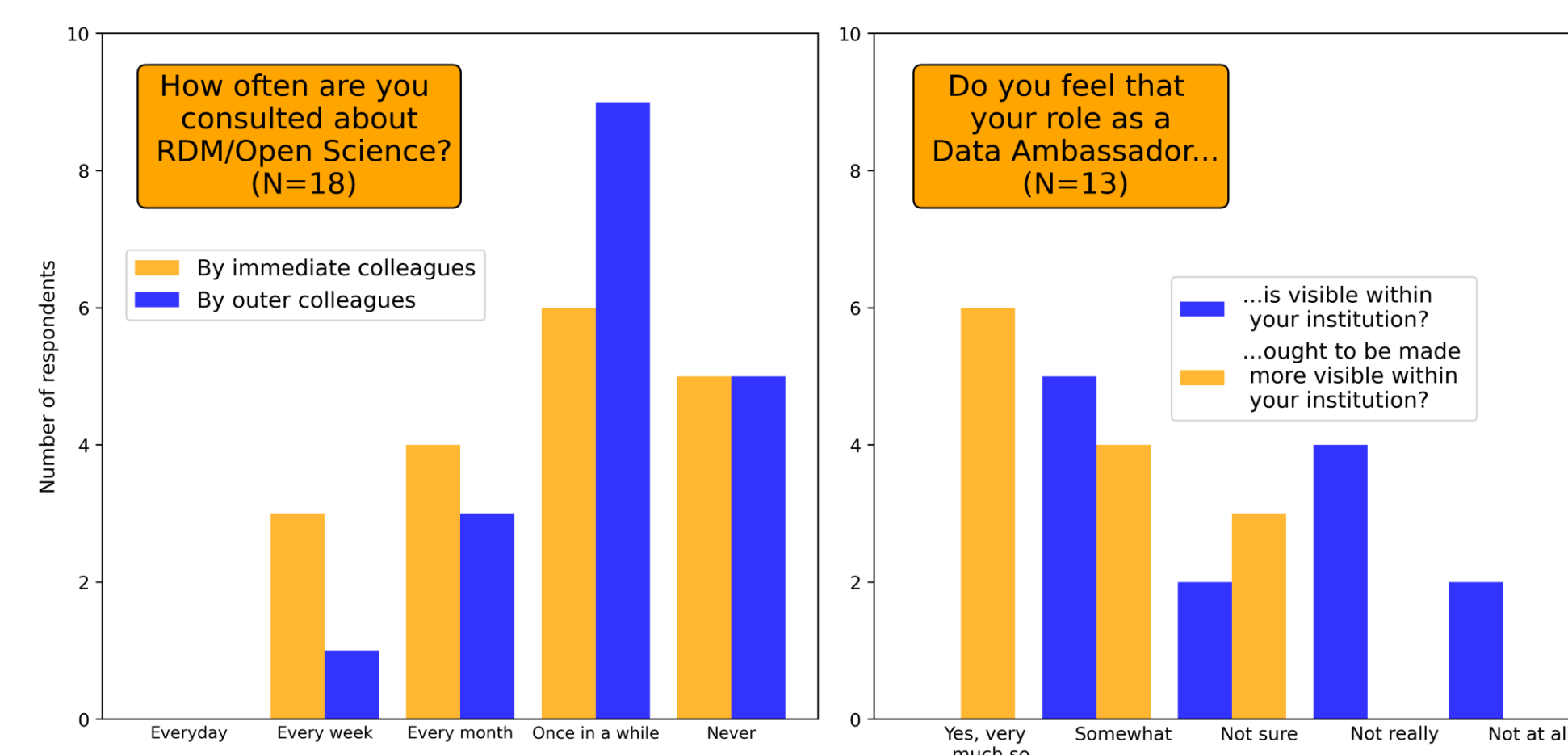


- 11 (N=18) respondents have reported an **improvement** in their self-evaluated RDM skills, for a **time investment** of less than a day to a few days per month.

What skills are perceived as improved through their role of Data Ambassadors?

They can be grouped into 6 categories: **learning new contents** (legal aspects, qualitative data management, ...), **deepening or updating one's knowledge**, **broadening one's point of view** (approaching practices beyond one's laboratory), **structuring knowledge** that had sometimes remained informal, **identifying tools** in research data management, **identifying experts** and resource persons.

Day-to-day role and visibility



- 13 (N=18) respondents are **consulted** at least once in a while as Data Ambassadors by their immediate and « outer » colleagues, with a majority of **irregular consultations**.
- Only 7 (N=18) respondents have reported **feeling valued in their role**, and only 5 (N=13) feel visible to their community as a DA. 10 (N=13) indicate feeling **the need to be made more visible**.

How is the role of a Data Ambassador perceived?

When we ask Data Ambassadors how they would summarize their role, we find several recurring perceptions. These representations can be grouped into 7 lexical fields: **mediation or connection** (relay, facilitator), **transmission of knowledge** (producing guidance, train, passing knowledge), **support or guidance** (advice, support, help), **persuasion** (promote, convince, raise awareness), **exchange or sharing** (share knowledge or good practices), **affect** ("lower anxiety") and **"strategic" action** (establish policy).

It should also be noted that the mission of the Data Ambassadors **sometimes comes up against certain obstacles**, such as resistance to change. Thus, the obstacles identified are both **practical** (limitation of time, diversity of data, reaching beginners) and sometimes **"epistemological"** (linked to the very philosophy of Open Data). One respondent said they had the impression of **"preaching in the desert"**.

References

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