

Strengthening Knowledge-Based Partnerships

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Enhancing Knowledge Management under *Strategy 2020: Plan of Action (2009–2011)*

Sharpen the Knowledge Focus in ADB's Operations

(Add value at regional, country, and project levels)

Empower the Communities of Practice

(Collaborate for knowledge generation and sharing)

Strengthen External Knowledge Partnerships

(Align and leverage external knowledge)

Further Enhance Staff Learning and Skills Development

(Enhance opportunities for staff to learn)

Strengthening External Knowledge Partnerships

Some Challenges

- The purpose and selection of knowledge partnerships need clarity
- Insufficiency of monitoring and evaluation systems
- Poor performance vis-à-vis work plans



promote learning, creativity, and innovation for the benefits of DMCs

KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIPS

Key Actions

1. Develop **criteria** for the selection of knowledge partnerships including non-regional institutions.
2. Ascertain that expected **outputs and outcomes are aligned** to ADB and DMC priorities.
3. Ensure that **knowledge partnerships** are considered when ADB enters into **agreements** such as letters of intent and memorandums of understanding with other institutions.
4. Make sure that knowledge partnership agreements spell out the need to conduct **proactive dissemination activities in ADB and DMCs**.

Defining Knowledge Partnerships

Knowledge partnerships are associations and networks of individuals or organizations that share a purpose or goal and whose members contribute knowledge, experience, resources, and connections and participate in two-way communications.

They thrive when there is a strategic, structural, and cultural fit, and when members embrace a collaborative process, behave as a coherent entity, and engage in joint decision making and action.

Some Common Attributes

- Groups of individuals or organizations...
- With a shared, understood, and consistent purpose or goal...
- Who voluntarily contribute knowledge, experience, resources, and connections toward joint decision making and action and share learning to achieve the shared purpose or goal...
- Who rely on the partnership to reach the shared purpose or goal...

Why Knowledge Partnerships are not Organizations

- A knowledge partnership has a less formal structure than an organization and is more fluid.
- Participation is largely voluntary and as needed, not full-time.
- Participants have a high degree of freedom to make choices.
- The nature of decision making is distributive.

Organizations have **bosses**.
Knowledge partnerships have **coordinators**.

Knowledge Partnership Fundamentals

Commitment exists at the top, middle, bottom, and across functions in both partner organizations.

Risks, rewards, and resources are fairly balanced and adequately understood.

Why?

Where?



Monitoring and Evaluation

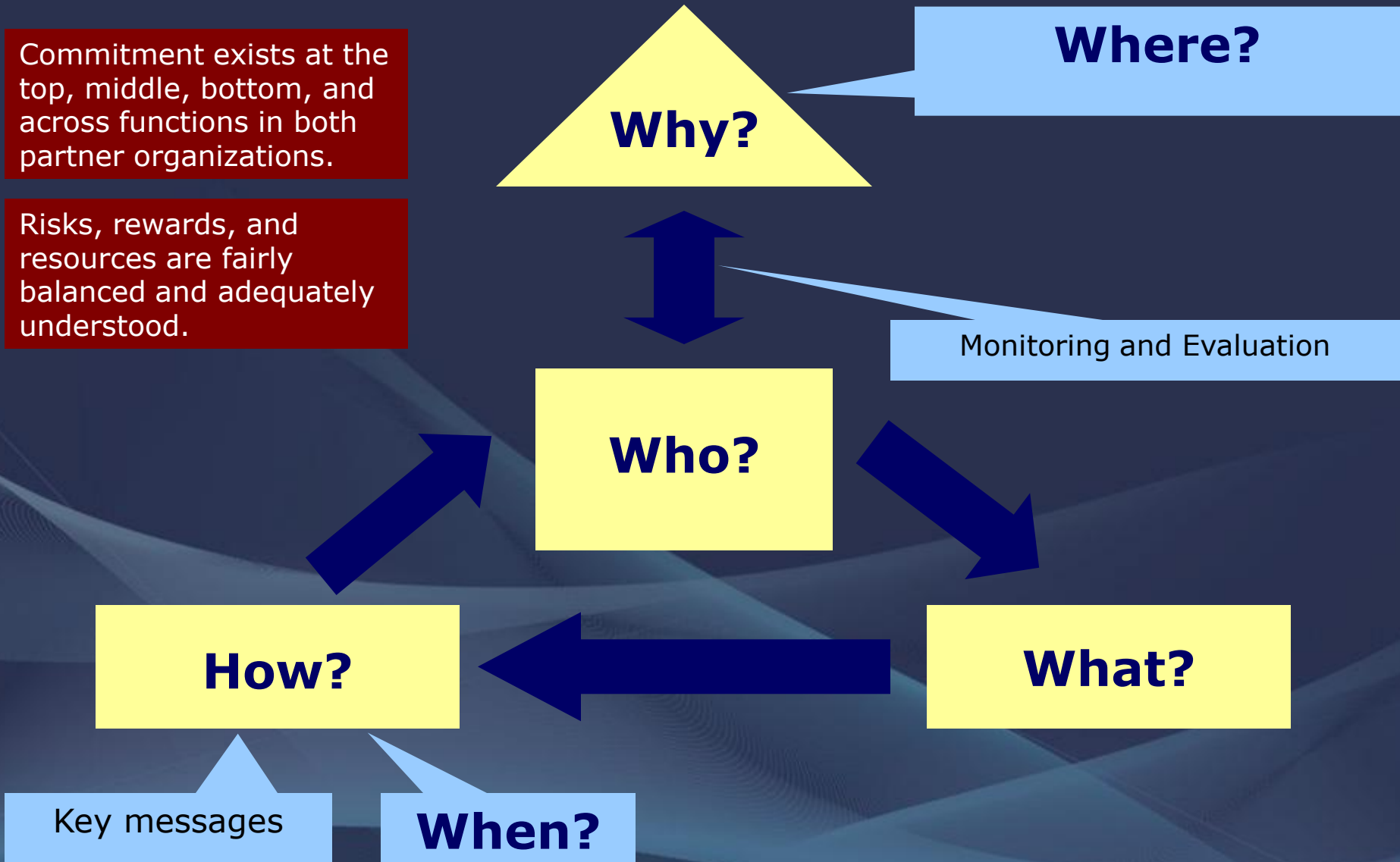
Who?

How?

What?

Key messages

When?



Benefits from Knowledge Partnerships

- Increased access to knowledge, experience, resources, and connections
- Shared learning
- Shared good practices
- Fostered creativity and innovation
- Increased business process efficiencies
- Increased visibility of concerns and issues
- Strengthened capacity to advocate and influence policy
- More effective responses to complex realities and scaled-up impact
- Reduced isolation and increased credibility
- Mitigated risks

What Knowledge Partnerships Ought to Be Good at

- Efficient search for data, information, and knowledge
- Rapid dissemination
- Efficient small-world reach to collect and connect with others and resources
- Building adaptive and flexible capacity
- Resilience to shock or change

A fool can learn from his own experience, the wise learn from the experience of others -
Democritus

Anatomy of Relationships



What Flows Through Knowledge Partnerships

- Knowledge
- Competencies
- Resources

What Makes Knowledge Partnerships Work

- Connections
- Trust
- Reciprocity
- Diversity
- Complementarity

Trust is the glue that holds networks together. It is personal. It is the core asset of knowledge partnerships.

Nodes are individuals or organizations.

Links are relationships.

Top-Ten Trust Builders

discuss, recognize, support, collaborate, disclose, value, help, acknowledge, share, ask.

Trust is built by

- Increasing the bandwidth of information that flows between nodes
- Character, honesty, integrity, and principles
- Experiencing reciprocity
- Capitalizing on pre-existing, "heritage" relationships.

Common Forms of Knowledge Partnerships

	Networking Partnership	Informal Partnership	Partnership with some "Formal" Elements	Institutional Partnership	Inter-Organizational Partnership
Common Forms of Knowledge Partnerships	Web of relationships, or loose ties of information transfer and reciprocity, fuelled by trust	<p>Self-governing and self-regulating</p> <p>Members articulate ways to leverage some arrangements</p> <p>Highly dependent on informal leadership to achieve purpose or goal</p>	<p>Partnership with a common name and collective identity</p> <p>Guiding principles and norms for decision-making and emerging or well-established governance structures</p> <p>Small secretariat facilitates functioning of the partnership and is primarily accountable to partnership members</p>	<p>Legally recognized entities with institutional legitimacy; can attract large project funding from the state, private sector donors</p> <p>Structures and systems to manage and account for complex funded projects and to rapidly disseminate information and promote creativity and innovation</p>	Contractual relationships, agreements, and accountabilities, where funded projects and delivering on results are the main drivers of the partnership

Common Forms of Knowledge Partnerships

	Networking Partnership	Informal Partnership	Partnership with some "Formal" Elements	Institutional Partnership	Inter-Organizational Partnership
Typical Benefits	<p>Connections and relationships</p> <p>Access to knowledge, experience, and resources</p>	<p>Space in which to share information, develop good practices, and mobilize as an partnership for change</p>	<p>Collective identity, combined with internal and external legitimacy</p> <p>Capability to synthesize learning, to do research, to move things forward between meetings, to mobilize the partnership for joint action and to manage relationships</p>	<p>Capacity to scale up and to take on complex, internally and externally funded projects, as a partnership with greater impact</p>	<p>Capacity to address complex local, national, regional, global, institutional or policy issues or integrated service delivery requiring collaboration among different stakeholder groups</p>

Common Forms of Knowledge Partnerships

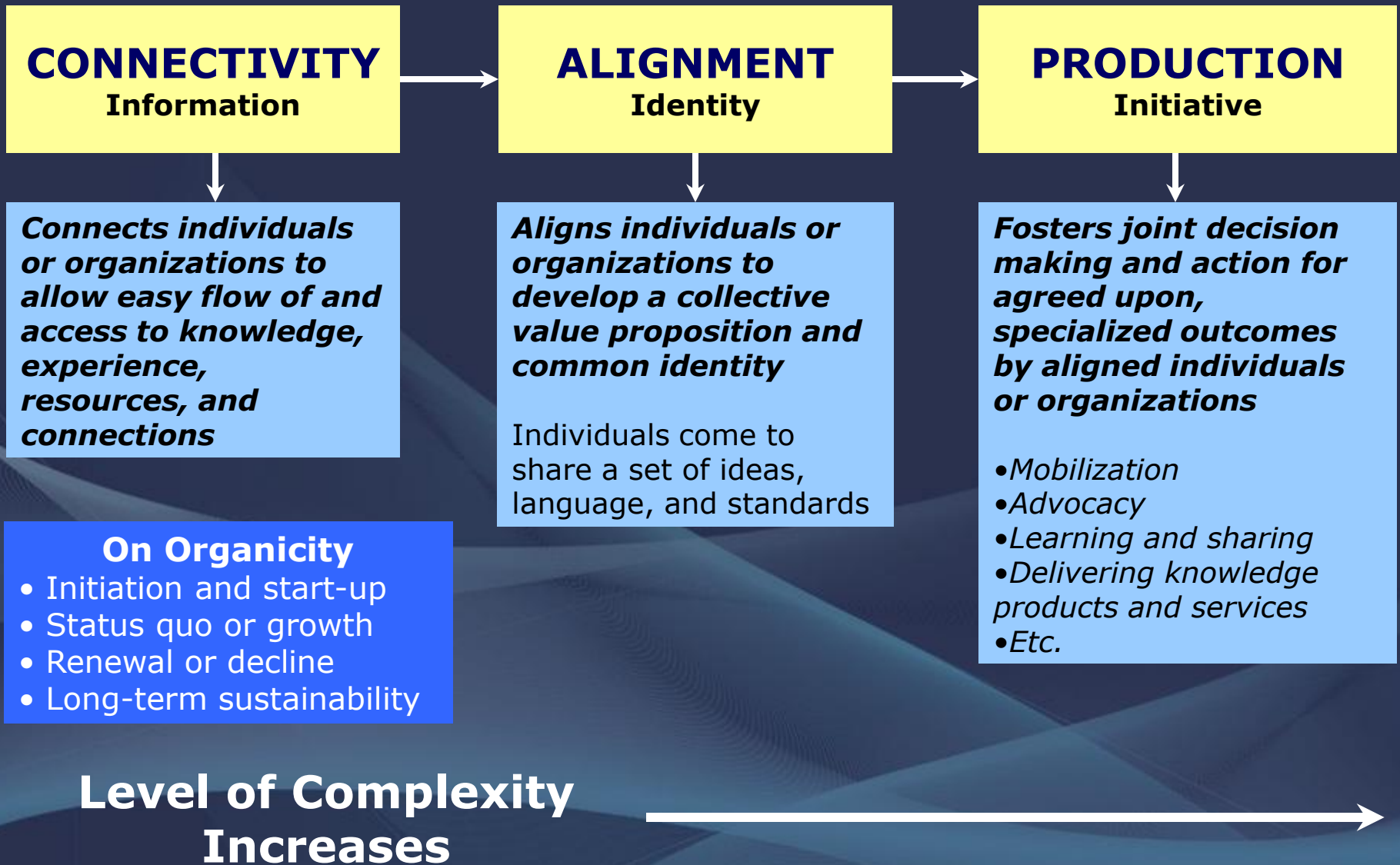
	Networking Partnership	Informal Partnership	Partnership with some "Formal" Elements	Institutional Partnership	Inter-Organizational Partnership
Typical Limits and Challenges	Benefits accrue mostly to individual members, with limited impact on the partner organizations	Limited internal and external legitimacy Risk of dissention around the purpose or goal	Due to limits on available resources and the challenges of organizational complexity, there are risks that the secretariat can begin to substitute for the partnership or does not have the capacity to meet the expectations of the partnership's members	The secretariat can become driven by funding imperatives and contracts Competition for access to resources can arise in the partnership and lead to loss of trust and reduced willingness to share information Formalizing can reduce the flow of information and limit creativity and innovation	Fostering and preserving trust, joint ownership, And collaboration Possible competition or conflict over who holds power and accesses resources can lead to disengagement of actors, or loss of capabilities and legitimacy

Archetypal Functions of Knowledge Partnerships

- **Filtering:** Organizing and managing information that is worth paying attention to.
- **Amplifying:** Taking new, little-known, or little-understood ideas, giving them weight, and making them more widely understood.
- **Investing and Providing:** Offering a means to give members the resources they need to carry out their main activities.
- **Convening:** Bringing together different, distinct people or groups of people.
- **Community-Building:** Promoting and sustaining the values and standards of individuals or organizations.
- **Learning and Facilitating:** Helping members carry out their activities more efficiently and effectively.

Time and again, a subtle rationale behind strategic alliances is obscured by their explicit strategic motives. That rationale is the intent to learn—especially knowledge that is tacit, collective, and imbedded: and it is probably failure in this arena that explains shortcomings.

Different Types of Knowledge Partnerships



Designing A Knowledge Partnership

Partnerships are self-regulating systems: if they have no value proposition, individuals or organizations will exit them.

1. What **kind** of partnership do you wish to build?
2. What is the **value proposition** that will attract participants?
3. What is the (initial) **membership**?
4. How will the partnership be **governed**?
5. What will the partnership's **structure** be?
6. What are the partnership's **operating principles**?
7. Who will **build** the partnership?

How Complicated is the Collaborative Task?

- The task is not likely to be accomplished using only the skills in the organization.
- The task must be addressed by a new arrangement designed specifically for the purpose or goal.
- The task requires collective inputs from specialized individuals.
- The task requires collective inputs from more than 20 individuals.
- The members of the collaborative arrangement are in more than two geographical locations.
- The success of the task depends on understanding the preferences or needs of individuals outside the organization.
- The task must be accomplished under time pressure.
- The outcome of the task will be influenced by uncertain, emerging events.

If more than two of the above statements hold, the collaborative task requires special arrangements.

Designing A Knowledge Partnership

1 – What Kind of Partnership?

- Choose carefully and wisely. Are you willing to be a partners and is your partner? Is this an important and valuable partner?
- Partnerships should be designed to serve the partnership's function.
- Take time to clarify what the purpose or goal of the partnership is.
- Differentiate between the partnership design and partnership launch phases.

2 – What is the Partnership's Value Proposition?

- Sharing knowledge
- Sharing competencies
- Sharing resources
- Sharing connections
- Building trust
- Building reciprocity
- Building diversity
- Building complementarity

3 – What is the Partnership's Membership?

- Partnerships can be open or closed.
- Membership should be aligned to the purpose or goal and required capacities.
- There can be different categories of members, e.g., core group, inner circle, outer circle.

Designing A Knowledge Partnership

Some Criteria for Membership

- Shared commitment to the partnership's purpose or goal
- Expertise or competence in key content areas
- Connections that matter
- Capacity to collaborate
- Being a good partnership citizen

4 – How Will the Partnership be Governed?

Who decides?

- Core group
- All members
- Other arrangements

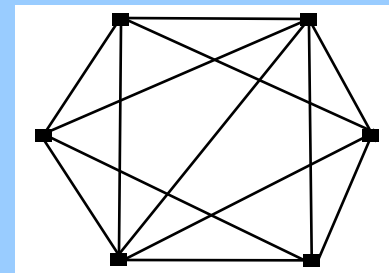
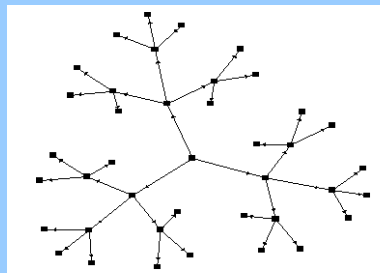
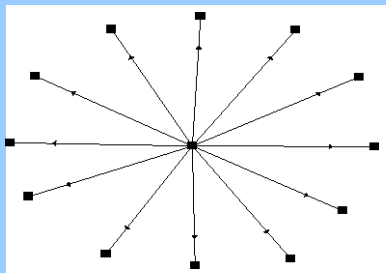
How are decisions reached?

- By consensus
- By democratic vote
- By action (emergence)
- By outsiders

What is decided?

- Purpose or goal
- Values and beliefs
- Membership criteria
- Member responsibilities
- Plans and strategies
- Outputs
- Distribution of resources

5 – What Will the Partnership's Structure Be?



Designing A Knowledge Partnership

6 – What Are the Partnership's Operating Principles?

- Make the partnership do the work and minimize "delegation" opportunities.
- Let connections flow to value.
- Let variation create (unplanned) opportunities.
- Keep plans flexible.
- Encourage strategic learning from emergent strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

7 – Who Will Build the Partnership?

Sample Roles for Partnership Builders	
Organizer	Establishes the partnership's purpose or goal and its value proposition, links the first nodes, and attracts initial resources.
Funder	Provides initial resources.
Weaver	Increases links among nodes and connects to new nodes.
Coordinator	Helps establish the partnership's shared value proposition, negotiates action plans for production, and coordinates production.
Coach	Advises organizers, funders, weavers, and coordinators.

Managing Knowledge Partnerships

Partnership Management Tasks

- **Weaving** connections within the partnership and between the partnership and associated players.
- **Facilitating** alignment that leads to production agreements.
- **Coordinating** the actual work of production and partnership development.
- **Operating** the partnership and handling management issues.
- **Monitoring and evaluating** partnership development and performance.

Planning must, eventually, degenerate into work.

Assigning Responsibilities

- Work plans lie at the core of a partnership's value proposition.
- In the voluntary, collaborative structure of a partnership, responsibilities still need to be made very clear.
- It helps to have an "outsider" negotiate and structure the partnership's relationships.

Management Issues that Require Attention

- Balancing between the needs of the "parts" and those of the "whole."
- Balancing autonomy with collective control, and stability with change.
- Ensuring effective communications. "Policing" the partnership.

Partnership Design Check List

Purpose or Goal

What is the value proposition?
What will the partnership produce?
What values and principles will guide it?

Formation

Who will build the partnership?
Will an outside facilitator be used to facilitate alignment and production plans?
Who will operate the partnership?

Membership

Who will the members be?
What are the member criteria?
Will there be different classes of members?
What will be the obligations and benefits of members?

Production

What hypotheses will you test?
How will you design joint undertakings?
How will you evaluate results?
What will give you confidence to scale them up?

Governance

What decisions will need to be made?
Who will make decisions?
How will decisions be made?

Communications

Are open communications and information a visible indicator of the level of trust?
Is the power of technology harnessed in support?

Structure

What will the structure look like?
What will the development path look like?

Resources

What resources will fuel the partnership?
What contributions will members make?
What are all the possible sources of funding?
Who will manage the cash?

Measures

What is success? What are its specifics?
How will the partners know when success is achieved?
How will success be rewarded?

Evaluation

What factors do you want to assess?
Who will do the evaluation?
How will you design evaluation at the front end?

Success Criteria for Knowledge Partnerships

Informal Leadership

- Coordinators are active and committed, give space to others, act as leaders of the cause the partnerships stands for, make connections, facilitate relationships, and make good use of resources.
- The partnership relies on a core group of coordinators with complementary skills and usually include a governing committee, secretariat, and working groups.

Legitimacy and Collective Identity

- The partnership connects individuals across functions, locations, and organizations and create a third space for learning, creativity, innovation, and development of joint practice.
- In the partnership, legitimacy is earned, not declared.
- The partnership fosters the emergence of collective identity among members.

Technical Expertise and Resources

- Cooperation increases when the roles of individuals members are sharply defined.
- The partnership is able to tap the technical expertise and professionalism of members and connect them to the higher purpose that motivates them.
- The partnership offers possibilities for individuals to use their knowledge outside of their organizations to create new knowledge and spark energy for change that, potentially, can be used by others.
- The partnership is looked to and recognized by key stakeholders (e.g, policy makers) as a place to visit or consult for deep expertise.
- Resources come in various forms: in-kind; grants; member funding; etc. "Sweat" equity is the key to most successful partnerships.

Success Criteria for Knowledge Partnerships

Coordination

- Coordinators are both task- and relationship-oriented.
- Coordinators focus first on serving partnership members. They earn and maintain the commitment of members by ensuring that the partnership responds to explicit (not constructed) needs.
- Coordinators create a gift culture by mentoring and coaching. They encourage activity and interaction among members of the partnership and build networks to foster a sense of community.
- Coordinators provide technical advice and scan the environment for opportunities to advance the partnership's purpose or goal and benefit its members.

Communication Systems

- The partnership has significant capability to use information and communications technology to facilitate rapid and broad-based interaction among members.
- The partnership strengthens and supplements online communications with face-to-face interactions.

Adaptive Capacity

- Coordinators have strong analytical and adaptive capabilities and effectively anticipate and respond to changing circumstances.
- The partnership invests in information and communications technology, relies on information exchanges to gather intelligence from a range of sources, and establishes spaces for processing and sharing data, information, and knowledge.
- The partnership reinvents its working forms as needed.

Making Knowledge Partnerships Work Better

From	To
Defining the right business arrangements	Developing the right working relationships
Creating ends metrics	Creating means metrics
Eliminating differences	Embracing differences
Establishing formal management systems and structures	Enabling collaborative behavior
Managing the external relationships with partners	Managing your own internal stakeholders

Knowledge Partnership Evaluation

- Assess for multiple dimensions, including:
 - **Connectivity**, e.g., what flows, between whom, and how well?
 - **Partnership health**, e.g., membership; involvement; diversity; behavioral changes, unplanned benefits; financial health, etc.
 - **Outcomes**, e.g., what was produced, at what quality levels, and at what cost?
- Focus on the value proposition: avoid being funder-centric.
- Use network mapping for visual display.
- Build monitoring and evaluation of multiple dimensions in the partnership's design, from the beginning.

Further Reading

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