

Research Application Summary

**Building your partnering muscles: Seven core competencies**

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**Abstract**

Partnership brings together complementary skills and institutional synergy in addressing the complex challenges in agricultural research for development. Therefore, no institution can afford to ignore it and at the same time expect to deliver impact. Seven core competencies for the success of partnerships have been identified: leadership, ability to negotiate, conflict management skills, effective communication, effective facilitation in identification of core issues, effective inter-personal relations and organizational ability. Seeking out training, coaches and mentors who can help inculcate the principles of these seven competencies can help program and project managers chart a course for learning to consistently make partnering work for them and their teams. This practice of “building partnering muscles” should be adopted to improve delivery of impacts in agricultural research and development.

Key words: Agricultural research and development, competencies, impact, partnership

**Résumé**

Le partenariat réunit ensemble des compétences complémentaires et une synergie institutionnelle pour relever les défis complexes en matière de recherche agricole pour le développement. Par conséquent, aucune institution ne peut se permettre de l'ignorer et réaliser l'impact. Sept compétences de base pour le succès des partenariats ont été identifiées: le leadership, la capacité à négocier, les compétences de gestion des conflits, la communication efficace, une animation efficace dans l'identification des questions de base, de bonnes relations interpersonnelles et la capacité organisationnelle. Chercher une formation, des formateurs et des mentors qui peuvent aider à inculquer les principes de ces sept compétences peut aider les gestionnaires de programme de projet à tracer la voie pour apprendre à faire constamment des partenariats de travail pour eux et leurs équipes. Cette pratique de la « formation du partenariat musclé » devrait être adoptée pour améliorer la

prestation des impacts dans la recherche agricole et le développement.

Mots clés: Recherche et développement agricoles, les compétences, l'impact, le partenariat

## **Background**

That agricultural production is a complex system. This makes successful technology development a complex process requiring a much more holistic approach than any single discipline of science can provide. Thus, partnership, a situation where two or more organizations with complementary areas of expertise commit resources and work together to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome, has become an important strategy for agricultural research programs implementation (Training Resources Group (TRG) 2001). Partnership brings together complementary skills and institutional synergy in addressing the complex challenges in agricultural research for development. Different kinds of institutions, including those from outside the formal research community need to come together, in order to create significant development impact. Any agricultural development organizations must always be prepared to develop and manage effective partnerships if they have to live up to their missions. But Partnerships are not always easy to achieve and manage; and too often, attempts fall well short of the desired outcomes. When partnering fails, many times it is because the team leaders and the different individuals and institutions may not be paying enough attention to the elements of successful partnerships. Sue Dyer (2007) of the International Partnering Institute, USA identifies seven core competencies for making partnerships to succeed and these are outlined below.

## **Leadership Competencies**

**Leadership- Be a trusted leader.** This competency refers to the ability to effectively lead a team to the successful completion of its objectives. A leader by definition is someone who has followers. Following is 100% voluntary. Team members decide to follow the leader because they trust that the leader will help the team to succeed. The more trusted you are as a leader the better you will be able to share a compelling vision for success. Because they trust you, they will work to help you fulfill that vision. Fear and trust cannot coexist. As the leader you must drive out fear within your team. Fear will always prevent you from becoming the trusted leader.

**Negotiation- Be a non adversarial negotiator.** This competency refers to the capacity to negotiate fair, justifiable

agreements. As a team leader you are interdependent. Because of this you need the cooperation of others on the team in order to succeed. The old traditional adversarial way of negotiating where you argue your points and there is an ultimate winner and loser just cannot work when you are interdependent. You either win or lose together, nothing else is possible. A non-adversarial negotiator seeks fair justifiable solutions. These are the underpinnings of building trust within your team.

**Conflict management- Use conflicts for constructive change.** This competency refers to the skill of transforming conflict into a productive force for change. Many people judge conflicts as being bad. Many people are conflict adverse and as such avoid conflicts. This always allows conflicts to go on for some time without resolution. Most conflicts help us to see where some thing is not working as we need it to. There is a lot of energy in conflicts. If we dive into the conflict and really examine it, we can begin to see the root cause (s). Then we can take that same energy and begin to develop a strategy and commitments to resolve the root issue.

**Communication- Foster a forum for communication.** This refers to the aptitude to create an atmosphere that allows team members to openly communicate so that understanding can be attained. When team members trust each other to tell the truth no matter what, then a dialogue can take place. This is where you are willing to listen to your teammates with an empathetic ear, really trying to understand what they are telling you without judgment. Then in turn you are willing to tell them truthfully from your perspective, how you see things. Seeing the same issue from different perspectives is when real communication has occurred.

**Facilitation- Trust in the collective wisdom of your team.** This competency refers to the capability to facilitate identification of the core problem/ issue and to allow the team to co-create the solution. Every team faces its challenges and problems that determine if the team succeeds or fails. It is how the team comes together to resolve the problems that determines success or failure. This usually takes someone helping to facilitate conversations, a dialogue or assuring the right people are in the right place at the right time. When a team is focused on, and perhaps enjoying, the challenges that it faces, it begins to tap into the collective wisdom of the team. From there it begins to co-create great ideas and solutions.

**Interpersonal relations- Create synergies.** This competency refers to the facility to understand yourself and others so that you can build a strong, cohesive team focused on expanding the pie. People are motivated by their own self interests. Sometimes this means that some team members are actually working against the goals of the team. This causes entropy. Entropy can be depicted mathematically as  $1+1=-2$ . Entropy means that some of the resources you are putting into your project are not moving you toward success. It is critical to understand your team members and to get everyone focused on and moving towards common goals. This allows for synergies to be developed. Synergy can be depicted mathematically as  $1+1=3$ .

**Organization- Be structured for success.** This competency refers to the expertise to create processes, procedures and policies that bring the right people together in the right way, allowing them to unleash their talents for the good of the overall effort. Policies, procedures, roles and responsibilities all must be in place, understood and congruent with partnering and the goals of your team. Misaligned policies often frustrate team members into complacency. Poorly run meetings waste time and energy. Lack of a clearly charted course prevents the team from knowing where it is and what is of highest priority. The inability to set priorities and assure they are followed through upon wastes time. A structure should enable the team to achieve their objectives. It prevents bottlenecks and allows for a coordinated effort by each team member towards the good of the whole team.

The seven core competencies for partnering can help program and project managers chart a course for learning to consistently make partnering work for them and their teams. Seeking out training, coaches and mentors who can help inculcate the principles of the competencies would help. Some self assessment on where you are on each of the seven competencies and trying to identify your strengths, as well as taking time to mentor others should be a continuous undertaking. And so is setting some goals to improve on challenging areas. Building your “partnering muscles” is an effort worth undertaking.

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