

# From First Attempt to Funded Coordinator

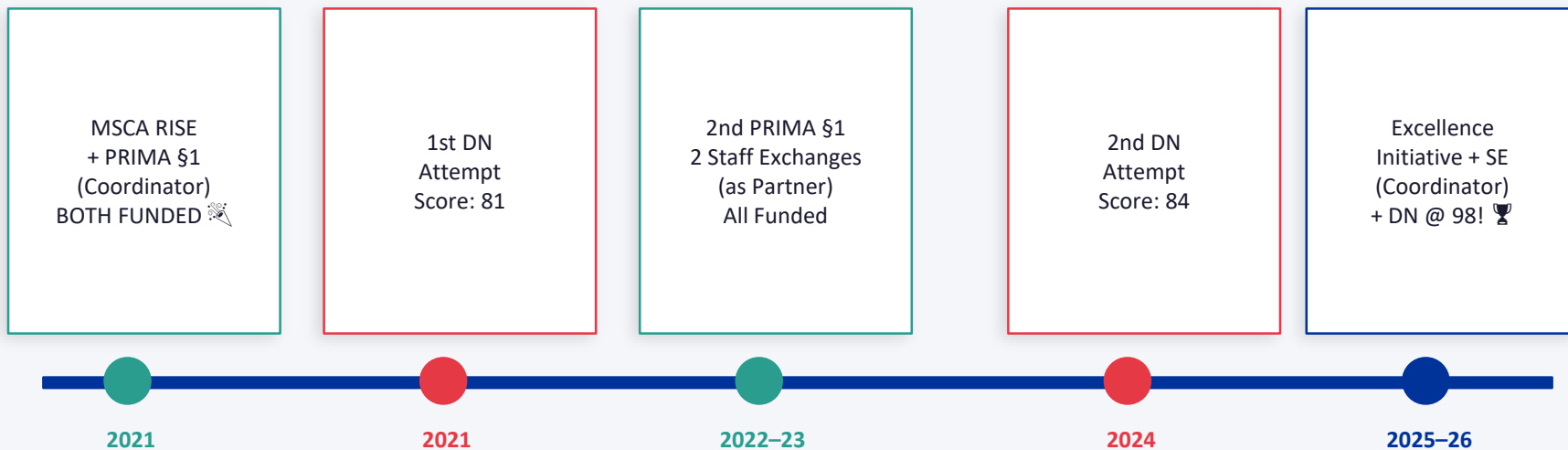
5 Years of MSCA: Lessons from the Field

---

**Prof. Dr. Mecit Halil Öztop**

Middle East Technical University, Türkiye  
MSCA Best Practice Forum · 27 March 2026

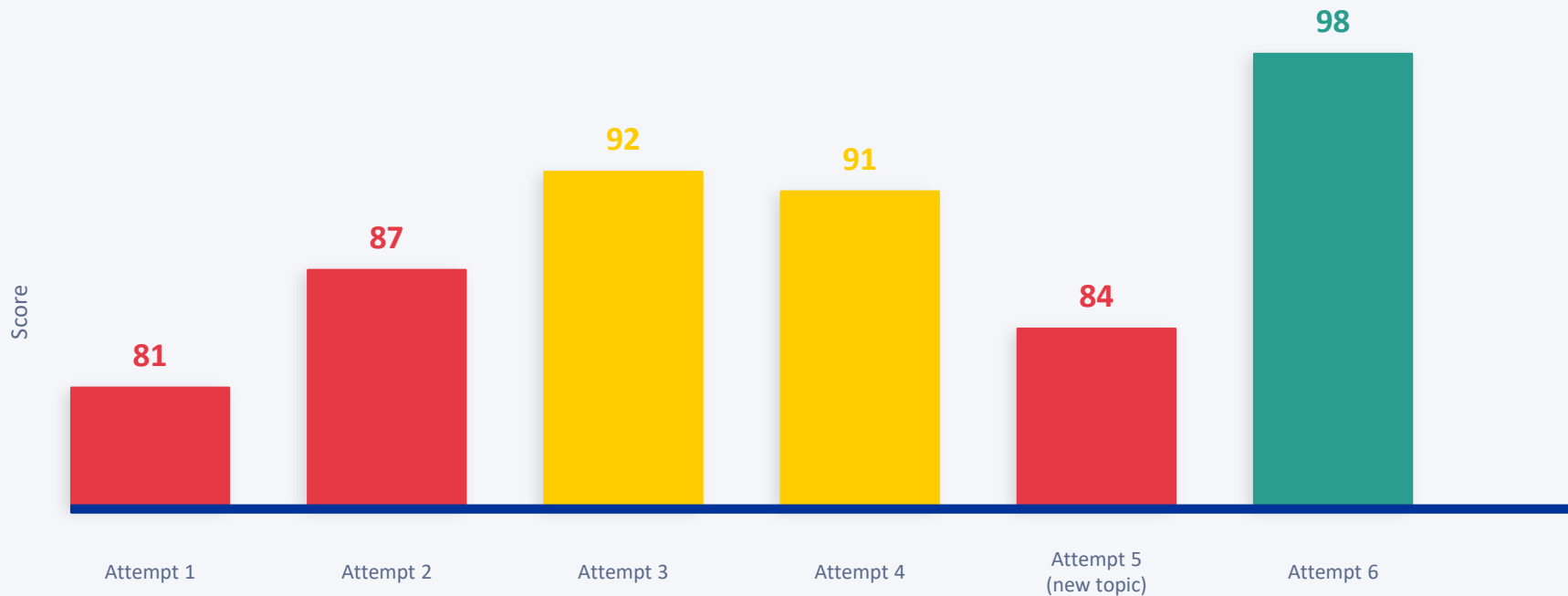
# My EU Journey: 2021 → Today



*It started during the pandemic. I was sitting at home — so I decided to write.*

\* MSCA RISE has since been replaced by Staff Exchange (SE)

# The DN Journey: 5 Submissions, One Key Lesson



💡 *It's not a straight line up. The 84 in Attempt 5 showed me: even with experience, a tired topic will hurt you.*

# What Made the Difference: Key DN Lessons

## 01 DC Interconnection is Everything

Evaluators don't want 15 great PhD projects — they want to see why these 15 researchers NEED to be in the same network. The new template forced us to articulate this explicitly. We spent enormous time designing how DCs genuinely benefit from each other's research.

## 02 Risk ≠ Generic Checklist

We used to treat risk as a standard box to tick. Wrong. Ask yourself: 'Could this risk appear in ANY DN proposal?' If yes, it's too generic. Write the real technical risks specific to your research that could actually derail the science.

## 03 Topic Freshness Matters

Evaluators are experts — they feel when a field is saturated. My Attempt 5 with an aging topic scored 84. The new topic in 2026 scored 98. Don't be afraid to start fresh if your topic has run its course.

# A Radical Approach to Consortium Building

## ⚠ The Real Problem

**Commitments change.** Wars happen (we lost a partner to the conflict in Ukraine). People leave. Institutions restructure.

**In SE projects:** leftover secondments = budget you must return. This catches new coordinators completely off guard.

## ✓ The Solution: Build in Redundancy

- Add more partners than you think you need — deliberately
- Include 3rd country partners as a strategic buffer
- With PO approval, transferring secondments is manageable (if numbers aren't huge)
- Yes, justification is harder to write — but it's worth the implementation flexibility
- Industry mostly hosts, rarely sends secondments — 3rd country partners solve this
- 🗺 **The removal of the 1/3 interdisciplinary rule is a BIG deal — use it!**

# Implementation Reality: What Nobody Tells You

## Partner vs. Coordinator: Very Different Worlds

As a partner, I wished coordinators communicated more. As a coordinator, I now understand why they couldn't. Both experiences made me better at both roles.

## Secondment Flexibility is Underused

Many coordinators don't know they can transfer secondments between partners with PO approval. Build this into your project management plan from Day 1.

## Industry Partners: Host vs. Sending

Industry is great as a host but rarely sends people for secondments. This is a structural tension — plan for it, don't be surprised by it during implementation.

## Rejection is Research

Each evaluator report is a free consultation from an expert in your field. I read mine forensically. That's why the score went from 81 to 98 over time.

# Key Takeaways

- 1 Show WHY your DCs need each other — not just what each one does
- 2 Write real, technical, project-specific risks — not a generic checklist
- 3 If your topic feels old, it probably is — don't be afraid to start fresh
- 4 Build consortia with redundancy — more partners, including 3rd countries
- 5 Rejection is data. Read evaluator reports forensically and iterate

*"Submit once, learn. Submit five times, succeed."*