2 Improving participation through partnerships

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 Participation, partnerships and agricultural research

In the 1980s agricultural researchers began to take more interest in “indigenous knowledge” and “farmer innovation”, and the growing recognition of the knowledge and capacities of farmers led to an explosion of interest in the ways in which professional agricultural researchers could better work with farmers (rather than just “for” them). From this interest came a number of approaches such as “participatory technology development” (PTD) – which in turn became “participatory innovation and development” (PID) when it was recognised that development requires more than just technology. These approaches emphasise joint working between villagers, researchers and advisory services: to analyse problems and opportunities; identify things to try; trying them out in the community; analyse and share results; and improve local organisation and linkages with other actors in R&D. The importance of these experiences for the development of ARD was the recognition that innovation in farming does not always – or even usually – start with (formal) agricultural research. They also contributed to a growing appreciation of what “participation” actually means in practice.

Initial efforts to increase participation often focused on the tools and methods, such as those used in “rapid rural appraisal” (RRA) or “participatory rural appraisal” (PRA). These methods generally emphasised working with groups (rather than individuals), and techniques that allowed effective communication between development professionals and less formally educated villagers (often using qualitative or semi-quantitative tools and visual methods such as matrix ranking, mapping, etc.).

Parallel to these evolving ideas about participation, development agencies began to put more emphasis on the involvement in development planning of “stakeholders” – those who have a vested interest or “stake” in the outcome of a project or proposed change. As a result of this emphasis during the 1980s and 90s, a number of donors began to require “stakeholder analysis” to support the design, implementation and evaluation of (proposed) projects. This analysis involved the drawing up of matrices or checklists to show the interests of the stakeholders and what they could contribute to the project, as well as identifying risks for successful project implementation due to conflicts between stakeholder interests and the project interest. Based on these risks and assumptions, the desired types of stakeholder participation in the various stages of the project cycle were identified as well as strategies for consensus building.

However, the focus on PRA tools and techniques often became an end in itself, with the “professionals” treating the “data” obtained much as they might in a more conventional research process. Conventional stakeholder analysis as described above was also used as a tool to gather information that project planners and implementers used as they made the important decisions about project and programme design and implementation. Seeing participation as mainly a methodological issue, the “professional community” - agricultural researchers, extensionists, planners, donors - was reluctant to cede control of the process to other stakeholders, and continued to focus on technical solutions to essentially social or political problems.

The focus has therefore now shifted on how to go beyond such “functional participation”, towards a more “empowering” or “emancipatory participation”. This implies developing beneficiaries’ capacity to conduct or control their own affairs, be it research, extension, project development, evaluation, etc. A more participatory approach to stakeholder interaction requires the analysis of stakeholders’ interests, perceptions, relationships, knowledge and experience to be done by the stakeholders themselves. An essential part of this process is the facilitation of dialogue and negotiation, reduce conflict, and to develop commitment for collective action among stakeholders. Moreover, it has been increasingly recognised that "innovation" depends to a large extent on information exchange between stakeholders, and the processes of stakeholder interaction themselves.

One of the key characteristics of the ARD process is therefore the establishment of a participatory stakeholder partnership to address a particular issue (what we have called a research and development "challenge in this resource book). Such a partnership requires the facilitation of dialogue and negotiation among stakeholders to promote an understanding of their different interests, views and values, a joint vision of shared goals and a plan for concerted action to improve rural livelihoods.

Moving in this direction however, requires professionals to reassess their roles, ways of working, and status. It also requires organisations to reassess their mandates, processes and products, internal structures, incentives, etc. "Scaling up" participation, from the community level to higher levels of organisation also implies the reassessment of political power held by managers, "decision makers" and powerful organisations, and redressing the power imbalance that inevitably exists between donors and recipients (those who want somebody to change and those who they want to change).

2.1.2 Outline of chapter 2

The purpose of this chapter is to improve understanding of what it takes to work together in stakeholder partnerships.

In order to achieve this, Section 2.2 first explores the concepts of stakeholders and participation. Section 2.3 then goes on to look at what is involved for stakeholders to come together in equitable and functional partnerships. In practical situations, multidisciplinary or multi-stakeholder partnerships involve the ability to work in teams; section 2.4 therefore looks at the nature of teams, multidisciplinary teams and the facilitation and leadership of such teams. Finally, and recognising that conflict is inevitable in any partnership, section 2.5 looks at the causes of conflict as well as the ways of dealing with this.

The concept of participation is a crucial one in the development process, and one that has therefore captured the interest and attention of policy makers and development players alike. Participation is more than a question of being consulted. Rather, it is at the root of the whole question of ownership; when those with a stake in a project participate in all its phases in such a way that they own the process, the chances of success are increased. It is therefore important to clarify the concept in terms of its diverse meanings, define exactly whose participation is relevant, and examine the steps necessary to form the collaborations and partnerships that promote project success.

2.2 Stakeholders, participation and partnerships

There is often confusion in the way the terms "stakeholders", "partners" and "teams" are employed in both popular and technical literature. For this reason, it is necessary at the outset to make an attempt at providing some clarification that will guide the use of those terms in the rest of this resource book.

2.2.1 ARD, stakeholders and participation

The focus or "entry point" for ARD is a complex problem or opportunity in rural development. We can also call this a research and development "challenge". Typically, this R&D challenge is identified by one or more persons or organisations, which then lobby for action to resolve the issue. This also usually requires the involvement of other persons or organisations, based on recognition that no one person or organisation alone can tackle the issue effectively: in other words, it requires a working alliance or partnership among different "stakeholders".

As these stakeholders are identified and become involved, they bring different perspectives of the problem or opportunity, different (even conflicting) interests and multiple sources of knowledge. These differences need to be explored, confronted, reconciled, and negotiated into a common understanding of the (redefined) challenge and shared objectives. Achieving this common understanding and establishing shared objectives, is a key part of the ARD process (and commonly done superficially or even not at all in many research and/or development projects). Only when joint objectives are agreed can concerted action be planned and implemented. This does not imply that all stakeholders need to be involved in all actions, but rather that the specific roles of the different stakeholders in taking complementary and coordinated measures to tackle the issue are recognised by all.

These interests of the different stakeholders go beyond mere information and technology to include business, politics, finance, organisation, management, etc., and - more importantly - the links among these. The differences in interests also means that the costs and benefits of working together will not fall evenly to all stakeholders and the priorities for action will be higher for some than others.

Although these different interests contribute to the complexity of the problem, it must nevertheless be manageable, defined, and concrete. If it is too general, "the problem of smallholder development in region x", for example, there will be insufficient focus for effective collaboration and action. Typical themes for ARD are centred on product value chains, or a natural resource management problem, in a defined geographical area, for example.

Creating any successful partnership requires mutual understanding and trust. In the multi-stakeholder partnerships of ARD, such relationships are not always easy to create where there are considerable differences in social status and income levels etc., which are typical between government professionals, rural households, businessmen, etc.

2.2.2 Who are the "stakeholders"?

Stakeholders are all those people who have a "stake" (or share) in a particular issue or system. In other words, a stakeholder is any individual, group or organisation that affects, or is affected by the situation, development issue or innovation system being considered.

Other terms sometimes used synonymously with stakeholders are "*actors*" and "*interest groups*". The word "actors" (or the similar term "*ba tsaa karolo*", in Sepedi-Tswana) stresses that stakeholders are active and interact with each other. The use of the terms "interest groups" (or "*belanghebbendes*", in Afrikaans) indicates that people can be grouped according to a common interest.

Stakeholders can be at any level or position in society, from the international to the national, regional, household or intra-household level. Stakeholders include all those who affect and are affected by policies, decisions or actions within a particular system, including different types of rural households (commercial farmers, subsistence farmers, female-headed households, etc.); it is a mistake to regard stakeholders as just those official bodies or government agencies who have a mandate related to the issue (for this reason, the term "*izikhulu*" in Zulu is not considered here to be a very accurate translation of "stakeholder").

Agricultural development often fails because the stakeholders are not given enough consideration. Each stakeholder has a different interest in the situation. Stakeholder analysis is becoming more common in project settings. It attempts to deal with stakeholders' multiple and often conflicting views, interests and objectives.

Sometimes a distinction is made between "active" and "passive" stakeholders. In this learning resource, we use the term "partners" to refer to "active" stakeholders or those who are actively collaborating with others in the innovation system being considered. "Passive stakeholders" are those who may have an interest in a particular issue, or may be affected by the outcome of collective action, but for one reason or another are not actively collaborating as part of the "partnership". In a process involving causing change to happen, it is possible to distinguish these two categories in terms of the extent of their relative contribution to the change process. For instance, whereas "partners" are those stakeholders who are taking part in bringing about the change, the rest are merely in the relationship as beneficiaries of the effect of the change. "Partners" are those who cause the change to happen, not just being affected by the change.

Another distinction that is sometimes made is between "important" and "influential" stakeholders.

- **Important stakeholders** are those whose needs are important to a particular project or innovation system.
- **Influential stakeholders** are those who have the power to control decisions in an activity or who can influence others in the decision making process.

Importance and influence are not the same. For example, rural women farmers might have been identified as an important stakeholder for equality purposes, but they may have traditionally little influence in decision-making processes. In South Africa, development efforts are often directed at improving the livelihoods of rural communities of the second economy – but the influence of these communities is usually much less than that of Provincial Departments of Agriculture, for example. In other words, the communities are considered to be "important", but they are not "influential". Ideally, "important" stakeholders should also be "influential" and a number of ways of achieving this have been tried in recent years, often involving the strengthening communities and farmer groups, and/or decentralising financing decisions to local levels. However, it is inevitable that different stakeholders still interact on an uneven playing field.

Different stakeholders also bring to the table different perspectives, which often result from their different philosophical positions. The philosophical position held by any individual or group influences what they believe and what they do. The different ways in which we hold "knowledge" underpin many of the difficulties different stakeholders seem to have in communicating with each other. Two main philosophical positions can be distinguished, namely positivism and constructivism and are briefly explained in the next sub-sections.

2.2.3 Positivist and constructivist stakeholder perspectives

"Positivism" holds that there exists a true knowledge of "reality", that this reality is universal and unchanging, and that it can be gradually revealed by the scientific method. Science, it is thought, must limit itself to what is observable and measurable ('empiricism'); it is a way of getting at the true nature of things. The assumption is that the universe is governed by laws, which science must understand in order to predict and control. This view of reality influences the way scientists approach concepts and methods: systems, problems and solutions are seen as objective entities with features that are universally valid. The role of the scientist or expert is therefore seen as one of identifying this objective (value free) truth – the problem to be solved, opportunity to be exploited, or development action needed.

"Constructivism" is interpreted in many ways, although when used in an epistemological sense (i.e. in regard to how we know what we do) and contrasted to positivism, its main thrust is to assume that knowledge is a function of how we "construct" meaning from our experience. What we see as "reality" is therefore not independent of our perception of the way things are, based on our experience. Different people can interpret the same phenomenon in different ways, and knowledge is therefore "deconstructed" and then "reconstructed" during its transfer from one person to another. Under this view technology, policy and development actions are not independent of people's perception. Their perceptions of a particular problem are different. Thus an optimal solution is not necessarily one that is "right" scientifically, but rather one which is acceptable to the different stakeholders. Following this constructivist perspective, data are often less important than the processes activated during their collection, and the role of the expert is to facilitate processes of communication between diverse interests and come to a common understanding and agreed action.

While the foregoing represents an oversimplified dichotomy between positivism and constructivism, it does underlie much of the discussion about ARD and why participation and partnerships often prove so difficult. A purely positivist view of science and development is responsible for many of the difficulties scientists have in communicating with other stakeholders, in understanding the interaction between stakeholders, and in integrating their knowledge and actions with those of other stakeholders – all important features of ARD.

In particular, one of the results of a positivist outlook of researchers and scientists has been the undervaluing of the knowledge of farmers (as well as other stakeholders). While the capabilities of these farmers have long been recognised by some professionals working closely with farmers, these capacities tended to be overlooked in the era of modernisation during the second half of the 20th century and the establishment of formal agricultural research and extension organisations. In the 1980s agricultural professionals began to take more interest in "indigenous knowledge" and "farmer innovation", and the growing recognition of the knowledge and capacities of farmers led to an explosion of interest in the ways in which professional agricultural researchers and service providers could better work with farmers (rather than just "for" them). In other words, how farmers and other stakeholders could participate in their own development.

2.2.4 What is "participation"?

Participation, engagement and involvement are all terms that are popular today. While each of these terms has a specific, possibly specialized, meaning, there is often a large amount of overlap. But the common thread running through them is that the terms are associated with the importance of involving wider groups of people in the decision making on matters affecting their very existence. As one might imagine, the participation field is diverse in both practice and theory.

2.2.4.1 Definitions of participation

There are as many definitions of participation as there are authors who write about it. A sample of these definitions and perspectives is captured in the following statements, adapted from various sources:

- Participation is the active engagement of organisations, communities and individuals in decision making and actions that affect them;
- Participation is the process of equitable and active involvement of all stakeholders in the formulation of development policies and strategies and in

the analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development activities;

- Participation is the organized effort within institutions and organizations to increase stakeholders' access and control over resources and related decision making that contributes to sustainable livelihoods;
- Participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and the execution of a development project, with a view to enhance their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish;
- Participatory development stands for partnership, which is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which the agenda is jointly set and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda. Thus people become actors instead of being mere beneficiaries;
- Participation is concerned with the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements or those hitherto excluded from such control;
- Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the derived and the excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes.

These statements reflect the different emphasis which different agencies place on the concept. These differences notwithstanding, there is a growing understanding among professionals and planners at least, that participation is best seen as a process, rather than as an outcome of an intervention. In conclusion, to answer the question – "what is participation?" - we can say it is a complex and challenging approach to improving the lives of all people, but particularly the poor and disadvantaged. We can also say that viewing participation as an intervention to achieve this goal has produced disappointing results and that viewing participation as a product raises expectations rarely met in practice. It is more important to keep an open mind and be flexible; this includes examining our own assumptions about what works, and developing attitudes and behaviours that support intended beneficiaries in their search to gain control over their own lives.

2.2.4.2 Community participation

In the context of ARD, community participation is especially important. It is therefore crucial to gain a deeper understanding of this area: "what is community participation?"

Although this may appear to be a simple question, and although most people agree that community participation is critical in development programmes, there is quite some disagreement in practice about what participation actually involves. The above definitions of participation suggest some degree of involvement in an activity or an organization. However, there are different levels of involvement, with some people being at the centre of activity and decision-making whilst most take more of a back seat, or play a passive role. Effectively, the important issue is one of how much power – power to affect the decisions or actions taken.

Table 2.1 Different levels of community participation

Mode of participation	Type of participation
Co-opted	Tokenism and/or manipulation; representatives are chosen but have no real power or input.
Cooperating	Tasks are assigned, with incentives. Outsiders decide agenda and direct the process.
Consulted	Local opinions are sought. Outsiders analyze data and decide on course of action.
Collaborating	Local people work together with outsiders to determine priorities. Responsibility remains with outsiders for directing the process.
Co-learning	Local people and outsiders share their knowledge to create new understanding and work together to form action plans with outside facilitation.
Collective Action	Local people set the agenda and mobilize to carry it out, utilizing outsiders, not as initiators or facilitators, but as required by local people.

Source: adapted from Pretty et al, 1995.

In the real world of development practice, processes which have been described as "participatory" have varied considerably in terms of real community involvement. The continuum represented in Table 2.1 provides a helpful framework for understanding the different "modes" of community participation in this regard. In this continuum, "participation" ranges from negligible or "co-opted" – in which community members serve as token representatives with no part in making decisions – to "collective action" – in which local people initiate action, set the agenda, and work towards a commonly defined goal.

As can be seen from this continuum, there is a considerable difference in the level of involvement of communities in what is often regarded or even defined as participation. This level of involvement ranges from:

- "Low levels of participation", where people passively receive benefits or – in some cases – are simply manipulated. Although people may be members of an organization or community, they may have no real say or influence in how it operates. Members are expected to go along with decisions made by others and are powerless to make changes themselves. In meetings, such people are only participating in terms of physical attendance and do not make any contribution, their attendance often being a means of satisfying the quorum requirement as contained in the constitution of the group. This level is really better described as "non-participation".
- "Intermediate levels of participation", where community members have some involvement in an organisation, but influential community members or other stakeholders make important decisions and inform the general community about new policies or what action to take.
- "Higher levels of participation", where all stakeholders are actively involved in making decisions about the programme policies and activities, including information sharing and collaboration. This level of participation usually requires specific measures to "empower" the less influential stakeholders and redress power differences.

“Information sharing” is commonly equated with development professionals or organisations giving information to rural “lay people”. In ARD however, we understand information sharing situation as a two-way process between rural people who understand the local context, and professionals who possess the technical knowledge needed to address the problem. Similarly, we understand collaboration to involve the interaction between different stakeholders from positions of equal power. “Empowerment” is therefore an important component of participation, to allow community people to be actively involved in the decision-making about a programme in which they have a stake.

At a low level of participation or involvement therefore, communities make a voluntary contribution to public programmes but local people do not play a role in shaping these programmes. At a higher level, local people are involved in shaping, implementing and evaluating the programmes and sharing the benefits. At yet a still higher level, participation becomes an active process where the intended beneficiaries initiate and control the programme, and gain personal growth in the process.

A high level of community participation is a goal of ARD. Community participation can be said to occur when a community organizes itself and takes responsibility for managing its problems. Taking responsibility includes identifying the problems, developing actions, putting them into place, and following through. Nevertheless, this view of “community participation” as a process by which the entire community is involved and consequently benefits is a bit simplistic and often unrealistic in practice. In particular, it is not realistic to assume that a community is effectively a homogenous group that represents one common interest.

Rather, a “community” usually comprises several different groups, whose interests do not always coincide. For example, livestock owners within a given community might have different interests than cultivators (e.g. free ranging animals on common land vs. fenced and individually managed plots); female farmers may have different interests than male farmers (e.g. food crops vs. cash crops), and so on. In some societies, there is a tendency for women to focus on food crops destined for household subsistence, while men focus on cash crops to which the bulk of the family’s budget is channelled. Certain sections or groups within the community have more power than others, by virtue of wealth, family connections, or political influence.

These differences are explored more fully in the sections of this resource book on gender and equity (section 4.2.2), on livelihood strategies (section 4.3.6), and ways of analysing these different stakeholder interests (section 6.4).

2.2.4.3 Community Participation in South Africa

There is no universal agreement among planners and professionals in South Africa concerning the contribution of community participation as a means of improving the lives of people, particularly the poor and disadvantaged. Some completely dismiss its value while others believe that it is “magic bullet” that will guarantee improvements, especially in the context of poverty alleviation and development of the “2nd economy”.

Despite this lack of consensus, community participation continues to be promoted as a key to development. It is seen by government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as critical to programme planning and poverty alleviation, and central to development projects that seek sustainability and equity, particularly for the poor. Government policy on empowerment marks another step forward for those who believe that engaging citizens in decision making is key to solving the political and social challenges of the 21st century. Public dialogue now forms a prominent part of the government policy agenda in diverse topics. At the same time, the rational for involving citizens has broadened: participation is not just seen as a more inclusive way of making decisions, but as a panacea for any number of social ills, be they political disengagement, community tension or antisocial behaviour.

The members of a community represent a rich source of knowledge about their community and energy and commitment to that community. Tapping into this expertise and enthusiasm is a critical issue, and requires building institutional arrangements to allow this. Such institution building is not easy, and - as with any strategy that becomes seen as a cure-all solution - there is danger that it will fail to live up to its hype and fail to achieve the set goals. It is therefore important to ensure that the opportunities for participation offered to the public are of highest quality. This means that rather than promoting participation as a good in its own right, care is taken to ensure that the activities that take place offer the best possible experiences for the people and institutions involved, as well as maximum benefit for the wider society.

If implemented properly, community participation can be effective for a number of reasons, namely:

- Different communities, and the different interest groups within these communities, have different needs, problems, beliefs, practices, assets, and resources.
- Community involvement in programme design and implementation helps ensure that strategies are appropriate for, and acceptable to, the community. Involving local people in planning projects can increase their commitment to the project.
- Local people have a great amount of experience and insight into what works, what does not work, and why.
- Community participation promotes shared responsibility by service providers and community members.
- Involving local people can help them to develop technical and managerial skills and thereby increase their opportunities for employment, as well as increase general self-confidence.
- Involving a community helps to increase the resources available for the programme. When communities "own" programmes, they often mobilize resources that may not otherwise be available. They can work together to advocate for better programmes, services, and policies.
- Involving local people is a way to bring about "social learning", for both planners and beneficiaries, promoting the development of partnerships between professionals and local people in which, each group learns from the other.
- Community support can change structures and norms that pose barriers to information and services, and can increase awareness regarding the right to information and treatment;
- Community participation can empower members of the community and increase the accountability of development programmes and service providers.

2.2.4.4 Farmer participation

People at the grassroots levels need to be encouraged to participate in programme decision-making with a view to eventually giving them increased responsibility for programme development. Putting responsibility in the hands of farmers to determine agricultural extension programmes can make services more responsive to local conditions, more accountable, more effective and more sustainable. Agricultural specialists increasingly recognize that if advisory services are to meet the diverse needs of modern farming, a fundamental change of approach is called for that educates and enables farmers to define and solve their own problems, and to determine and take responsibility for demanding the services that they require. By making extension more demand-driven and more accountable to farmers, participatory approaches can help to ensure that services are relevant and responsive to local conditions and meet the real needs of users. This helps to increase the influence and responsibility of farmers as clients, rather than as passive beneficiaries of the extension service. When programmes benefit from farmers traditional knowledge as well as modern research, the risk of inappropriate advice and programmes is greatly reduced.

There has therefore been an increasing emphasis on involving citizens in the planning, conducting and evaluating of research and extension programmes at international level. This emphasis has led to a number of approaches being advocated, such as "farmer participatory research", "participatory technology development", or "participatory innovation and development" (when it was increasingly recognised that development requires more than just research, and more than just technology). These approaches emphasise collaboration between villagers, researchers and advisory services: to analyse problems and opportunities; identify things to try; trying them out in the community; analyse and share results; and improve local organisation and linkages with other actors in research and development.

The importance of these experiences for the development of ARD is the recognition that innovation in farming does not always – or even usually – start with (formal) agricultural research. They have also contributed to a growing appreciation of what "participation" and "innovation" actually mean in practice.

2.2.5 Stakeholders and participation

Two broad but quite different approaches to thinking about the roles of, and relationships between stakeholders can be contrasted, and these differences relate to the degree of "participation" and stakeholder involvement described above.

2.2.5.1 Strategic stakeholder analysis

The more "strategic" approach of "stakeholder analysis" is used to support the design, implementation and evaluation of a proposed project. The main purpose of this approach is to assist in the design and evaluation of projects. Some donors now require a stakeholder analysis as an integral part of project preparation; and example is the UK Department for International Development (ODA, 1995).

This type of stakeholder analysis includes the drawing up of matrices or checklists which show the interests of the stakeholders and what they can contribute to the project, as well as identifying risks for successful project implementation due to conflicts between stakeholder interests and project interest. These risks can then be included directly in the "logical framework" of the project.

Based on these risks and assumptions the desired type of stakeholder participation at the various stages of the project cycle is identified as well as strategies for consensus building.

The steps that are usually followed in this approach are:

1. Draw up a list of stakeholders;
2. Identify the interests of the stakeholders identified, in relation to the project or problem area;
3. Evaluate the importance and influence of the stakeholders, and the implications of this for the project;
4. Evaluate the implications for cooperation between stakeholders and the risks to the project represented by the different interests;
5. Determine which stakeholders should participate in the project, when and how.

As will be obvious from this sequence of activities, this form of stakeholder analysis simply assumes that "project managers" or professionals remain in charge of important decisions, and regard "stakeholders" as variables to be analysed with regard to making a project more "efficient". This type of approach therefore represents the "consultative" mode of participation described in Table 2.1 above.

2.2.5.2 *Participatory stakeholder partnerships*

A more participatory approach to stakeholder involvement is one where they themselves analyse their own mutual interests, perceptions, relationships, knowledge and experience. The main role of development professionals in this process is to facilitate dialogue and negotiation among stakeholders, to promote an understanding of their different interests, views and values. These stakeholders can then better understand how well they are organised to deal with particular problems, and develop commitment for collective action around shared interests.

One such approach is that known as “RAAKS” – or “Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (Engel and Salomon, 1997). This type of approach consists in looking at a development issue from the different perspectives of the different stakeholders. For convenience, RAAKS breaks this process down into three major phases:

1. **Define the problem**:

- Identify the mutual problem or opportunity;
- Identify additional stakeholders or groups with an interest;
- Evaluate the diversity of objectives of these stakeholders;
- Evaluate the external factors that influence the situation (i.e. those factors over which the involved stakeholders have no control);
- Redefine the mutual and shared objective(s).

2. **Analyse who is currently doing what and how:**

- Identify what is already being done, and by whom, to reach the mutual objective;
- Identify what knowledge is needed, and who has this knowledge;
- Analyse how the different stakeholders interact to share knowledge and information;
- Analyse how the different stakeholders are organised to communicate, share information and coordinate activities.

3. **Plan strategies and actions:**

- Define what needs to be done to achieve the mutual objective, (including the exchange of information and knowledge, the interaction between and organisation of stakeholders);
- Define future roles - which stakeholder should undertake the activities needed;
- Agree on a joint plan of action (who, what, where, when and how).

The participatory approach to stakeholder involvement is more in keeping with the concepts of ARD as promoted in this resource book. However, for a participatory stakeholder process such as RAAKS to work, it needs careful facilitation or management. This issue is addressed below (section 2.3.4).

2.2.6 Bibliography – stakeholders and participation

2.2.6.1 *Acknowledgements*

This section was written by Ajuruchukwu Obi (University of Fort Hare), Nelson Raidimi (University of Venda) and Richard Hawkins (ICRA). Section 2.2.3 also includes material prepared for ICRA learning programmes by Nour Sellamna (ICRA) and Jon Daane (ICRA); sections 2.2.4 – 2.2.5 by Annemarie Groot (Wageningen University Research Centre, The Netherlands) and Jules Pretty (University of Essex).

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2.2.6.3 *Further reading*

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Internet Gateways

Eldis Participation Resource Guide: Key gateway on participation issues, with weblinks, manuals, etc. www.eldis.org/participation

Participation. From the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) Sussex University, UK. www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/

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Participation: Sharing our resources. FAO website. www.fao.org/participation/default.html

Participatory Learning and Action. Series of publications with practical experiences from many countries. www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/pla_notes/index.html

Farmer First Revisited. Includes contributions from 3 conferences and resulting books "Farmer First" (1989), "Beyond Farmer First" (1994) and "Farmer First Revisited" (2009). www.future-agricultures.org/farmerfirst/

Prolinnova - PROmoting Local INNOVAtion in ecologically-oriented agriculture and NRM. www.prolinnova.net

Note: more links on stakeholder partnerships, and stakeholder analysis are given in Sections 2.3 and 6.4, respectively.

2.3 Forming and facilitating stakeholder partnerships

In this section, we take a look at the concept of partnership by first exploring what it involves and how it is employed in rural and agricultural development. The key considerations for forming partnerships are also examined.

2.3.1 What is a partnership?

A partnership represents a strategic alliance or relationship and/or cooperation between two or more people, organisations or institutions that are involved in the same activity and characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility as for the achievement of a specific goal. In an ARD partnership, different organizations or individuals who have an interest in a particular "development challenge" agree to work together to address that challenge. The starting point is an initial recognition by all stakeholders that one individual or organization alone cannot solve the challenge.

Successful partnerships are often based on trust, equity, and mutual understanding and obligations. Partnership can be formal, where each party's roles and obligations are spelled out in a written agreement, or informal, where the roles and obligations are assumed or agreed to verbally.

It would be nice to be able to always choose your partner according to similar interests, but in the real world of development practice, you need to work with other stakeholders who hold different viewpoints and have different ways of working. Much of the time, prospective partners in ARD have contradictory objectives and operate on the basis of assumptions that differ in every material respect. Getting to the point where these divergent positions are reconciled to the point of a common agenda is often a tedious and time-consuming process. The rewards of such partnership must be worth the trouble of achieving such reconciliation. It is therefore important to determine early in the whole process why partnerships are needed in order to implement a particular innovation process.

2.3.2 Principles and prerequisites of partnerships

Partnerships can be effective only when certain basic principles are adhered to, for example, 'shared ownership', 'equity' and 'openness'. These principles are the fundamentals of partnership building. Allied to these principles are prerequisites, the basic necessities for the proper functioning of partnerships; for example, 'good facilitation' and internal motivation'. These principles and prerequisites are closely related and overlap, and are explored below:

2.3.2.1 Partnerships imply equality

A partnership implies a relationship between equals. The thoughts and beliefs of each partner are held to be valuable, and although each partner is different, they do not decide for each other. In an ARD partnership therefore, one stakeholder (individual or organization) does not impose, dominate, or control, or make decisions for another.

Because partners are equal, stakeholders make their own individual choices even if decisions are made collaboratively. Partnerships are multi-focal rather than uni-focal, reflecting the inclusion of multiple perspectives, and the resolution of multiple interests often through some sort of negotiated compromise. All individuals or organisations in a stakeholder partnership seek opportunities to express their distinct points of view, but ultimately the partnership is assessed by its ability to engage in dialogue, integrate these disparate viewpoints into a common goal, and arrive at mutually acceptable decisions about what should be done and who should do it. Indeed, a primary benefit of a partnership is that the partners have access to a multiplicity of perspectives which generally lead to a more rounded and complete vision or goal.

ARD partnerships can therefore only work when competition between agencies with conflicting interests are turned into cooperation among agencies working together towards a mutual goal. Thus, unless there is a change in mindset (a prerequisite) between agencies that were previously competing, then partnership is impossible, and an illusion. Underlying this principle is the very real concern that farmers are confused by various development agencies or organizations offering different rewards and conflicting advice. A simple, consolidated stand achieved through partnership can help to end these mixed messages and the energy wasted on one-upmanship amongst agencies.

2.3.2.2 Partnerships require openness, respect and trust

It is challenging in practice to establish a culture of equity amongst actors in a partnership. This is especially so when there was previously an unwritten hierarchy which, for example, place government agencies above NGOs, and all other agencies above farmer's organizations. Perhaps establishing a 'balance' and mutual respect is a more realistic goal, and the minimum required to make partnership work. All partners need to be able to create a balance between accommodating others' interests and negotiating for their own position.

Equality in a partnership cannot be achieved unless there is openness and transparency in decision-making. This implies that, at the very beginning and to the greatest extent possible, partners need to make their interests and expectations clear. They must articulate what is at stake for them, that is, what they stand to gain and what they could loose through the partnership. The resources that can be made available from internal and external sources should be openly discussed. This allows the partnership to move together from a common position of understanding and respect for each other's positions. Even though this is set up at the outset, clarifying objectives and identifying stakeholders and stakes is an iterative process.

2.3.2.3 Partnerships imply shared ownership

Allied to equality is shared ownership of the agenda and programme of activities, and an overall sense of joint responsibility for outcomes of endeavours. If all partners are working together then they have to accept joint responsibility for what goes wrong or for what challenges need to be faced. But of course they also share success together, that is, the feeling of being part of a winning team. This shared ownership distinguishes partnerships from other forms of collaboration, where overall ownership and responsibility stay with the main organization while others contribute their part as per agreement, for example, under sub-contract. Sharing of ownership and responsibility by definition implies a relative reduction in the central role and hence power of the coordinating organization and it is the reluctance of many organizations to make this step - to cede power - that forms a major bottleneck in many non-functioning partnerships.

Although a common agenda is critical, partners nevertheless need to be able to link the common agenda to important institutional and personal interests of the partners. Addressing partners' own institutional interests allows them to create time, and even to provide their own resources for activities of the partnership. The link to personal interest creates commitment with the people involved and allows them to find space in their already full diaries. This issue needs careful consideration in an inception phase when potential partners are visited, the need for partnerships discussed and areas of interests of organizations identified.

2.3.2.4 Partnerships imply mutual learning

Partnerships also imply mutual learning. As partners exchange information, explore ideas and reflect on shared experience, they learn together. All stakeholders have relevant knowledge based on their roles in the system. This includes both codified (explicit or recorded) knowledge and tacit (implicit or "indigenous") knowledge. The tacit knowledge in particular can only be tapped into and made available to others through interactive learning and by joint action.

Beyond simply a concerted action process, where stakeholders collaborate to achieve a certain goal, ARD is therefore a mutual and interactive learning process, with stakeholders learning from each other and from the experience of working together; a process often referred to as “social learning”. For this type of experiential learning to be effective, and hence for ARD to be effective, it requires a conscious but flexible cyclical and interactive process where all partners jointly plan, act, reflect, re-plan, and so on – a process sometimes referred to as a “learning cycle”.

ARD partnerships are embedded in the need to resolve real world issues. As more experience is gained with participatory development processes, it has become clear that the *processes* of interaction between stakeholders are at least as important as the technology or policy options that are often considered to be the important drivers of innovation. Consequently the learning that takes place in stakeholder partnerships should focus as much on these processes of stakeholder interaction themselves, rather than just on the technological or policy outcomes of research and development efforts. Moreover, it is usually the *processes* learned that can be adapted for use in other situations, to solve other complex problems, rather than the technical results or outputs themselves. These issues of learning in ARD partnerships are explored further in Chapter 3.

2.3.2.5 Partnerships require nurturing

The establishment and management of the partnership itself should form part of the overall agenda amongst partners. It is not enough to simply come together and assume that partnership will magically appear. It needs to be understood from the beginning that the relationship itself needs building and nurturing, and this must be a conscious effort. So, a prerequisite for this to occur is an understanding from the beginning that functional partnership itself is a goal. All partnerships therefore require management – those day-to-day activities that make them work, and in ARD partnerships this tends to be an especially tricky issue.

It is not always easy for one stakeholder to “convene” the others, or play a leadership role in a way that is mutually accepted by all stakeholders. This problem obviously becomes more difficult when more stakeholders and substantially different or even conflicting stakeholder interests are involved. In general research or local extension agencies often find it easier to work with local farmer groups or communities, than with a wider array of private and commercial stakeholders involved in value chains (see section 4.2.3, for a discussion of value chains and stakeholders).

Partnerships also need to grow or evolve with the circumstances. This means that new partners may need to join or leave the partnership composition as and when necessary. That is what we mean by an “open nucleus” arrangement. The partnership starts with a smaller group of committed partners and then allows others to join at a later stage. That is, begin small, establish the relevance of the partnership through evidence, and gradually grow by accommodating others. Of course, the other side of the coin is that, if one partner wishes to leave at any time, for whatever reason, that is also possible. Keeping a reluctant partner for the sake of numbers or image can jeopardize internal motivation of the group, and eventually cause the group to fall apart.

2.3.2.6 Partnerships require coordination

Experiences in different countries (in Europe and Africa) have provided a number of different “mechanisms” for facilitating stakeholder interaction. These include individual facilitators and permanent inter-institutional bodies that are relevant to the issue (e.g. watershed management committees, and farmer organisations).

Individual facilitators, selected for their ability to bring stakeholders together and manage the interaction between them, can be drawn from NGOs, universities or service providers. The difficulty here is in finding an individual or parent organisation that is seen as “neutral” and respected by all stakeholders, rather than being seen as simply a representative of one of the stakeholders with a particular agenda to push.

Inter-institutional "steering committees" or "task forces" are sometimes established specifically to address the problem, project or programme, but again can beg the question of who (which stakeholder, whose interest) establishes or chairs the committee. It is rare that the leadership of such inter-institutional bodies gives equal opportunity to all the stakeholder representatives to voice opinions and participate in decision-making. The management of such committees and teams will therefore require clear planning, roles, and rules of conduct – including agreed mechanisms of decision-making. The partnership will need to agree on which tasks should be undertaken in common, and which should be allocated to individual organizations, subgroups or persons based on mandate, expertise and skills. It will also need to agree on know how these tasks can be coordinated. The members of inter-institutional task forces or work teams need to be clearly mandated by their organisations and be given the time and other resources to make their contributions to the team at the agreed moments.

The difficulties of working in such teams should not be underestimated. Most professionals are educated as individuals; few have formal training in teamwork and many of us do not attempt to systematically reflect upon our experiences and learn from them – let alone ask others for their opinions on how we are doing. Facilitating effective teamwork is usually the most difficult aspect of the ARD process.

In summary, there appears to be no universal and ideal way of bringing stakeholders together around a common theme, or forming partnerships, based on a position of mutual trust and power. Every partnership needs to address this issue according to the specific circumstances and opportunities.

2.3.3 Why bother forming a partnership?

Building and managing effective and sustainable partnerships is always a challenge in itself. There are no universal guidelines or standard handbooks available. There is often considerable frustration among those trying to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships. They do not seem to work, cost lots of time and resources just for meetings, lead to delays in implementation, and cause conflict over group interests. In such cases, the organisers and facilitators of the partnerships often point fingers at or blame the various partners.

Given all these likely problems, the prerequisites, the effort involved – why bother?

No partnership will work unless the benefits are perceived to outweigh the costs. In ARD, stakeholders will not make the effort to commit to a partnership unless they see clearly that they will more likely achieve their own individual objectives by doing so. The starting point (or "entry point") for any ARD partnership is therefore the recognition by one or more stakeholders that they face a complex problem (the R&D "challenge") that they cannot solve by themselves.

To accelerate innovation at the local level, effective collaboration between resource users and farmers and research, extension, marketing and other organisations is required. The process of innovation and agricultural development usually requires integrated measures that go beyond mere information and technology to include business, politics, finance, organisation, management, etc., and the links between these. The partnerships needed to tackle all these aspects require action at administrative levels (by individual farmers, by communities, by municipal, district, provincial and sometimes national governments, by local, national and sometimes international traders, by national and international research organisations, and so on.

As more stakeholders from these different fields or levels join an ARD partnership, more knowledge is gained, additional perspectives of the problem and new opportunities to improve the situation are identified. These differences need to be explored, confronted, reconciled, and negotiated into a common understanding of the (redefined) challenge and shared objectives. Achieving this common understanding and establishing shared objectives is a key part of the ARD process (and commonly done superficially or even not at all in conventional agricultural research).

Although these different interests contribute to the complexity of the problem, it must nevertheless be manageable, defined, and concrete. If it is too general, “the problem of smallholder development in region x”, for example, there will be insufficient focus for many stakeholders to justify their involvement in a partnership. Typical themes for ARD are centred on product value chains, or a natural resource management problem, in a defined geographical area, for example, where the incentives to cooperate and form partnerships are more obvious to the various local stakeholders.

Only when joint objectives are agreed, and seen to be relevant to each partner, can concerted action be planned and implemented. This does not imply that all stakeholders need to be involved in all actions within a partnership, but rather that the specific roles of the different stakeholders in taking complementary and coordinated measures to tackle the issue are recognised by all. The differences in interests also means that the costs and benefits of working together will not fall evenly to all stakeholders and the priorities for action will be higher for some than others.

A central justification for building partnerships is to do with making the best use of available resources, financial as well as human resources. The limited levels of resources available can form a strong incentive for partnership building in order to access facilities and resources of partners. Partnerships can be the most cost-effective way of reaching furthest and making best use of the abilities of the various stakeholders involved.

2.3.4 Making partnerships work

This section looks at the nuts and bolts of putting partnership into practice- “how to go about it”. What can we do to ensure that partnerships are effective and the above principles become a reality?

Learn by doing. It is self-evident that, when a new way of working is proposed, stakeholders need to understand what the potential benefits are and what is expected of them. The facilitating organisation also needs to be ready and capable to play its crucial role. Capacity can be built in two ways. The first is through training workshops and written information. When there is a danger of these becoming too theoretical, that is, losing people’s attention and boring them, there is a simple opportunity for building knowledge through sharing of experience and group work on problem solving.

The other route to better understanding of how partnerships can be built and improved is through “learning by experience”. Creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships is novel to most people. It is important for minds to be kept open and for people to learn from doing and to share their experience as they gradually build up partnerships with sensitivity. To realize this:

- One needs to put the issue of the multi-stakeholder partnership approach as a joint learning item on the agenda from the start;
- Present the coordination or steering committee in terms of partnerships: why is this different from the usual steering committees that most people have joined in the past?

To support such learning from experience, it is extremely important that the process of partnership building and the lessons learnt are carefully documented. This confirms, to all involved, the body of experiences generated and becomes the point of reference in further developing the partnership.

Start with looking into what is already there. Many initiatives assume that the new partnership proposed is filling an important gap. But in many cases there are relevant networks and initiatives at least partly covering the new agenda. Overlap and needless competition need to be prevented. Commitment of partners is also likely to be greater if the new initiative builds on relevant existing initiatives and networks, and gives serious attention to these while acknowledging them as a valid starting point. This confirms the importance of allowing for a process of inception consultation and planning in which stocktaking of existing experience is a key element. “Stakeholder Analysis” and “Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems” are effective approaches and tools in this context.

Choose the right partners. At the start of a programme, the agenda needs to be moved forward rapidly to show evidence of the usefulness of the partnership. There may be the tendency to invite only very like-minded individuals and organizations so that conflicts are avoided and consensus can be reached quickly. This may exclude, those stakeholders whose contribution could be critical. If the agenda includes mainstreaming and institutionalization goals, the inclusion of stakeholders beyond the converted inner group becomes even more critical. . Of course, this could make the process a lot more difficult and slower, but the outcome would be more rewarding in view of its greater inclusivity of a broader spectrum of interests. This would also make for more credibility for the entire process.

Define roles. Clarity is needed about roles and responsibilities. Overlapping roles can be a source of inefficiency, confusion and even conflict. In many cases, there is a need for formalization of roles agreed between organizations involved in the partnership. This can be done through the signing of memoranda of understanding (MOUs). A simpler approach is to define rules and roles in a document that is approved in a meeting of the Steering Committee. This helps to govern the partnership but is weaker in terms of formal support by the relevant organizations.

Establish a governance structure. Closely related to the above is the issue of partnership governance. What is the structure and process for decision-making within the partnership? Who decides on what? A partnership implies that some of the power and control from the initiating organization (which often holds the budget) is transferred to the other partners. This is essentially what the governance set-up should cater for. To allow this shift to become a reality, the process of forming the governance mechanisms and rules needs careful attention, allowing for maximum possible influence of partners and their constituencies in the process.

Look for early success. Partnerships need to be built on a shared will to succeed by pulling together resources and enthusiasm. This is teamwork in contrast to individuals or organizations working for themselves in competition with others. When a partnership has been built, one of the best ways of strengthening bonds between partners is by facing a shared problem together and allowing commitment to be demonstrated and reinforced through success. Another facet to commitment is not just at the human level, but a demonstration that materials and other resources can also be shared. This may take the form of finances, but also meeting rooms, vehicles and even field sites with farmers who have already formed bonds with one organization.

Ensure effective communication. Good and effective communication is the central strategy to achieve openness and transparency. A regular flow of information either through meetings, phone calls or written materials is also critical for implementation and coordination of activities. In this modern era, when overwhelming amounts of information circulate, the challenge seems to be to strike a balance between too much and too little information. Another central role of the facilitating organization is ensuring effective communication with organizations outside the direct partnership, which helps to mobilize stakeholders’ interest.

Establish joint planning, monitoring and evaluation procedures. To achieve joint implementation, joint planning and joint monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are essential. These are characteristics of a true partnership. To achieve these procedures, good facilitation is required and this is the responsibility of the main facilitating agency or the organization to which this is delegated.

We need to distinguish two closely related flows of M&E:

- *The progress/accountability flow:* This is the best-known aspect. It focuses on collecting information systematically on progress made in implementing activities, compared with what was planned and on results and the impact of these activities in relation to expectations. This part of M&E in a partnership arrangement poses a special challenge, as a good balance needs to be found by the facilitating organization in setting clear M&E requirements and formats for all partners and maintaining the dynamics of true partnership.
- *The learning flow*: This includes the regular discussion and review of work done and of constraints encountered in all aspects of the work, through an exchange and documentation of experience. It leads to generation of insight and identification of the way forward. General lessons learnt can be formulated and shared among partners and beyond.

2.3.5 Bibliography – partnerships

2.3.5.1 Acknowledgements

This section was written by Ajuruchukwu Obi (University of Fort Hare) and Nelson Raidimi (University of Venda).

2.3.5.2 Further reading

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2.4 Teamwork

Putting partnerships into practice inevitably involves teamwork. These teams can be in the form of multi-stakeholder steering committees, working groups or just ad-hoc teams formed for the purpose of one-off workshops or activities. They can also be teams within a particular organisation, including for example inter-disciplinary working groups within a research organisation. Almost all professional activity requires teamwork in some shape or form.

However, teamwork is not easy. Many development professionals have not had formal education in teamwork. Higher education tends to be oriented around individual effort and individual assessment. Being a “team-player” is one of the most common and highly rated traits sought by many employers in their recruitment, and one where new graduates are often considered to be weak. Usually, teamwork ability is simply assumed to improve through experience (especially managerial experience). The belief expressed in this resource book is that this process of improvement though experience can be made more efficient with an understanding of the fundamentals, and above all with the development of skills to observe and analyse processes that occur in all teamwork.

This section therefore looks more specifically at teamwork. It begins by examining what is a “team”, and what makes teams effective. It then goes on to look at the particular challenges faced by interdisciplinary teams, before looking at the challenges of managing and leading teams. Finally this section looks at some of the principles of conflict and conflict resolution, and considers some of the typical conflicts that arise in multi-stakeholder partnerships.

2.4.1 Managing effective teams

2.4.1.1 Groups and teams

A **group** can be defined as two or more people who share certain values and whose social roles are interrelated. A group in the broad sense is a collection of people belonging to an institution, ideology or race. In the narrower sense, a group is a number of people who interact directly.

A **team** has been defined as a group of people who:

- Have a specific purpose, with clearly defined and shared objectives;
- Are organized, with a fixed number of members who know each other;
- Share a common strategy and act inter-dependently
- Analyse and improve their own interaction and procedures.

As can be seen from the above definitions, all teams are groups – but not all groups are teams. Teams tend to be limited in size (6 is often quoted as an optimum number for effectiveness), and one of the challenges of organising large groups or stakeholders is how to form effective teams within the larger group in such a way that communication is maximised both within and between related teams.

2.4.1.2 Effective team behaviour

Whatever their size, not all teams are effective. In general, team effectiveness depends on the behaviour of individual team members, and how they work together (or do not). Table 2.2 summarise effective and non-effective team behaviour:

Table 2.2 Effective and non-effective team behaviour

In an effective team, members:	In a non-effective team, members:
Understand and commit to shared objectives Initiate and offer ideas, suggestions, value creativity and risk taking; Seek and encourage diverse opinions, listen to others, communicate openly Look for common ground, compromise; Reduce tensions, develop procedures to diagnose and solve conflicts Support team decisions, trust each other; Constantly seek to learn and improve performance; Take pride in achievements	Pursue individual interests, assert individual rights; Keep quiet; Do not listen; Polarise discussions, try to win by making others loose; Argue at length, refuse to listen, reject the ideas of others; Refuse to compromise, block agreement, do not support team decisions; Change focus frequently Clown around excessively, disrupt team activities Loose interest, absent themselves, show indifference

2.4.1.3 Learning about teamwork

Key learning objectives, in relation to improving abilities of individuals to work as effective team members, include developing skills in:

- Interacting with other team members;
- Observing team processes, and analysing how these affect team effectiveness;
- Giving and receiving feedback on personal behaviour and how this affects others;
- Managing and facilitating team interaction.

Skills in communication, teamwork, facilitation, and leadership are mainly developed through experience and reflection, rather than learned from written resources. It is often said that effective people are not those who never make mistakes, but those who never make the same mistake twice. In fact, it often seems that the more embarrassing or difficult an experience with other people, the more that is learned. Exercises or experiences specifically designed to improve teamwork are often therefore designed to take individuals beyond their normal “comfort zone”, although negative experiences will likely remain negative if the reflection that leads to learning and future improvement is not facilitated either by others or by the concerned individuals themselves.

In ARD learning programmes, methods to develop teamwork generally fall into four categories:

1. Exercises based on simple tasks specifically designed to create a situation which allows focus on one aspect, such as the task (planning), communication, decision making, conflict resolution etc. These tasks are usually simple: building bridges out of office stationary (to explore team planning procedures), selecting useful objects in a hypothetical shipwreck (to explore decision making procedures), etc.

2. Role-plays, designed to “put yourself into someone else’s shoes” and understand/contrast the different perspectives and motivations of different people or stakeholders.

3. “Process reflection” on real and ongoing teamwork within a particular project. Usually, in a particular project or programme, team members are under such pressure to achieve the task, that little time is made available to reflect upon *how* the team is going about that task, and if the team is functioning efficiently. Some of the questions the team should ask itself are given in the section below.

4. Encouraging feedback between individual team members, to enable individuals to see themselves as others see them, to be able to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, and therefore improve interaction and “social skills”.

2.4.1.4 Reflecting on team process

In the case of exercises, role-play or process reflection during ongoing tasks or projects, it is important to develop skills of observation of group processes. In teams with less experience, or in “non-work” exercises specifically designed for team building, it is often useful for one or more team members to “sit out” the immediate task at hand – the “content” - and focus completely on observing the team process. Even in experienced or ongoing work/project teams, it is useful – even vital – for time and space to be made available to reflect on how the team is functioning.

Points that team members should be individually observing and jointly reflecting upon include:

- **Understanding**. Do all members at the beginning understand their task or assignment? Do they check their understanding with others? Are there misunderstandings? If so, how did they develop? What do they do about them?

- **Planning.** Is the team assignment or task handled in a logical and structured way? Do team members clearly identify what they expect to have achieved (in concrete terms) at the end of the task, and how this relates to any higher or more long-term goals or objectives? Do they decide how the task is to be handled, and who will do what, and when? Is this plan adhered to?

- **Communication.** Do group members listen to and support each other? Does the group utilize the full knowledge and expertise of all group members? Do individual members relate their contribution to those of other members? Are some members listened to more than others: if so - why? Which suggestions and contributions are especially important in helping the group to reach its goal?

- **Decision-making.** How are decisions made? (e.g. by consensus, vote, deference to authority or an expert within the team, etc?). Is the most appropriate decision making procedure chosen? Do team members return to decisions that had been resolved before – if so, is this on the basis of new information, or because previous dissatisfaction with the decision was not dealt with?

- **Leadership.** Is there someone in the team who assumes the role of coordinator, moderator, or leader? Is he/she impartial? Is this role appropriate to the task in hand? Did others support this role? If not, why not?

- **Conflict.** Were there conflicts between team members? How did these arise? What were the causes (e.g. use of resources, struggle for influence, etc.)? Were these differences reconciled? If so, how? What actions helped, and what actions hindered this resolution.

During reflection sessions, team members (or the "observer" – if one has been designated for specific team building tasks) should give feedback to the whole team concerning these points, focussing on the most important observations (it is usually not helpful to simply repeat everything that happened), giving precise and illustrative information, identifying the reasons for problems and success, and where possible making specific suggestions for further improving group procedures.

These observations should provide the basis for a rigorous process of reflection on what happened and identification/ consolidation of the lessons learned. These can then be summarised in a simple matrix of a) "what went well?" b) "what did not go well?" and c) "what should be done differently next time?" If the task and reflection session are part of specific workshop on teambuilding, it is useful to display the summary chart in a prominent place so that the team can refer back to this in subsequent tasks and reflection sessions. By repeating this cycle of action-observation-reflection, team members should be able to improve their ability to both address the task at hand and at the same time observe the patterns of communication and process within their team. And team efficiency should improve.

It is therefore a good idea for all work teams to plan for and programme "process breaks" within their activity schedule. In such a process break, the team should leave aside, for the moment, their technical discussions and focus on team process and interaction (the issues identified above). Avoiding such discussions will simply lead to poor communication processes, decisions which are not supported by all team members, splits between different "factions" within the team, and reduced effectiveness of the team. Even if such a discussion takes, for example, one hour per day, it will still be worth it if it improves team efficiency and effectiveness by more than 15% - which should not be difficult to achieve, particularly in the early stages of team development.

2.4.1.5 Feedback and personal growth

Everyone has ingrained habits. Often, team members are "blind" to aspects of their behaviour that affect how others react to them, and consequently their effectiveness as team members. The only way in which individual behaviour can be improved is for the consequences of this behaviour to be made explicit by feedback from colleagues.

In the case of feedback from one individual to another, it is important to create a climate of trust and confidence where individuals can both give and receive feedback concerning the behaviour of other team members and themselves. Feedback should be aimed at alerting others to aspects and implications of their behaviour of which they may not be aware: in other words, by removing personal "blind spots".

Feedback should be:

- **Specific**, not general. Not: "*you are too talkative*". Rather: "*when we were discussing the problem of soil fertility, you talked so much I stopped listening.*"
- **Descriptive**, not judging. Not: "*You always try to annoy me!*" Rather: "*I feel annoyed, because you interrupted me several times while I was trying to explain my understanding of the situation*".
- **Receiver oriented**, not giver oriented. Not: "*Let me tell you…*" Rather "*When you have time, I would like to give you some feedback*"
- **Focused on behaviour**, not on the person. Not: "*You are arrogant!*" Rather: "*You often lifted your eyebrows when I was talking; this made me loose confidence in what I was saying*".
- **Focused on the positive**, not the negative. Not: "*You always look angry*". Rather: *"You have a warm smile, you should use it more often…"*
- **Timely.** Not: *"Last week, you….".* Rather: *"This morning, when you…."*

Remember, feedback tells you how another person sees your actions and gives you the choice of trying to change your behaviour. Even if you "disagree" with the feedback, it is important for you to hear it and understand it: listen carefully (don't defend), and then check what you have heard (e.g. paraphrase to check, ask for examples). Giving feedback is often difficult, and someone is trying to help you: help others to help yourself.

2.4.1.6 Balancing team types, institutions and disciplines

It is sometimes said that nobody is perfect – but a team can be. The best work teams consist of people with different skills and personalities; after all, a football team coach would not select a team with all strikers, or six goalkeepers. Knowledge of the different "types" of individual, and the role that they could potentially play, can therefore help the construction of a balanced team. The main types are summarised in Table 2.3. Which are you? How can you minimise your weaknesses and maximise your strengths?

Table 2.3 Personality types and team dynamics

Types of team member – with their strengths and associated weaknesses	
The Coordinator: + Self confident, knows how to listen, promote decisions. - A bit manipulative.	**The Implementer:** + Works hard, logical, disciplined, reliable - Lacks imagination, needs instructions.
The Specialist: + Source of exotic knowledge. - A bit of a loner, contributes on a narrow front.	**The Shaper:** + Positive, dynamic, pressurises. - Polemic, argumentative, can bully people.
The Energy Source: + Creative, source of ideas. - Tends to be a bit impractical.	**The Sweeper:** + Keeps to deadlines, pays attention to detail. - Worries about small things.
The Monitor/Evaluator: + Creative, source of ideas. - Tends to be a bit impractical.	**The Resource Fixer:** + Extrovert, makes contacts - Undisciplined, short attention span.
The Councillor: + Perceptive, promotes harmony. - Indecisive.	

Source: Belbin, cited in Pretty et al, 1995

2.4.2 Interdisciplinary teams

It is often necessary to build teams whose members are drawn from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. This will be most likely in response to the nature of the problem to be addressed. Many of the practical problems we are required to contribute to solving in the real world call for such interdisciplinarity in the team architecture. The extent of disciplinary diversity is expected to be an important consideration when deciding on the configuration of a team.

2.4.2.1 Complex problems require an interdisciplinary approach.

As the agenda of agricultural development has changed, the political expectations from agricultural research have also changed in nature and widened in scope:

- The role of research is no longer limited to improving yield productivity: it must take into account social, economic and environmental impacts.
- Agriculture is now recognised to be only one element in rural livelihood systems: desirable improvements in agriculture have to be designed within this wider context.
- The goals and objective of rural development are often contested: there is disagreement and even conflict about what is desirable from different disciplinary, institutional and stakeholder viewpoints.

A complex situation requires that researchers are able to see "the big picture", to see all the factors contributing to the problem they are studying as well as putting it in a larger context. Each discipline can contribute to understanding this complexity.

Most researchers and development workers are trained in one single discipline (agronomy, economics, sociology, geography, etc…). Yet certain problems escape the field of a single discipline. Such problems are often complex and are inherent to the study areas like the environment, agricultural production and health for example. They can only be studied and solved through cooperation between several disciplinary competencies.

Being able to see the "big picture" helps researchers develop a broader understanding of how their individual research methods, concepts and skills fit into larger research issues. They are then able to gain new insights into their own disciplinary biases and limitations, and develop a broader knowledge. Stepping out of their own disciplinary methods and comparing it to others will give them a better understanding of their own discipline.

At the same time, no interdisciplinary team can be competent if the members do not have expertise in their own disciplines. While interdisciplinary teams are more efficient in analysing complex issues, this efficiency rests entirely on the ability of team members to feed the collective reflection with detailed and relevant analysis of information. A failure in one or several aspects of the complex issue will impair the team's judgements. Similarly, the lack of disciplinary competencies within a team will reduce its ability to collect relevant and valid information. Disciplinary incompetence from one or several members can have one of the following effects:

- Predominance of one disciplinary perspective: those members who are more competent, or articulate, will impose the orientation of their discipline, even if it is not necessarily the most relevant
- Retreat from the project: those members who are most competent may be discouraged and adopt a passive attitude

Reduction to lowest common denominator: failures from a majority of members may lead to a superficial analysis, based on the simplest and most easily understandable information.

2.4.2.2 Disciplinary value systems

The increasing scope of knowledge has resulted in academic specialisation and the development of different disciplines. As these disciplines have diverged, they have resulted in different sets of concepts and values. In agricultural research, these differences are reflected in different:

- **Geographical scales**. Typically, plant and animal scientists work at the plot or farm level. Sociologists often work at the community level. Agro-pastoralists and planners usually work at a regional level. Agricultural economists can work at various levels (depending on whether they are resource-oriented or production-oriented, among other specializations).
- **Time scales.** A crop scientist or agronomist may work around one-year cycles in the case of annual crops. A forester or perennial crop scientist may need

decades of data to evaluate the growth of trees and forests. The time scale of interest to livestock scientists may also vary from months to years depending on their chosen species. Economists may also need several years of data to evaluate a specific technology or policy. A sociologist might even look at changes over several generations.

- **Research methods.** Technical and social sciences often differ in their acceptance or use of numerical/ quantitative/ "scientific" methods and data as contrasted with descriptive/ qualitative/ "non-formal" methods or data. These differences lead to often contrasting appreciations of what constitutes valid or reliable evidence in general.
- **Data sources.** Some disciplines are better able to meet their information needs through the use of secondary information (historical or farm records, published surveys, etc.). Others – typically technical scientists – prefer to work with primary data collected from direct observation and experiments under more controlled conditions such as those found on research stations.
- **Evaluation criteria.** When asked to evaluate "development", or "sustainability", different disciplines will use different criteria (production, income, participation, empowerment, etc).
- **Languages.** All disciplines have developed specialised languages to be able to express certain concepts in a more precise way. When seen from the perspectives of other disciplines, or the non-academic, this language is often perceived as "jargon".

All of these factors make it difficult for persons from different disciplines to work together in interdisciplinary teams. Working together requires an understanding of these conceptual differences, and an appreciation of what other disciplines can offer to an interdisciplinary study or project.

2.4.2.3 A coherent interdisciplinary approach

For interdisciplinary teams to work efficiently, it is important to agree on a common model or approach. Such an interdisciplinary model should not be seen as a rigid set of steps applicable to all situations, but rather a model that is designed by the team for the specific needs of their study.

ARD can be regarded as a general research approach from which interdisciplinary teams can derive a specific procedure according to their needs. Such a procedure involves joint actions needed to address complex problems through a series of iterative steps. The exact model or process followed by the team should not just represent the use of all the tools available, but result from a confrontation of disciplinary insights and stakeholder interests around the problem area in question. Seven main steps are identifiable in a coherent interdisciplinary approach:

1. Reach agreement on the general research problems In all teams, it is important to have commonly agreed objectives. These should be formulated in a way that appeals to and includes all the disciplines present in the team and at which the "bigger picture" is manifest. These objectives then serve as the starting point for team planning of collective and individual tasks and for the definition of disciplinary inputs.

Usually, the interdisciplinary team works for a "client", a stakeholder or group of stakeholders that request and finance a particular task and give the team specific objectives or terms of reference. Several other groups may have a stake in the issue being worked on, and the team will need to consult with these to further clarify and refine overall objectives. Stakeholders from outside research, e.g. communities, farmer associations, etc., usually do not see the problem under study in disciplinary terms. They can therefore greatly contribute to the interdisciplinary thrust by helping the team to avoid excessive use of theory and putting the subject back into a broader context.

Although the team may be given specific guidelines, objectives or terms of reference, it is important to discuss these from the different disciplinary viewpoints of the team, and to come to a common definition of the purpose of the team's activity, and the specific outputs expected from the team. The team can then go on to find common ground through a common definition of the central problem or problem that is to be addressed by their efforts, and translate this into specific research questions to which each of the disciplines can contribute.

2. Explore what each discipline can contribute

Once there is agreement on the general research problems, disciplinary contributions must be made explicit. At this stage, disciplinary specialists should present:

- Their view of the research challenge and the relevance of their discipline to this challenge;
- The main research questions that are raised from their disciplinary perspective;
- The indicators used by their discipline to evaluate the success or worth of new policies, technologies or institutional arrangements;
- The time and geographical scales at which these indicators could be applied.

The team can then appreciate the differences and complementarities among disciplines and make decisions on the comparative advantages of each discipline, the steps that will make up their interdisciplinary model, select tools and allocate tasks.

3. Synthesize knowledge and identify gaps

With their disciplinary knowledge reviewed, teams should come to an agreement on a common framework. In the process, they should decide whether their added disciplinary knowledge is sufficient to carry out their research or whether they need added concepts from other disciplines.

In this process, it is important to:

- Avoid sterile theoretical discussion and not loose sight of the overall objectives;
- Agree on the nature of the relationship between the team and other stakeholders – is their role one of "informants", or will they participate more fully in analysis and decision-making?
- Integrate and prioritise the research questions and information needed to clarify the development problem and opportunities.

4. Allocate tasks.

Allocating tasks between disciplines is the biggest challenge for an interdisciplinary team. They must at the same time:

- Reach formal agreement on individual tasks and set the deadlines that are necessary for efficient team management
- Retain for all members the flexibility in interpreting this agreement so as to keep the flexibility to respond creatively to changing conditions and opportunities.

Success in combining these two conditions will greatly depend on how well the research problems have been formulated and how well the various disciplinary contributions have been identified by the team.

Interdisciplinary teamwork does not mean that all team members have to participate in all activities. This is a common error of inexperienced teams, much as young children learning to play football all tend to run after the ball in a pack instead of running into spaces and creating opportunities. Identifying disciplinary contributions, individual capabilities and consequent task distribution and programming is vital in effective teams.

Getting the balance right between individual and collective activities is one of the hardest aspects to get right in interdisciplinary teams. As a general guide, the areas of competence for individuals and teams are given in Table 2.4 below:

Table 2.4: Elements for Team Competence

Best done in team	Best done by individuals/ sub-teams
Produce ideas	Gather information
Exchange experiences	Elaborate on ideas
Communicate information	Produce proposals
Make decisions	Prepare team work sessions
	Formulate / write texts

5. Formulate ground rules

While a relaxed atmosphere helps team dynamics, a permissive attitude may impede teamwork. Interdisciplinary teams often find it useful to agree formally (in writing) on basic collective rules that will ensure that team members will participate and deliver as agreed. Such rules might cover:

- A clarification of individual responsibilities in data collection, analysis and processing
- Leadership and a clear decision making procedures
- A timetable for exchange of information and review of contributions
- A procedure for assessing individual contributions and deciding on follow-up.

6. Decide on leadership

The allocation of tasks to disciplinary specialists for parts of the team's research presents the risk of letting team members drift apart. The interdisciplinary team needs strong intellectual and management leadership to keep their work on track. This leadership requires specific skills:

- The ability to understand people, respect their different perspectives, and be prepared to learn from them. For this, an interdisciplinary team leader must be able to think outside the boundaries of his/her own discipline;
- The ability to synthesize the different team members' contributions and produce proposals that are easily understandable by all;
- The ability to facilitate team members' work on a day to day basis while at the same time keeping the "broader picture" in mind and thinking ahead.

7. Evaluate the teamwork

Criteria of evaluation vary substantially among disciplines; definitions of common terms ("data", "hypothesis", "survey", etc…) may be understood differently. It is therefore very important for the team to address issues of evaluation, quality control and relevance of methods.

Some components of the team research can be entrusted to the rigour of the disciplinary specialist. These relate to specific or technical outputs (ie, agronomic assessment of soil fertility, identification of animal diseases, calculation of farm budgets, etc…) that require disciplinary knowledge. But the integration of these outputs into the overall research must be discussed as a team so as to ensure that the work of each individual is closely linked to the research objectives.

2.4.2.4 Learning together as an interdisciplinary team

Interdisciplinary teams are problem-solving teams. Their problem solving capacity depends to a large extent on learning to work together. Team learning is to a large extent based on the team's ability to use the diversity of its members to experiment, evaluate and capitalize on its experience to produce better outputs. Some conditions for this are:

1. Recognition of team interdependence.

A basic condition for team success is the recognition by all team members that their own personal success depends on that of their team mates. This interdependence relates to:

- Objectives: the objectives of the study need to be shared by all team members – who will be assessed according to the achievement of these objectives.
- Roles: team members depend on each other for the performance of tasks
- Resources: logistics, time, information sources, etc., are shared by all

2. Team members' openness to diversity.

The diversity of points of view is what is peculiar to interdisciplinary teams. This diversity comes from their disciplinary training as well as from their social and cultural backgrounds. An interdisciplinary team need to look at problems from different angles in order to generate the best solutions. If not they will revert to "group think" (the same, unchallenging, way of looking at things, the same opinions, and unanimous decisions) with the risk of making conventional decisions. For the team to be innovative, each member must accept to be challenged in his / her way of thinking. This requires an open mind and a positive way of looking at conflict.

3. Learning/ procedural reviews.

Learning is by nature an iterative process. It requires regular feedback. In an interdisciplinary team, members should give this feedback to each other. To enable this feedback, the team needs a procedure that enables them to regularly review the process (e.g. at the end of each meeting). How did we go about the meeting? What were the differences? How did we individually deal with them? How did we communicate? What individual behaviour was helpful, harmful or ineffective? In case of conflict, what caused it and how did we manage it? How can we improve in the future? This learning process review is different from the evaluation of the technical content or work progress: it is important that time should be allocated for both activities.

4. Social and personal skills.

Apart from disciplinary expertise and an appreciation of others' knowledge and skills, team members must be able to work with and learn from other persons. This requires basic skills in dealing with one's own and others' way of expressing themselves and their emotions. These basic social skills are the basis of all teamwork and require self-awareness and self-discipline. If team members cannot learn to adapt their behaviour to the needs of others, they will prevent participation and reduce team efficiency.

5. Mutual support.

The team's common objectives will be better achieved through mutual support. By encouraging their fellow team members, they will help them improve their performance, and thereby the performance of the team. This mutual support can be manifested through:

- The provision of assistance

- The sharing of resources
- The constructive challenge to ideas
- The advocacy of team objectives

2.4.3 Managing Teams and Partnerships

Management is important to guide teams or partnerships towards the attainment of their goals. Relevant aspects of management include moderation, facilitation, leadership, and coordination. These will be explained below. Further on, some of the relevant models of leadership will be presented.

2.4.3.1 Moderation, Coordination and Facilitation

- **Moderation** means to avoid extremes in behaviour or expression. In a team or group context, it implies a process that channels energy of the team and prevents it from loosing track of objectives and tasks. The term moderation is commonly used in the context of group discussions or conferencing. A good moderator will ensure that all group members participate in a discussion, that the discussion remains on track, and that decisions made are acceptable to the group.
- **Coordination** means to place things in proper position relative to each other and to the system of which they form parts, so that they can act together to produce a particular result. In terms of team or group work, a good coordinator is aware of the different actions that need to happen to achieve shared objectives, and oversees the acquisition and use of the human and physical resources needed for these actions. The implication here is that the objective is already determined or self-evident, and that others share this objective.
- **Facilitation** means "to make something easy" for the work of a team or group of people (from the Latin "facile" = "easily"). In practice, this means helping a team or a group of diverse stakeholders work together to clarify their different perspectives and their context, agree on shared objectives, and formulate joint actions. A good facilitator therefore has a good understanding of process and communication issues, and is also neutral with regard to the different interests. A facilitator who is external to the team or group is less likely to be emotionally involved with the issues and team personalities, and so can focus on the process rather than content of the team tasks. However, it is unrealistic to expect even professional facilitators not to have their own values, interests, relationships and methodological assumptions that determine the facilitation process: a good facilitator will at least make these interests transparent to the larger group.
- **Leadership** implies giving direction by going in front, or bringing someone to a particular place. In terms of group or team management, a good leader is more proactive in creating a vision of where to go, as well as facilitating team or group processes to get there. In this sense, a leader is more likely to be internal to a group and emotionally involved than a more neutral facilitator. Being a leader often implies authority: the power of decision over group/team members and responsibility for decisions taken by the group. Different cultures and institutions place different emphases on these two functions of leadership (facilitation and authority).

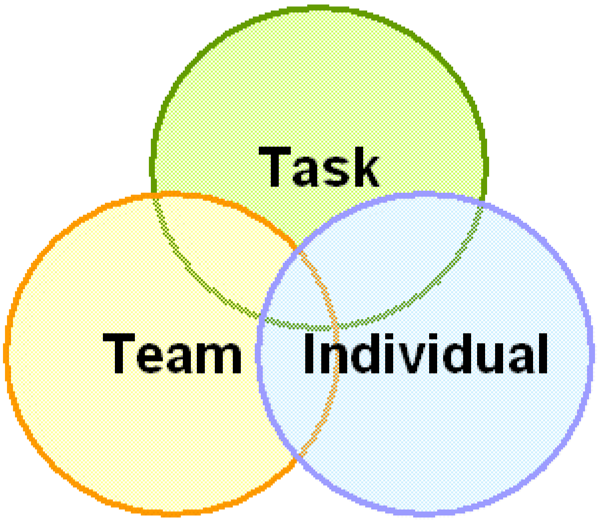
2.4.4 Models of leadership

Many "models" of leadership have been put forward over the years, mainly with the objective of identifying those traits needed by a good manager of people, teams and organizations. Two of the more widely known models are given below, mainly to illustrate some of these characteristics.

2.4.4.1 John Adair's action-centred leadership model

One of the better-known models for leadership is that of John Adair (see further reading). It is often graphically represented by his trademark of three overlapping circles shown in Figure 2.1, representing the core management responsibilities of:

Figure 2.1: The John Adair model of leadership



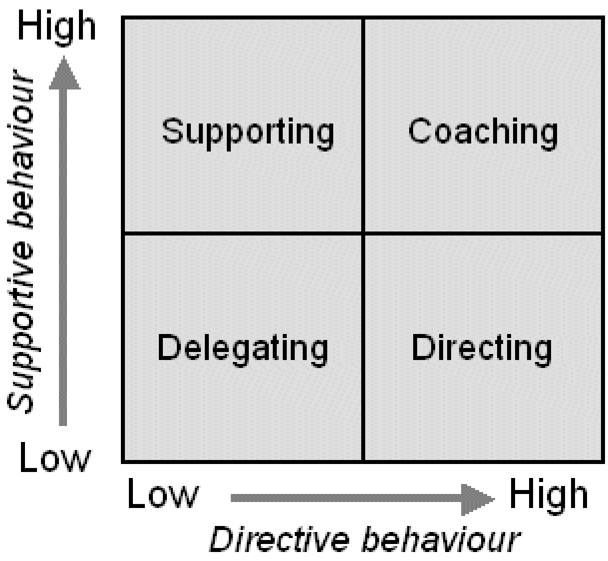
- **Achieving the task** or planning - defining (a hierarchy) of objectives, assigning individual or sub-team responsibilities, time frames, measures of monitoring and evaluating progress, etc.
- **Managing the team** – establishing norms or standards of behaviour, ensuring participation and input of all team members, encouraging communication and cooperation, promoting efficient and collective decision making, anticipating and resolving conflicts, maintaining team spirit, etc.
- **Managing individuals** – identifying individual strengths and weaknesses, alleviating fears, inspiring, motivating and rewarding team members, encouraging feedback and personal growth, etc.

John Adair's model is elegantly simple and neatly defines the three overlapping areas important not only to leadership as such, but also to effective action by teams. Without clear planning (task focus), good communication (team focus), or motivated individuals, teamwork and ARD are destined to fail.

2.4.4.2 The situational leadership model of Blanchard and Hersey

The situational leadership model of Blanchard and Hersey promotes the use of different leadership styles, depending on the situation. These different styles are commonly represented in a matrix (see Figure 2.2):

Figure 2.2: The Blanchard-Hersey model of leadership



The different leadership styles are thus related to the amount of direction and support that the leader gives to the follower, which is in turn determined by the amount of enthusiasm and competence (the "development level") displayed by the "follower":

- **Directing** (or telling) is focused more on the task than the relationship. The leader defines the roles and tasks of the follower, and communication is largely one-way. For followers who lack competence, but have enthusiasm.
- **Coaching** (or selling) is focused both on the task and the relationship. The leader still defines the roles and tasks but seeks ideas from the follower. Communication is more two-way. For followers who have some competence but lack commitment, and may need support to build their self-esteem and involvement in decision making to improve their commitment.
- **Supporting** is focused on the relationship more than the task. The leader facilitates, but control is more with the follower. For followers with competence but insufficient confidence, where support is necessary to bolster confidence.
- **Delegating** is where the follower is more in control and decides how and when to involve the leader. For followers who have both competence and commitment.

Blanchard and Hersey thus suggest that by adopting the right style to the follower's development level, the work gets done, relationships are built and the followers' development level will improve.

The model has been criticised for confusing leadership and management, and not giving enough attention to the issue of the roles and activities of the "followers". However, it has the advantage of simplicity, and is useful to use as a basis for reflecting on the type of relationship that exists in ARD teamwork, and how appropriate this relationship is in different situations.

2.4.5 Bibliography – teamwork

2.4.5.1 Acknowledgements

This section was written by Richard Hawkins using material prepared for ICRA learning programmes by Uwe Nagel (Humbolt University) and Nour Sellamna (ICRA).

2.4.5.2 References

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Situational leadership model of Blanchard and Hersey. Pages from 12Manage. Available at www.12manage.com/methods_blanchard_situational_leadership.html

2.4.5.3 Further reading

Internet gateways

Free Management Library. www.managementhelp.org

Business Balls Site of Alan Chapman, U.K. www.businessballs.com

12 Manage - The executive fast track. www.12manage.com/index.html

TeambuildingInc. www.teambuildinginc.com/ei_news.htm

Facilitation. http://facilitation.start4all.com

The International Association of Facilitators. www.iaf-world.org

Facilitation Resources from ebg Consulting. www.ebgconsulting.com/facres.php

Moderation. www.impartskills.com.au/moderation.html

The art and science of leadership. By Don Clark. www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leader.html

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2.5 Conflict in teams and partnerships

2.5.1 Conflict is inevitable

By their very nature of involving the coming together of entities, individuals and groups that previously existed separately, partnerships breed conflicts. Individuals and groups from different backgrounds represent perspectives and values that are often so divergent that reconciling them consumes much time and resources. To say that conflict resolution is the *raison-d'etre* for partnerships may be stretching it too far, but it is undeniable that much of the discussion about partnerships in the context of development and innovation processes gives ample primacy to the issue of conflict in teams.

Conflicts are almost always about different interests. These differences may be real or only perceived. Within interdisciplinary teams and multi-stakeholder partnerships, common causes of conflict include:

- **Objectives that are unclear or disputed.** If partners have different ideas regarding the objectives they wish to achieve together, tensions are inevitable. Partners need to express their needs and interests, making it clear what their goals are and how they intend to make use of a team or partnership.
- **Roles and responsibilities that are unclear or disputed.** Formalizing roles through written agreements can only go some way to prevent conflict. It is necessary to have clear communication, so that roles and responsibilities are constantly reviewed, accepted and recognised.
- **Power differences.** In any team or partnership, some members have more have more influence or resources, and hence have more power. The danger is that these partners dominate decision-making processes, or monopolise scarce resources. In these cases, others may start to feel uncomfortable, begin to see less advantage to their participation, and then withdraw (openly or tacitly). Unilateral decisions reflect a more judgemental attitude and lack of trust in partners.
- **Differences in pace.** Stakeholders or team members may differ with respect to the speed in at which they can take on board new ideas, make decisions and act, but these differences should be respected. It is important that sufficient time is taken to develop a common understanding of the goals and strategies that are to be pursued jointly, and to identify factors and conditions for transparency and accountability, in order to ensure that the process is jointly owned by all partners.
- **Reward and incentives systems.** When these differ between partners or team members, it is natural that some will feel that their effort is not adequately rewarded. Even differential per diems can cause friction when individuals from different organisations are expected to conduct joint activities (e.g. in workshops or in the field). When incentives are hidden or not in the open, ulterior motives lead to partners acting in ways that are not understood or appreciated.
- **Cultural differences,** both individual and organisational. Culture affects discussion and communication styles, tolerance for open (or heated) debate, the fear of losing face, as well as the normal ways of resolving conflict. Organisational culture can affect the rewards or penalties for being open, for collaboration, for taking risks, as well as the openness and methods by which an organisation shares its knowledge.
- **Communication difficulties.** Without open and effective communication, all of the above causes of conflict are likely to occur. Good communication is thus fundamental, especially in partnerships where face-to-face meetings may be less

frequent and letters, emails, etc are lost or not copied to all. Poor communication leads to partners not knowing what is going on, what is expected of them, or to the suspicion that others are withholding information and are not being open or honest. In these cases, conflict is inevitable.

When conflicts do occur, it is a matter of dealing with them in a way that conflict can be minimized. However, it is important to remember that conflict is intrinsic to the process of building multi-stakeholder partnerships in which by definition each partner retains its own interests or "stakes" while simultaneously "sharing". This is even more so in partnership that has the objective to bring about institutional change and a shift in the relations of power and influence.

2.5.1.1 Positive and negative conflict

Not all conflict is bad, and a distinction is sometimes made between positive and negative conflict.

Positive conflict can be creative. It can help the teams and partnerships make better decisions by:

- Motivating them to examine a problem they would have overlooked;
- Forcing them to re-examine a solution and be more innovative;
- Encouraging them to integrate several ideas to produce better solutions;
- Increasing their interest and energy, thus reinforcing solidarity and cohesiveness.

Negative conflict, on the other hand, reduces the efficiency of teams and partnerships by:

- Creating an environment of fear, frustration, distrust and avoidance
- Leading to crucial information being withheld and to work patterns being disrupted
- Diverting the team's energy towards destructive ends
- Undermining credibility in the eyes of outsiders / others.

2.5.1.2 Stages in Conflict

Conflicts usually start slowly and escalate through several stages:

- **Nervousness:** Debate begins to get heated and opponents take different positions.
- **Neurosis:** Views become fixed, opponents become the 'enemy'. To 'give in' at this stage means loss of face. Threats are made.
- **Combat**: Enemies become faceless, threats are often carried out, coalitions form, fighting may become physical.

Obviously, the earlier that potential conflicts are recognised and dealt, the easier it will be to resolve them.

2.5.2 Dealing with Conflict

There are various ways of dealing with conflict. These include:

- Ignoring the conflict and living with the consequences. This is probably the most common course of action, as dealing with conflict requires effort, examining ones own position in more depth, and often confronting some uncomfortable emotions.

- Going into confrontation and fighting. While a fight may lead to a victor and vanquished – which may seem to resolve the conflict at first, the consequences are usually that the vanquished withdraws completely or looks for a way of revenge later: not good for the long term.
- Giving in, freely or under pressure. This is also often not a permanent solution, as the party who gives in may still believe they were “right”, and tends to lack respect for the one who did not give in.
- Negotiating, when the two parties explore their differences and look for a “win-win” situation or compromise acceptable to both. This is the best method of resolving conflict when both parties stand to gain something, when they both have some power and when they are interdependent;
- Calling in respected intermediaries as mediators;
- Referring to arbitration (getting an outside party to judge who is right/wrong, and what should be done. As this effectively gives no voice to the combatants, feelings can fester and this can weaken a team. It is always best to try to solve the conflict within the team first.

When it is decided that a conflict situation must be contained, a number of practical steps are necessary to ensure a successful resolution. In general, conflict must be dealt with quickly and openly for the following reasons:

- Openness is important. It will prevent suspicion about the reasons behind private talks;
- Dealing with conflict early reveals misunderstandings and prevents emotions from taking over;
- Conflict left to escalate into warfare becomes much more difficult to solve;
- Solving conflict early creates greater awareness of possible future misunderstandings, forcing team members to adjust.

2.5.2.1 Personal behaviour in conflict

To handle conflict, it is necessary to:

- **Be impartial**. Try not to let your own perception and values influence the discussion. Assure everyone that they will have the chance to express their concerns. Keep the discussion on track.
- **Empathize** with all parties. Avoid simply defending your own position, or rejecting your opponent’s position. Look at things from all angles; distinguish emotional issues from substantive issues.
- **Ask** questions rather than make statements. A question should produce an answer and perhaps a solution.
- **Clarify** the issues. Rephrase and sum up the discussion in unemotional language that helps others understand the different points of view, and verify that everyone understands these. Keep communications simple and unemotional.
- **Listen** to what your opponent has to say. See it as one option to be examined in the light of your common problem. Read body language, be sensitive to feelings and be alert to emotional factors that are not immediately explicit. Take time to think before you reply and allow the others time as well.
- **Search** for common ground, beyond the immediate concerns, to identify shared goals and the potential for collaboration.

- **Reduce** the problem into manageable chunks, and resolve them one by one. Start with the simpler points.
- **Defuse** the tension. Keep calm and patient. Try not to counter-attack. Maintain a sense of humour.

2.5.2.2 Negotiation

Negotiation is a process through which two or more parties try to reduce or remove a conflict between them. The aim is to reach a compromise through communication, persuasion and mutual concessions. Conflicting parties must be prepared to relinquish some of their power, to make a solution possible

Negotiation is an appropriate means to resolve conflict when:

- Achieving your goals often depend on cooperation with others (if not, negotiation is not appropriate)
- The goals of the different parties are not necessarily mutually exclusive: if one wins, the other does not have to lose.
- You are likely to need the other parties in the future and you do not wish to loose a positive relationship between the different parties.

Once conflict is a recognised problem and parties have agreed to negotiate, a number of steps can make a successful outcome more likely:

1. **Plan for negotiation:** If you are involved in negotiation as party in the conflict, assess the situation as objectively as possible and define what is really important for you so as not to let emotions take over in the negotiation:
    - What situation are you in (win-win or win-lose)?
    - What are your goals, positions and underlying interests? What are those of the other party?
    - What will you do if you cannot reach an agreement? What will the other party do?
    - What do you see as a fair and reasonable solution? What does the other party see as best solution?
    - What information do you have? What is the information of the other party?
    - What are your competitive advantages and disadvantages, and those of the other party?
2. **Separate people from issues**: The important principle here is to address issues, not personalities. If you attack the other persons personally, they will feel threatened and will defend their self-esteem, which will make a discussion of the real problem more difficult. If you are attacked personally, don’t react in the same way; try to understand the problem behind the aggression.
3. **Emphasize win-win solutions**: A win-win solution is a condition for cooperation in problem solving and continuing collaboration. Even if you stand to benefit more from a win-lose solution, emphasizing the win-win aspect is essential if you are likely to need the other party in the future. Losing can create resentment and a desire for revenge. To avoid this:
    - Create additional alternatives that have value for the other party;
    - Frame the options in terms of the other party’s interests;

- Look for alternatives that will allow the other party to feel they have won and save face.

4. **Use objective standards**: Negotiators need some objective standard to assess their alternatives and base their decisions on. In the absence of such standards, emotions, assertiveness and stubbornness can take over. Succeeding in the definition of these common standards will also give convergence points to the negotiators.

5. **Try to understand the other person**: Negotiation is about reconciling different interests; understanding the other parties' situation and framing a potential solution in terms that are favourable to it is essential.

   - What are their goals?
   - What are their obligations?
   - What are their needs?
   - What is their strategy?

6. **Be careful about communication:**

   - Read body language, sense moods, and be aware of emotional issues that are not explicitly mentioned;
   - Be fair and impartial: make sure everyone has a chance to express their views;
   - Keep the discussion focussed on the issues;
   - Restate points in appropriate language to help each party understand the other's point of view;
   - Restate in neutral language those points on which the parties appear to agree;
   - Verify that they do in fact agree;
   - Use humour to bring people together and defuse tense situations.

7. **Think strategically**

   - Break disputes into manageable chunks, and resolve each chunk separately;
   - Broaden the pie: create additional resources for all the parties to reach their goals; Make for non-specific compensation: one side gets what it wants, the other is compensated on another issue;
   - Bridge the gap: Neither party gets its initial demands but a new option that satisfies the major interests of all sides is developed;
   - Cut costs: One party gets what it wants, the costs to the other are reduced or eliminated;
   - Build momentum: Each party makes concessions on low priority issues in exchange for concessions on issues it values more highly.
   - Postpone discussion of very tough issues to late in the mediation session. Once the parties have started agreeing on simple issues, an atmosphere of trust will begin to grow, and agreement on difficult issues will become easier.
   - Insist that any agreement be captured in writing before the negotiation ends

2.5.2.3 Mediation

Mediation is a process by which the conflicting sides call on a neutral third party to help them resolve their conflict. The role of the mediator is then to make them aware of their shared interests. The conflicting parties keep control of the decision making process. Mediation can only occur if both parties are willing to find a solution and if the mediator is respected by both of them.

Mediation can be useful when neither party wants a full conflict, but when negotiation has failed and the parties don't want to accept a more formal arbitration. The following steps might be helpful:

1. Diagnose the conflict and initiate solutions

- Sort out areas of understanding and areas of difference, and bring the disagreements to the surface.
- Bring the parties together and start asking them on the following questions:
  - What is the problem as they perceive it?
  - What does the other do that contributes to the problem?
  - What does each side want or need from the other?
  - What does each side do that contributes to the problem?
  - What first step can one side or other take to resolve the problem?

2. Listening and Responding

- Hear what each party is saying and how they're saying it: emotions are important;
- Get each side to expose their own view without being defensive and to acknowledge the other's position to show that they understand (understanding is not agreeing);
- Emphasize common ground and suggest mutual benefits that can be obtained from this common position;
- Postpone discussions to cool off the different parties, create opportunities for them to meet informally or socialize together;
- Try to maintain a neutral position regarding the people in the dispute
- Try to get the people to focus on areas where they might agree

3. Solving the Problem

- Review the options: What are the alternatives suggested by the parties? What is their impact? What are their benefits for each party?
- Suggest additional options: What potential solutions have the parties overlooked?
- Identify solutions: What solution is acceptable to all parties? What concessions will they make?
- Make sure people really agree on the solutions that are agreed upon. Write a plan of action: Emphasize the win-win aspect of the solution; insist on follow-up and joint action.

If you are called on to mediate in a conflict, remember that mediation is not simply a question of techniques. Mediators need to adapt to the nature of each specific situation. In any case: you are not a judge, but rather a facilitator; judges deal with problems, you deal with solutions. Your focus is not who is right and who is wrong, but how can the conflict be resolved.

2.5.2.4 Arbitration

Arbitration is when conflicting parties accept the recommendations of an outside authority. This process is usually based on facts and the conflicting parties' rights, and is a formal process where the conflicting parties relinquish all control on the decision making process.

Arbitration can be useful when some of the conflicting parties feel they stand to gain because of their rights concerning the issue, or when other methods have failed.

However, arbitration by outsiders has disadvantages:

- Time may be wasted waiting for a suitable arbitrator to become available.
- Someone from outside the team will only be concerned with the facts. They are not likely to know the deeper emotional factors.
- Communication can become strained within the team or partnership. Members could take 'sides' which makes agreement difficult to reach.

Finally a word of caution: there is no standard method for dealing with conflict because conflict is about relations between people and these are complex and varied. People involved in negotiation need to adapt to the nature of each specific situation.

2.5.3 Bibliography – conflict

2.5.3.1 Acknowledgements

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2.5.3.2 Further reading

Internet Gateways

The Negotiating Edge. www.negotiatingedge.com

ADR Resources - The Mediation and Dispute Resolution Resources Site. Managed by Stephen Marsh. http://adrr.com/

Berghoff handbook for conflict transformation. http://www.berghof-handbook.net/std_page.php?LANG=e&id=11

"Negotiations and Resolving Conflicts: An Overview" Prepared by E. Wertheim. College of Business Administration, Northeastern University. www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/DAS/interneg/training/conflict_overview.html

Documents

Glasl F. and R. Ballreich (n.d.) "Team and Organisational Development as a Means for Conflict Prevention and Resolution". Available at www.berghof-handbook.net/articles/ballreich_glasl_handbook.pdf

Note: for additional resource on teams and conflicts, see also resources listed in Sections 2.3 and 2.4