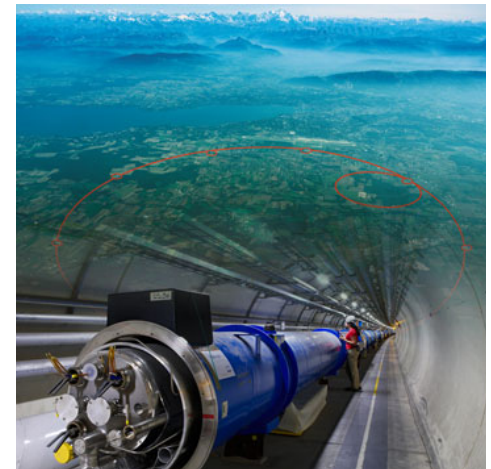




# A Very Personal Perspective on (Research) Staff Management



**US**  
University of Sussex

**Prof Antonella De Santo**  
Head of Experimental Particle Physics  
Sussex ATLAS Team Leader

**Practice Sharing Event for PIs and  
Research Staff Managers**  
University of Sussex, 13 April 2016



# Foreword

- **This is going to be rather personal**

- A biased selection of what I think is important and what works for me
- I'll make minimal attempts to generalise

- **I'm a physicist by trade**

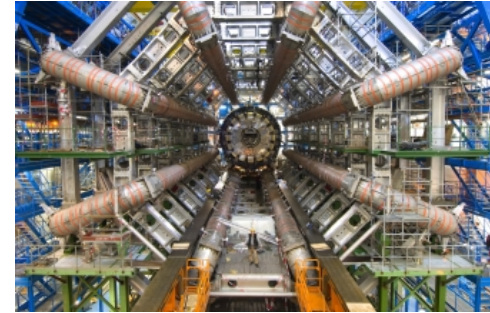
- Being a scientist and a creative researcher is my main identity
- **Revelation #1:** that is not mutually exclusive with being a good manager
- **Revelation #2:** getting some training is not only ok, it's necessary

- **I'm sure I have at least as much to learn from you as you do from myself**

- I look forward to lots of interesting discussions today



# + About Myself



2

## ■ I joined Sussex in 2009 to establish a new research group in collider physics

- I founded and lead the Sussex team working on the **ATLAS experiment** at the **Large Hadron Collider** (Higgs boson discovery in 2012 – and much more)
- My **ATLAS team** has grown from 2 faculty, 2 PhD students, 1 tech initially to **5 faculty, 6 post-docs, 9 PhD students, 1 tech** now

## ■ Challenges have evolved with the team size and its growing ambitions

## ■ I am also Head of Experimental Particle Physics (EPP)

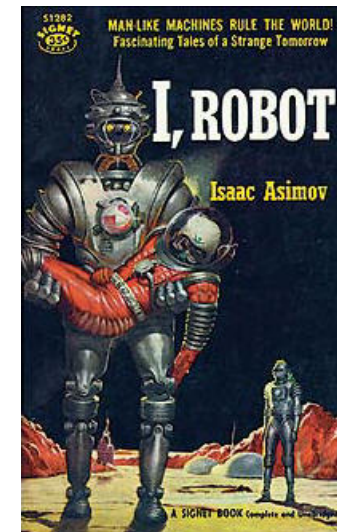
- 10 faculty, 12 post-docs, 17 students, 3 technicians – including the ATLAS team
- I am the **PI** on the Sussex **EPP Consolidated Grant** (platform grant awarded by the **Science and Technology Facilities Council** – £1.838M (2012), £2.336M (2015)), as well as on a number of other smaller grants (**ATLAS upgrade grants**, etc – a few £100k)

The majority of the funding goes into salaries –

## ■ Management of resources $\approx$ management of research staff

# Core Values

- **Tacitly or not, you and your team will have agreed a set of core values, on which your research ethos and your working practices are founded**
  - E.g.,
    - Doing excellent science
    - Respecting one another
    - Pursuing the greater good of the team as well as that of individuals
- **In an ideal world, only good things descend from those values**
  - Hard work
  - Enthusiasm
  - Fairness
  - Collegiality
  - ...
- **Of course, there are loopholes...**

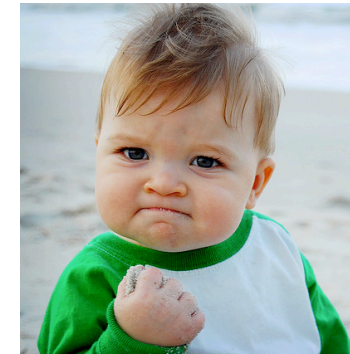




# You're Hired!

- **The management of team members begins with recruitment**

- Out of the field of candidates, they will be the best fit to the job description and to the talents of the rest of the team



- **On arrival, a good induction and a welcoming atmosphere will make new research staff feel fully engaged**

- You want them to hit the ground running
- Recruit support from the rest of the team and from other key staff (including admin and tech)



- **The first research meeting is very important**

- An early opportunity to set out mutual expectations and goals



# + Meetings, meetings, meetings

## ■ Regular scheduled interactions with team members are crucial at all levels (although no one likes unnecessary meetings)

- Circulation of information
- Planning & review of research strategy and objectives
- Ongoing assessment of pathways to objectives
- Early evaluation of emerging opportunities
- Early identification of challenges and solutions
- Technical discussions for day-to-day running of research

## ■ In addition to probation, appraisal and other review meetings scheduled at institutional level, I normally have:–

- Weekly one-to-one meetings with early-career researchers
- Weekly group meetings with my entire research team
- Bi-weekly meetings with the entire EPP faculty group
- Termly meetings with the entire EPP group
- One-off meetings with individuals and/or small groups if required

## ■ It's a lot of work!

- But it pays off in the long term





# + Your Success Is My Success

6

- **If individual researchers do well, the team does well**
  - And vice versa
- **Expect and encourage everyone in the team to become the best that they can be in all circumstances**
  - As talented and productive researchers
  - As decent human beings
  - Including when things don't go that well
- **Support people's realistic career aspirations**
  - Including through self-reflective personal development and formal training
- **Acknowledge and celebrate success**
  - Promotions, conference talks, publication of papers, grants, significant outreach activities, appointments to panels and committees, teaching prizes, ...

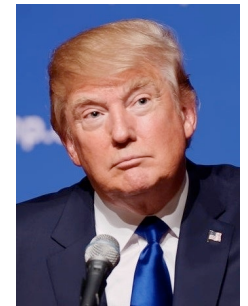




# Leadership Styles

7

- **We all develop our own “signature” leadership style**
  - There isn't just one right way to do it
  - In fact, I think everyone gets it wrong at least sometimes
  - Some more than others!
  
- **Team members will also have their own wide range of attitudes and dispositions towards authority**
  - Which they may sometimes challenge, for various reasons
    - Not a problem as such, but requires managing
  
- **An authoritative manager is grounded in the team's core values**
  - Leadership
  - Clear sense of direction
  - Knowledge of subject matter
  - Awareness of own role and that of others
  - Fairness
  - Accountability



# + Mentoring

- **I consider it a measure of my success when a researcher in my team gets on to the next step of their career ladder**
  - I want to help them get there
  - Need to discern when to lead, teach, walk with, give a hand, or just sit back and relax
- **There's a lot more to an academic job than just research**
  - People need opportunities to grow
  - Hours “away from the lab” aren’t always “lost hours” – we have a duty of care
  - Motivated researchers are better researchers
- **Fully rounded research staff need opportunities to get experience of teaching, grant writing, public speaking, outreach, and more**
  - Access to high-quality internal and external collaborations and training is always enriching



8







# Like To Get To Know You Well

## ■ Get to know your colleagues well (and allow them to get to know you too)

- It doesn't mean you'll be best buddies, but it's civil –
  - and going to work in the morning becomes a lot more pleasant
- It also facilitates positive group dynamics

## ■ Colleagues need to feel comfortable taking their instances to you

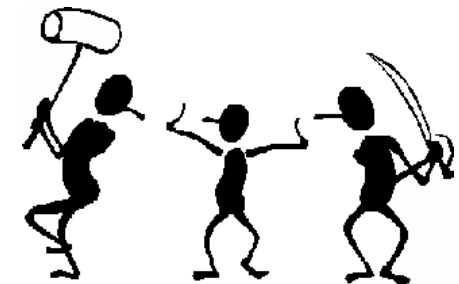
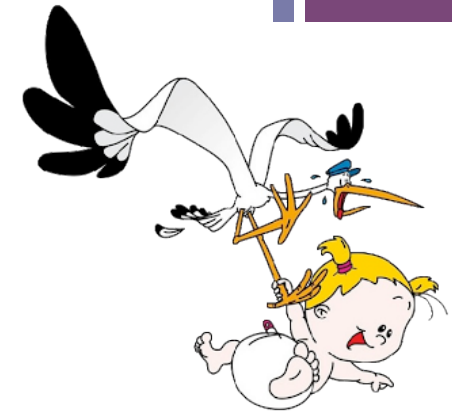
- Sometimes life gets in the way
  - Maternity/paternity leave, sick leave, other major life events

## ■ Prevention is better than cure

- It helps hugely if one can foresee (and possibly avoid) conflicts
  - Or minimise their impact

## ■ People are people

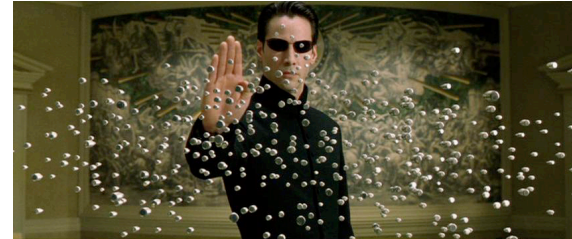
- A good team spirit is a great aim, but there are differences to respect
  - Because the law asks us and because it's better for everyone if we do





# + It's Not Always Plain Sailing

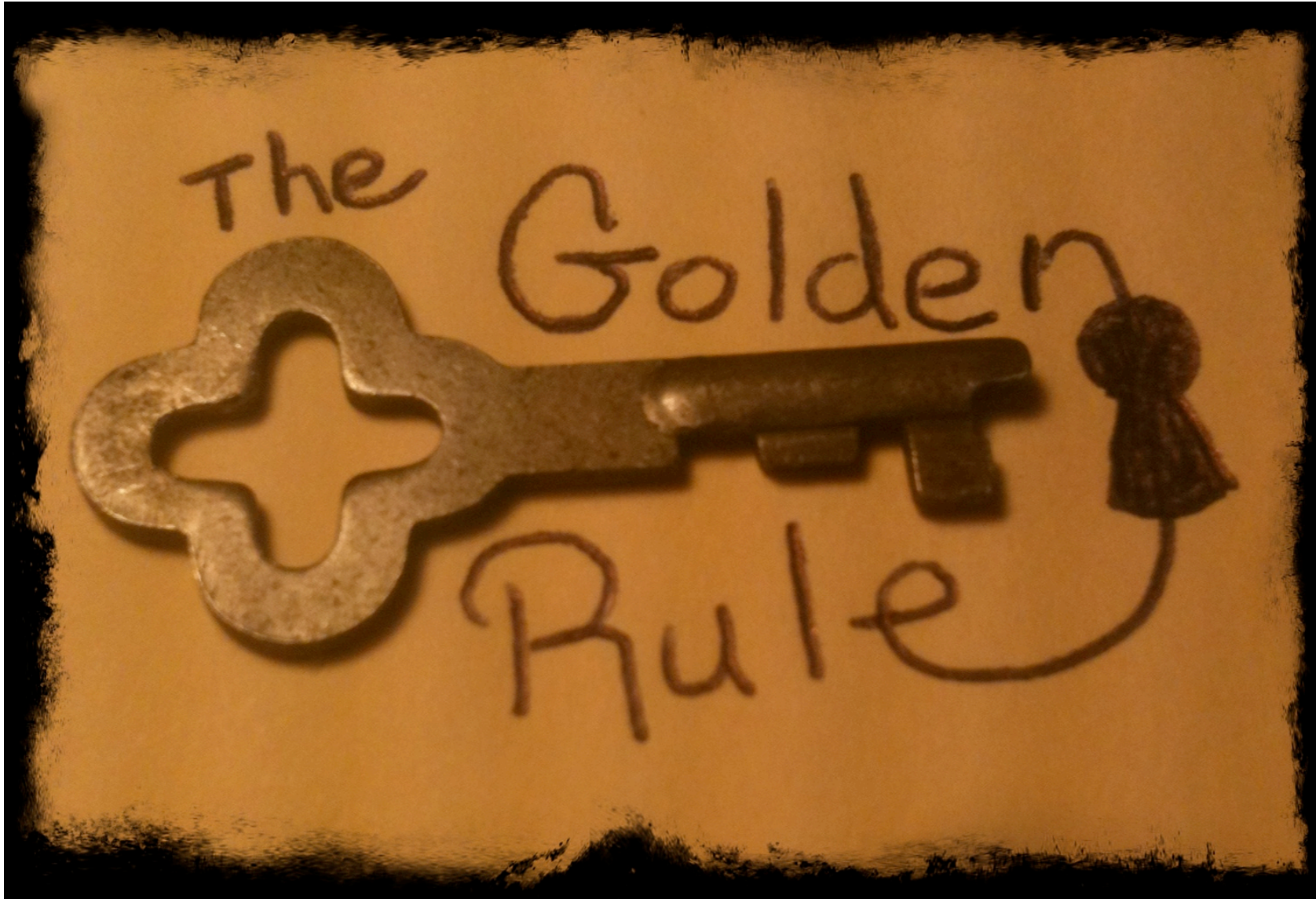
- **Foresight is a gift, but things don't always go as planned or intended**
  - In fact, you can bet that sometimes they won't
- **If a crisis happens, be on the case immediately**
  - Act promptly
  - Don't let it fester or deepen
- **Let your feedback be of the constructive kind**
  - Every situation can be turned into a learning opportunity for everyone
  - Even when straight talk is necessary
- **Be a good listener**
  - There might be useful feedback in it for you too
- **Some things cannot be altered**
  - It's important to learn how to manage change
  - And to know when to let go



+

# Do As You Would Be Done

11



# Thank you!