

Leaders - Wanted

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ABSTRACT

There are many good reasons why to choose a career within Statistical Programming. With data volume, data sources and data types increasing, with better tools and public libraries becoming available, job profiles are getting even more attractive. Companies around the globe offer corresponding jobs and finding qualified individuals works out sufficiently well for most corporations. Qualified Statistical Programmers can find jobs quite easily. Regarding leaderships positions within Statistical Programming, however, the situation is quite different. Filling these positions has become quite a challenge for many companies. This paper will explain the reasons why good leaders in Statistical Programming have become a threatened species and provide some motivation why it is worthwhile to think about a leadership role even as an introvert.

INTRODUCTION

Statistical Programmers who work in the strongly regulated environment of clinical trials typically have chosen their profession quite consciously. They like technology, they are interested in the details, they are used to work by themselves most of the day and they prefer to execute tasks sequentially one by one. The contrast to the main elements of a management role is quite stark. Spending most of your day in meetings, presenting results, collaborate with other people and departments requires a different skill and mind set. Together with the coordination of other people's efforts to provide prompt and proper results this is quite a different job profile. In essence these differences explain why it can be quite difficult for organizations to identify candidates for statistical programming leadership positions.

MOTIVATION

It is probably fair to state that most people in Statistical Programming love what they do and if they think of a change, the change will most likely be a move to a different project, another department or company offering a better compensation package. The job itself and the associated tasks will most likely stay the same. There isn't anything wrong with this situation. Actually, the loyal Statistical Programming employees who are experienced, reliable and stay for long times with their companies are of big value to their corresponding Clinical Development organizations. But the need for leaders within in Statistical Programming is quite obvious. There must be some management and coordination of the Statistical Programming work force even in smaller companies. Even in outsourcing situations some sort of leadership and (project) management of the external sources is required. When working in a "virtual" team set-up with different parts of the organization being spread over multiple continents and time zones, collaboration in general and leadership in particular becomes more challenging. Many leaders experience their leadership positions though as very fulfilling, inspiring and broadening one's mind. Leadership is never boring, even with some level of routine, challenges are always a little different and are very much depending of the people you are working with. In a leadership position leaders typically meet with other leaders. Leadership team meetings, independent of the level, typically provide insights into different parts of your organization, projects, collaborations and future plans. Essentially being part of a leadership team can increase motivation as it provides a more holistic view of things. And if you are able to share the essentials of your insights with your direct reports you may be able to add value to their professional lives. Vice versa, leadership offers the opportunity to bring things up which are important to you and your team. You will be the person who makes your team get heard. You can be their voice. A team leader in Statistical Programming may not be the end of the ladder. Some leaders become continuously better with their leadership skills as they progress in their leadership role. And they may even like it better than their 100% programming job they did before. So the interest in doing more leadership or project management work can raise together with the ambitions. Leaders have better visibility to higher management and if the interests match with open opportunities there is fair chance to move even higher up in the ranks. Last but not least it has to be acknowledged that despite all efforts by many companies to develop dual career paths for individual contributors and leaders, compensations for leadership positions are typically still better than those for individual contributors.

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REQUIREMENTS AND A POTENTIAL ROADMAP

So obviously there are good reasons, to think about a move into a leadership role if you wonder about your next career step. What is needed for this new track and how can you get on it? The essential question to be answered is: "Is this something for me?" It requires an honest answer. And a lot of frustration can be generated if people are thrown into a managerial or vendor management role or are persuaded to do so. Without proper motivation, sufficient skills or limited degrees of freedom failure is predetermined. In other words: the most important things needed for a leadership position in Statistical Programming beside programming skills are social competencies, leadership skills, the ultimate will and the freedom to do it. A proper assessment of these skills is necessary. Your manager, your spouse or a friend with leadership experiences may help to get a fair assessment of where you are. The abilities to interact in teams, to speak up in front of a group or the patience while others are talking can be limiting factors. All of these and other social competencies or leadership skills can be trained. It is not as easy as learning another programming language and it requires lots of practice and some time. A good boss plays an important role in this situation. He or she can help, mentor, guide through the process of developing the required skills and offer the space to practice what you have learned.

Also there is nothing wrong with being an introvert. Even a leadership role will not convert introverts into extroverts. If you are shy to speak up, you can practice how to do this and how to do this a bit more often. The amazing thing about introverts in leadership positions, at least in my experience is, that they get heard much better. It makes a big difference if you try to listen to somebody who "talks all the time", compared to someone else who doesn't speak up often but talks about the important facts, figures and who is able to identify the most important topics or arguments. With their intuitive analytical thinking Statistical Programmers are predestinated to take that role.

CONCLUSION

There are many different ways and good reasons to move from a Statistical Programming role to a leadership role. And leaders are very much wanted. So next time when you think of a change or you see a corresponding job posting, why don't you consider a move into leadership? Routine in a job can be a good thing as you don't have to think about everything and it makes life easy at some point. Too much routine, however, can make work boring and the level at which people experience one or the other may be quite different. Routine may also hide your undiscovered skills and talents. Leadership can bring new and challenging aspects of work to your life and may completely change your work situation. Eventually, it can be rewarding and fulfilling.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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