

# Learning in Partnerships

*Bruce Britton*  
and *Olivier Serrat*

2013

The views expressed in this presentation are the views of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Asian Development Bank, or its Board of Governors, or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this presentation and accepts no responsibility for any consequence of their use. The countries listed in this presentation do not imply any view on ADB's part as to sovereignty or independent status or necessarily conform to ADB's terminology.

ADB

# The Partnership Ideal



# Organizational Identity and Mutuality

- Organizations with a strong identity
  - Remain consistent, committed, and accountable, as well as responsive to their mission, core values, and constituencies.
  - Maintain characteristics—chiefly comparative advantages—reflective of their organizational type or sector.
- Mutuality is characterized by
  - Equality in decision-making
  - Resource exchange
  - Reciprocal accountability
  - Transparency of decision-making
  - Shared respect
  - Risk-sharing



# Partnerships as Collaborative Relationships

Organizational Identity

Low

High

Mutuality

Low

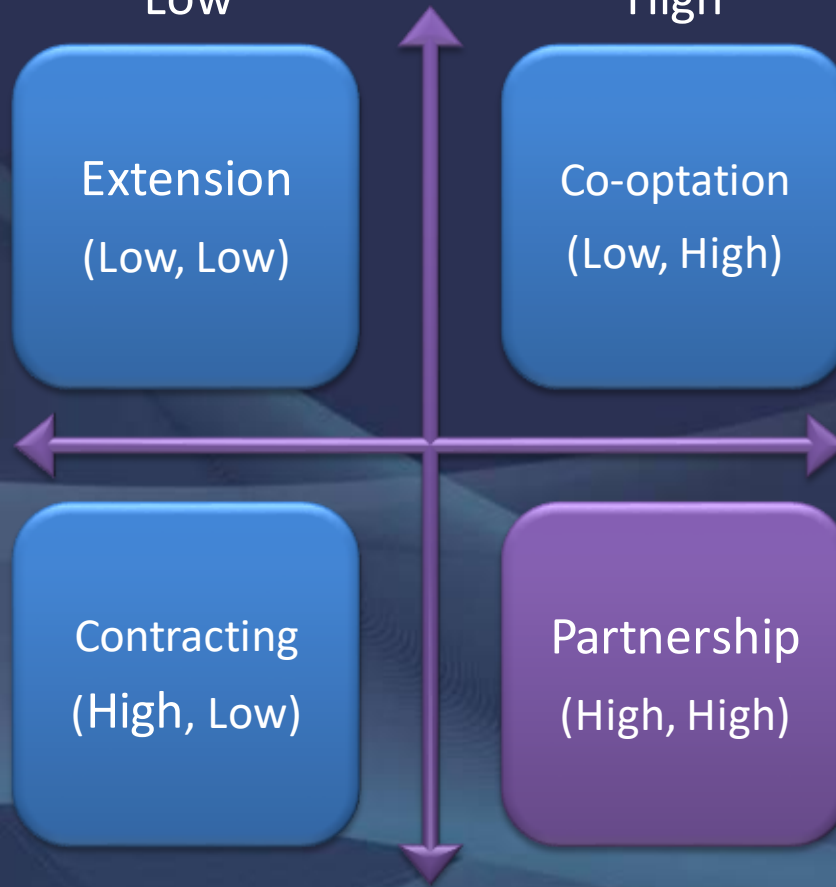
High

Extension  
(Low, Low)

Co-optation  
(Low, High)

Contracting  
(High, Low)

Partnership  
(High, High)



# Why Enter into Partnerships?

Mutual Interest—To pursue common or mutually beneficial goals and objectives that would not otherwise be attainable

Accessing resources—To access resources, including knowledge, that would not otherwise be available

Effectiveness—To provide more products, services, processes, methods of delivery, etc.

Efficiency—To lower costs, produce higher input/output ratios, or increase economies of scale or scope

Legitimacy—To enhance reputation and credibility

Stability—To overcome uncertainty through risk-sharing

Necessity—To obey mandated law, regulation, etc.

# Effects of Partnerships

## Strategy

- Acquiring resources and skills that are not available in-house

## Learning

- Creating new knowledge or transferring existing knowledge

## Polity

- Developing inter-connectedness and sustaining or increasing influence and impact

# Dimensions of Partnerships



# Activities of Partnerships

Capacity Building  
and Training

Cofinancing

Conferences,  
Seminars, and  
Workshops

Evaluation

Information  
Exchange

Loan/Investment  
Projects

Policy Dialogue

Project  
Implementation

Publications

Research

Secondment

Staff Exchange

Technical  
Assistance

# Operating Level of Partnerships



Project/Program-Focused



Sector/Theme-Focused



Cofinancing



Institution-Wide



Country/Region Focused

# Legal Basis of Partnerships



# The Partnership Management Cycle



# Foundation and Sustaining Elements of Effective Partnerships

## Foundation Elements

- Compelling Vision
- Strong and Shared Leadership
- Shared Problem Definition and Approach
- Interdependence and Complementarity
- Mutual Accountability

## Sustaining Elements

- Attention to Process
- Communication Linkages
- Clear and Open Decision-Making
- Trust and Commitment
- Sharing Credit and Recognition

# Obstacles to Effective Partnerships



Incompatible Vision, Goals, and Objectives

Inadequate Ownership

Lack of Trust

Unwillingness to Share Risks

Poor Communications

Inflexibility

Mismanaged Conflict

Challenges of Virtual Teamwork

# Six Partnership Principles

Make out and agree on the need for partnership

Develop clarity and realism of purpose

Ensure commitment and ownership

Develop and maintain trust

Create clear and robust partnership arrangements

Monitor, measure, and learn

# Principle 1: Make Out and Agree on the Need for Partnership



Identify previous partnership accomplishments

Clarify and agree on factors associated with successful partnership accomplishments


Anticipate and try to avoid obstacles to partnership work

Recognize the influence of the policy context on the partnership

Acknowledge what interdependence is necessary to achieve specified goals and objectives

Specify areas where interdependence is not required

# Principle 2: Develop Clarity and Realism of Purpose



Make sure that the partnership is built on shared vision, shared values, and agreed principles

Define joint goals and objectives

Ensure that joint goals and objectives are realistic

Understand and integrate respective motives behind the partnership

Focus on areas of likely success

# Principle 3: Ensure Commitment and Ownership



Corroborate widespread ownership of the partnership in each organization

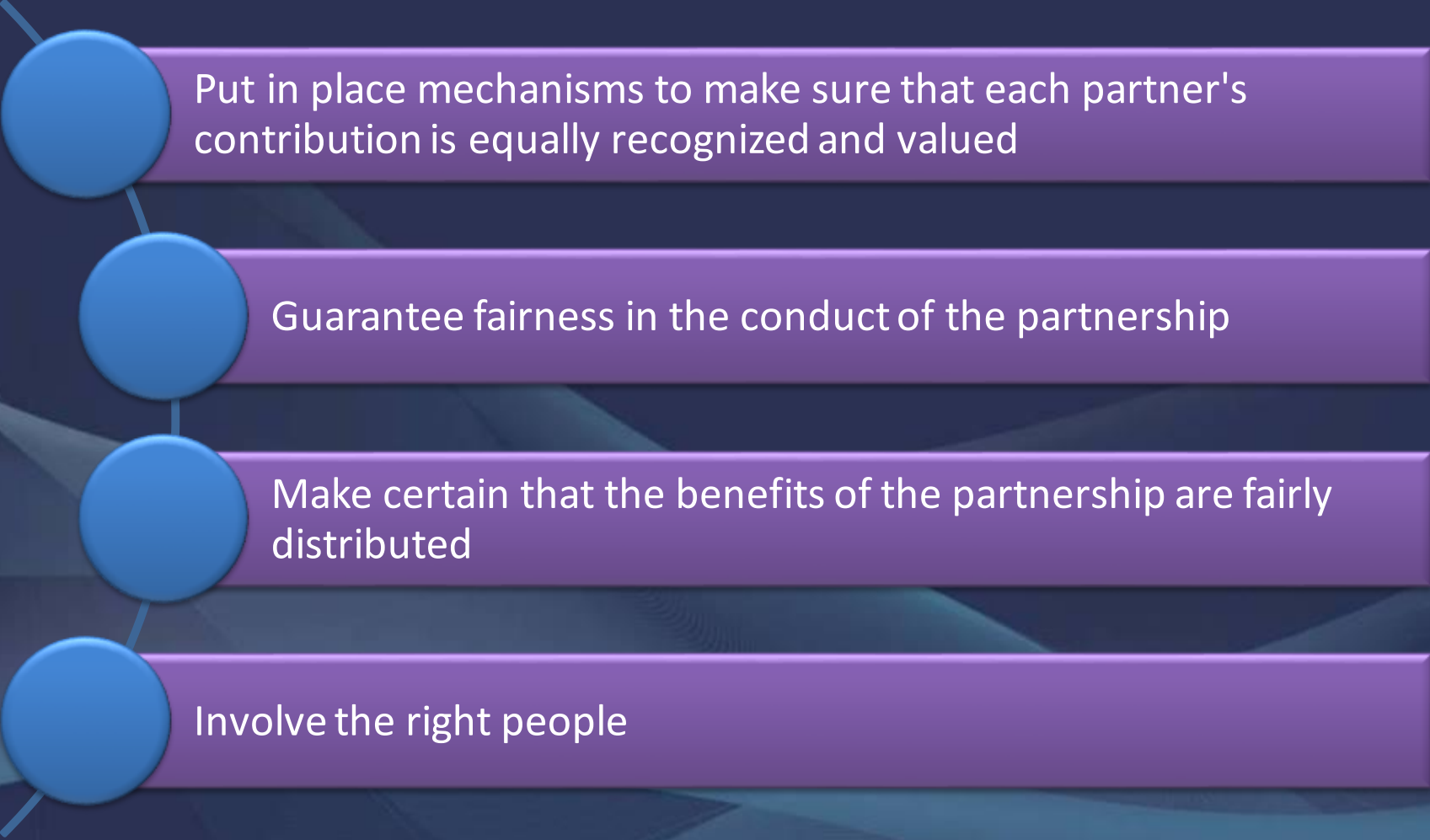
Confirm commitment at a sufficiently senior level

Recognize and encourage individuals with networking skills

Make certain that partnership work is not entirely dependent on individuals

Reward partnership work

# Principle 4: Develop and Maintain Trust



Put in place mechanisms to make sure that each partner's contribution is equally recognized and valued

Guarantee fairness in the conduct of the partnership

Make certain that the benefits of the partnership are fairly distributed

Involve the right people

# Principle 5: Create Clear and Robust Partnership Arrangements



Ensure transparency in the financial resources each partner brings

Be aware of and appreciate the non-financial resources each partner brings

Demonstrate clear lines of accountability

Make certain that the partnership is not hindered by cumbersome, elaborate, or time-consuming arrangements

Focus on creativity, innovation, and outcome

# Principle 6: Monitor, Measure, and Learn



Agree on a range of success criteria

Establish arrangements for monitoring and evaluating progress in achieving the partnership's goals and objectives

Establish arrangements for monitoring and evaluating how effectively the partnership itself is working

Ensure widespread feedback of findings

Celebrate success and address continuing obstacles

Review partnership goals, objectives, and related arrangements

# Simple Rules to Make Partnerships More Effective



## Not Just ...

- Defining the right arrangements
- Creating "ends" metrics
- Eliminating differences
- Establishing formal management systems and structures
- Managing the relationship with the partner



## ... But Also

- Developing the right working relationships
- Creating "means" metrics
- Embracing differences
- Enabling collaborative behavior
- Managing internal stakeholders

# Benefits of Shared Learning

Increased access to knowledge, experience, connections, and other resources

Critical thinking from different perspectives

Shared experimentation that mitigates risks

Fostered creativity and innovation

More effective responses to complexity

Shared good practices

Increased business process effectiveness and efficiency

Increased visibility of concerns and issues

Strengthened capacity to advocate and impact policy

Reduced isolation and increased reputation and credibility

# Learning in Partnerships

One-Way  
Learning

Two-Way  
Learning

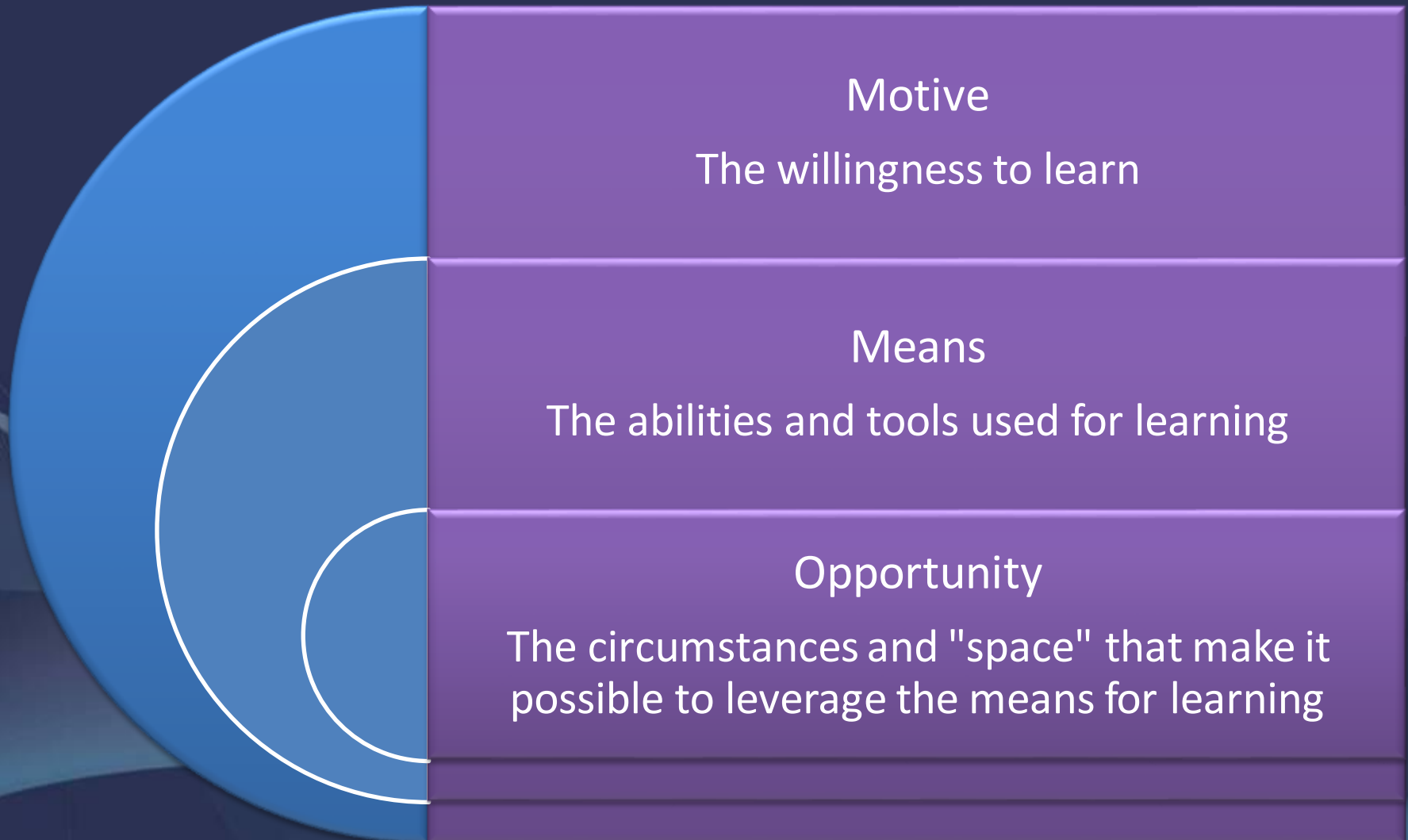
New Knowledge  
is Generated as a  
Result of  
Interaction

From One  
Partner to  
Another

From and to  
Both Partners



# Motive, Means, and Opportunity for Learning



# Factors Affecting Learning in Partnerships



## Transparency

The willingness (motive) and abilities and tools (means) with which to *share* knowledge

## Receptivity

The willingness (motive) and abilities and tools (means) with which to *absorb* knowledge

# Factors Affecting Transparency

## Motive

- Experience of previous relationship
- Willingness to share knowledge
- Understanding of the importance of sharing
- Degree of familiarity with partner
- Perceived imbalance in power dynamics

## Means

- Social and cultural context (including language, customs, and organizational culture)
- Abilities and tools with which to share knowledge
- Communication capacity

## Opportunity

- Embeddedness of knowledge in context-specific relationships
- Prioritization of time and creation of "space" for learning

# Factors Affecting Receptivity

## Motive

- Levels of trust (related to track record and awareness of each organization's learning strategy)
- Strength of intent to learn (related to understanding of value of new knowledge)
- Willingness to absorb knowledge

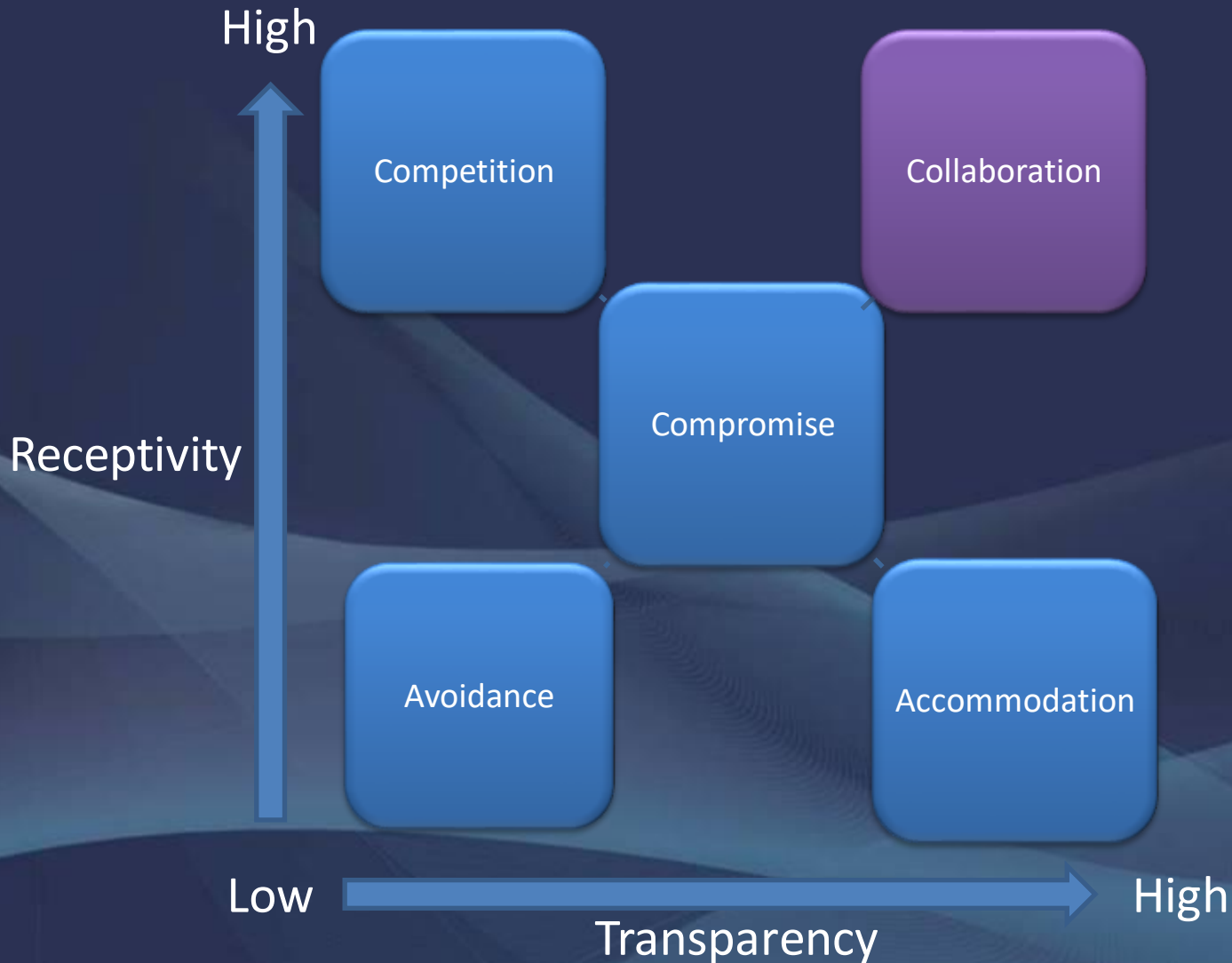
## Means

- Adequacy of knowledge management architecture
- Abilities and tools with which to absorb knowledge
- Knowledge is far outside the organization's area of expertise

## Opportunity

- Prioritization of time and creation of "space" for learning

# Individual Learning Strategies



# Outcomes of Learning Strategies

Organization B's Learning Strategy

Organization A's Learning Strategy

	Avoidance	Accommodation	Compromise	Competition	Collaboration
Avoidance					
Accommodation					
Compromise					
Competition					
Collaboration					

Note: Dark green represents high transfer of existing knowledge and creation of new knowledge for both A and B; dark blue represents high transfer of existing knowledge from A to B; orange represents high transfer of existing knowledge from B to A; light blue represents low transfer of existing knowledge from A to B; light green represents low transfer of existing knowledge for both A and B; brown represents low transfer of existing knowledge from B to A; grey represents no transfer or creation of knowledge.

# Checklist for Effective Learning in Partnerships—Motive

Motive—The reason for learning

- The partnership has a solid base of joint commitment and understanding.
- Each partner has clearly identified its intended benefits from the partnership.
- There is trust between the partners.
- Each partner values the other partner's knowledge.
- Knowledge sharing and mutual learning is an explicit goal (i.e., there is a shared learning agenda).

# Checklist for Effective Learning in Partnerships—Means

Means—The  
"software"  
and  
"hardware" of  
learning

- There is a clear and appropriately detailed plan for achieving the partnership's goals and objectives.
- Sufficient and appropriate resources are committed from the partners for achieving the partnership's goals and objectives.
- The partnership has an appropriate level of formality.
- The partnership has good leadership.
- There is alignment between the organizational cultures of the partners.
- The partnership has clear and effective lines of accountability.
- Both partners have an in-depth understanding of models and tools for knowledge sharing and mutual learning.
- Accurate and appropriate indicators are used to evaluate and improve the success and progress of the partnership.

# Checklist for Effective Learning in Partnerships—Opportunity

Opportunity  
—Formal and  
informal  
"space" for  
learning

- The partners communicate regularly in a productive and mutually supportive way.
- Tools and mechanisms are used to surface, share, and generate new knowledge (i.e., joint after-action reviews, meetings, workshops, seminars, retreats, etc.).
- Knowledge sharing and mutual learning are integrated in the partnership management cycle.

# Evolution of Partnerships

Initial conditions in a partnership are important but ...

It is important to recognize that partnerships are dynamic and interactive.

The learning strategies adopted by partners evolve over time: this leads to different outcomes in terms of inter-organizational learning.

Successful partnerships evolve and grow in interactive cycles of learning, re-evaluation, and readjustment.

Partners evaluate the partnership in terms of efficiency, equity, and adaptability.

If the partners have positive experiences of symmetrical learning, each learning cycle will reinforce the positive relationship and lead to higher levels of mutual commitment.

# What are Knowledge Partnerships?

## Definition

A knowledge partnership is a partnership that has a particular emphasis on the role of knowledge in accomplishing the goals and objectives of the partners, including the sharing of knowledge, the generation of new ideas and understanding, and the communication and application of that knowledge beyond the partnership itself.

## Capacities

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; and resilience to shock or change.

# Specific 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.

# Some 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

---

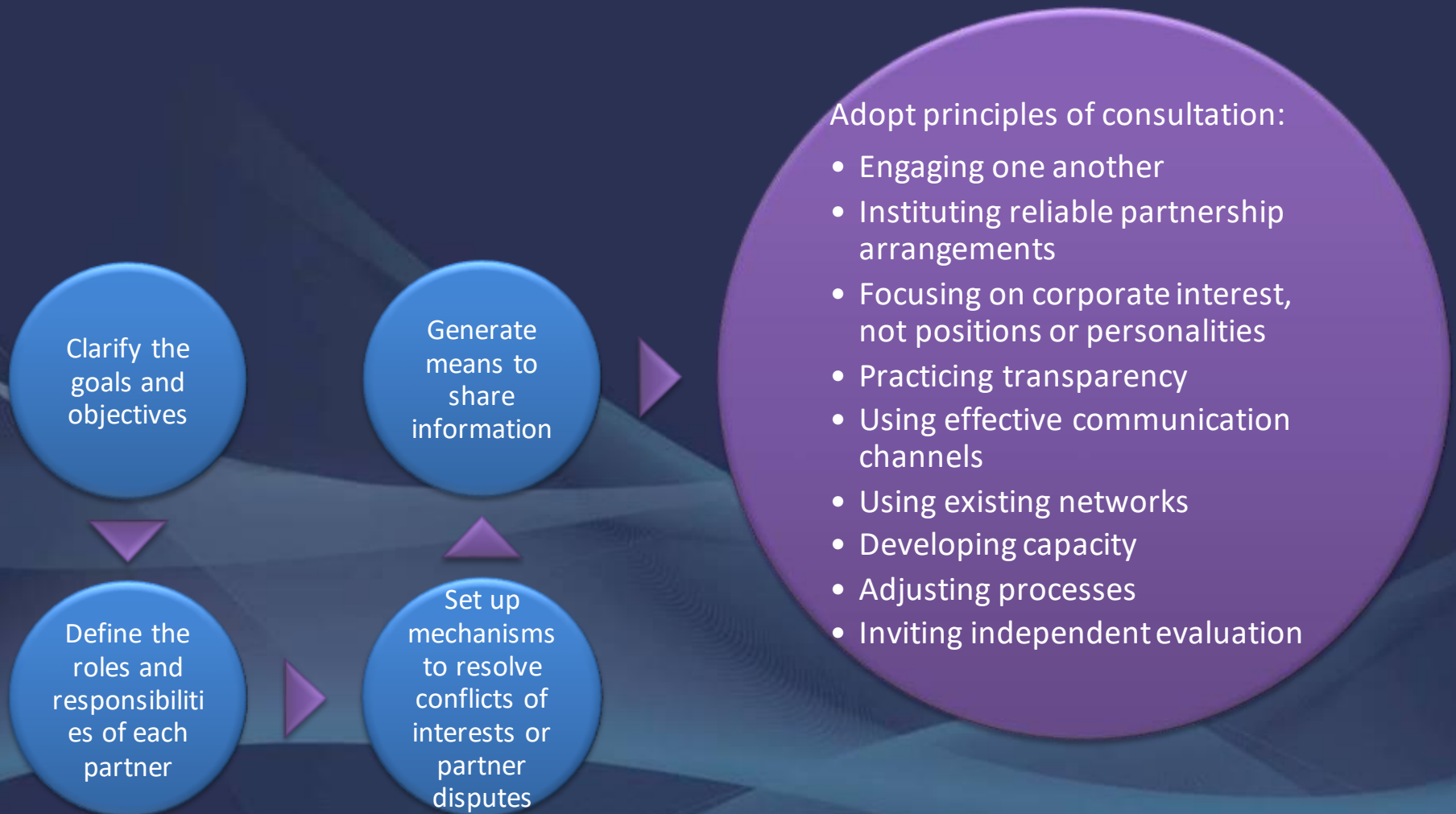
Reduced isolation and increased credibility

---

Mitigated risks

---

# Ground Rules for Establishing Knowledge Partnerships



# Designing Learning into Partnerships

Assess and value partner knowledge



Determine knowledge accessibility



Evaluate knowledge tacitness and ease of transfer



Establish knowledge connections between the partners



Draw on existing knowledge to facilitate learning

# Managing Collaborative Learning in Partnerships

Articulate processes for collaboration



Articulate processes for knowledge generation and sharing



Articulate processes for communications beyond the partnership



Put in place mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation

# Success Factors for Knowledge Partnerships

## Informal Leadership

- Coordinators are active and committed, give space to others, act as leaders of the cause the partnerships stands for, build 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.

## Alignment and Identity

- The partnership connects individuals across functions, locations, and organizations and create "space" for learning, creativity, innovation, and development of joint practice.
- The partnership fosters the emergence of collective identity among members.

# Success Factors for Knowledge Partnerships

## Technical Expertise and Resources

- Cooperation increases when the roles of individual members are defined.
- The partnership is able to tap the technical expertise and professionalism of members and connect them to the higher purpose it stands for.
- The partnership offers possibilities for individuals to use their knowledge outside the organizations to create new knowledge and spark energy for change there.
- The partnership is recognized by stakeholders 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 Factors 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 goals and objectives and benefit its members.

# Success Factors for Knowledge Partnerships

## Communication Systems

- The partnership has significant capability to use information and communication technologies 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 the analytical and adaptive capabilities needed to anticipate and respond to changing circumstances.
- The partnership invests in information and communication technologies, relies on information exchanges to gather intelligence, and establishes "space" for data, information, and knowledge.
- The partnership reinvents its working forms as needed.

# Definitions of Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is the systematic and continuous assessment of progress of an activity over time which checks that things are going according to plan and enables positive adjustments to be made.

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed activity, including its design and implementation.

The aim of evaluation is to determine the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of an activity.

An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of the relevant organization.

# OECD-DAC Evaluation Criteria

**Relevance**—Examines to what extent the objectives of an intervention match the priorities or policies of major stakeholders, including beneficiaries

**Effectiveness**—Examines whether outputs led to the achievement of the planned outcome

**Efficiency**—Assesses outputs in relation to inputs

**Impact**—Assesses what changes, intended and unintended, have occurred as a result of the intervention

**Sustainability**—Looks at how far any changes are likely to continue in the longer term

# Monitoring and Evaluating Learning in Partnerships: Relevance

## Relevance Criteria

Relates to whether or not the goals and objectives of the partnership are suited to the priorities and policies of the partners and those that the partners wish to influence, and is aligned with broader development priorities.

## Evidence

Partners can clearly articulate the goals and objectives.

Partners align the goals and objectives of the partnership with defined needs of audiences and clients.

Partners discuss, understand, and share purpose, scope, and expectations.

Partners define, assess, and locate complementary skills, experience, knowledge, resources, and influence.

All partners understand their respective strategic directions.

Partners raise awareness of the partnership among staff.

## Key Questions

Did the partnership have a clear, shared purpose to meet defined needs?

Has the partnership helped each organization achieve more than they could on their own?

Did the partnership help each partner define its own areas of influence more clearly?

# Monitoring and Evaluating Learning in Partnerships: Effectiveness

## Effectiveness Criteria

Refers to the extent to which the partnerships attains its goals and objectives.

## Evidence

Partners plan joint activities and knowledge products that lead toward the outcome.

Partners establish ground rules for collaboration.

Partners identify and foster champions.

Partners use a variety of methods for networking and knowledge exchange.

Partners ensure sustained engagement of their leadership.

## Key Questions

Did the partnership have a clear outcome identified?

Were there processes, infrastructure, and resources with sufficient flexibility in place for quality exchange of knowledge and experience, regular communication and meetings, and communicating beyond the partnership?

Did you mutually agree upon a framework for monitoring work over time?

# Monitoring and Evaluating Learning in Partnerships: Efficiency

## Efficiency Criteria

Measures the qualitative and quantitative outputs in relation to the inputs. Attention should be given to alternative approaches to achieve the same outputs, and the extent to which the partnerships made optimal use of all available resources.

## Evidence

Partners discuss strengths and weaknesses concerning how they will organize themselves to deliver outputs.

Operational document lays out what each partner will do, and how resources will be allocated and shared.

Clearly defined activities, timelines, and responsibilities for the delivery of outputs.

Ensure that processes are in place for delegating the authority to individual partners to act and adopt, for accountability, and for conflict resolution.

Partners understand the capacities and constraints of each partner organization.

## Key Questions

Did partners explore different delivery options, including whether a partnership is the best approach?

Were the necessary resources available, properly allocated, and well-matched for planned activities?

Was there a scope for adjustment of processes, activities, and resources during the lifespan of the partnership?

Was there clarity on management of the assets (funds, intellectual property, and brand) of the partnership?

# Monitoring and Evaluating Learning in Partnerships: Impact

## Impact Criteria

Refers to the positive and negative changes produced by the partnership activities, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. The impact should be examined at two levels: (i) the contribution that the partnership as a whole makes to the attainment of development priorities; and (ii) the improvement of each partner's institutional capacity to have impact.

## Evidence

Knowledge exchange is focused on solutions.

Peer-to-peer learning is facilitated.

Communication tools are used to extend the reach of the partners.

Strengthening relationships and capacity building with audiences and clients is a priority.

## Key Questions

Has the outcome led to impact?

Are people outside of the partnership aware of the knowledge generated and, if so, how are they using it?

Have the partners' capacities increased as a result of the partnership?

Did the partnership have flexibility for the unexpected to emerge?

# Monitoring and Evaluating Learning in Partnerships: Sustainability

## Sustainability Criteria

Consists of two components: (i) the likelihood that the achievements of the partnership will be sustained; and (ii) the sustainability of the partnership itself which considers four dimensions: (a) relevance —whether the goals and objectives of the partnership is still relevant; (b) relationships—whether the partners are still active; (c) resources—whether resources are available; and (d) time—whether the partnership has given itself sufficient time to achieve its purpose or if continuation is necessary.

## Evidence

Transparent discussions are held on current and future resources.

Partners are aware of evolving organizational and development priorities.

Partners make an effort to co-evolve and explore new activities.

Partners are committed to open and generous sharing of expertise and resources.

The staff responsible for implementing the partnership's activities are recognized for their efforts.

## Key Questions

How likely is it that the outcome of the partnership work will be sustained?

Should the partnership itself be sustained and, if so, how?

What motivated each partner to join and continue to participate?

How effective were the mechanisms to jointly reflect, learn, and adapt over the life span of the partnership?

# Basic Data Required to Monitor Learning in Partnerships

Basic data on learning in partnerships should be monitored to facilitate the evaluation process:

Learning activities (what knowledge-sharing and learning activities were carried out?, how often?, to what quality?, at what cost?)

Partners' engagement in learning activities (who was involved?, at what levels of engagement?)

Learning outputs (what new knowledge was created?, what knowledge was shared?, what knowledge products were produced?, what was the quality of the products?)

Obstacles (what obstacles to knowledge sharing and learning were encountered?, how were they overcome?)

Partnership arrangements (what arrangements have facilitated learning in the partnership?)

# Further Reading

- ADB. 2008. *Creating and Running Partnerships*. Manila. Available: [www.adb.org/publications/creating-and-running-partnerships](http://www.adb.org/publications/creating-and-running-partnerships)
- ADB. 2009. *Managing Virtual Teams*. Manila. Available: [www.adb.org/publications/managing-virtual-teams](http://www.adb.org/publications/managing-virtual-teams)
- ADB. 2009. *Learning in Strategic Alliances*. Manila. Available: [www.adb.org/publications/learning-strategic-alliances](http://www.adb.org/publications/learning-strategic-alliances)
- ADB. 2011. *Guidelines for Knowledge Partnerships*. Manila. Available: [www.adb.org/publications/guidelines-knowledge-partnerships](http://www.adb.org/publications/guidelines-knowledge-partnerships)
- ADB. 2012. *Designing Knowledge Partnerships Better*. Manila. Available: [www.scribd.com/doc/86041500/designing-knowledge-partnerships-better-for-print](http://www.scribd.com/doc/86041500/designing-knowledge-partnerships-better-for-print)

# Further Reading

- Jennifer Brinkerhoff. 2002. Government-Nonprofit Partnership: A Defining Framework. *Public Administration and Development*. Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 19–30.
- Jennifer Brinkerhoff. 2002. Assessing and Improving Partnership Relationships and Outcomes: A Proposed Framework. *Evaluation and Program Planning*. Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 215–231.
- Jeffrey Dyer, Prashant Kale, and Harbir Singh. 2001. How to Make Strategic Alliances Work, *MIT Sloan Management Review*. Summer. pp. 37–43.
- Brian Hardy, Bob Hudson, and Eileen Waddington. 2003. *Assessing Strategic Partnership: The Partnership Assessment Tool*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

# Further Reading

- Cynthia Hardy, Nelson Phillips, and Thomas Lawrence. 2003. Resources, Knowledge, and Influence: The Organizational Effects of Interorganizational Collaboration. *Journal of Management Studies*. Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 321–347.
- Douglas Horton, Gordon Prain, and Graham Thiele. 2009. *Perspectives on Partnership: A Literature Review*. Social Sciences Working Paper. No 2009-3.
- Andrew Inkpen and Mary Crossan. 1995. Believing is Seeing: Joint Ventures and Organizational Learning. *Journal of Management Studies*. Vol. 32, No. 5, pp. 595–618.
- Andrew Inkpen. 1998. Learning and Knowledge Acquisition through International Strategic Alliances. *Academy of Management Executive*. Vol. 12, No 4, pp. 69–80.

# Further Reading

- Rikard Larsson, Lars Bengtsson, Kristina Henriksson, and Judith Sparks. 1998. The Interorganizational Learning Dilemma: Collective Knowledge Development in Strategic Alliances. *Organization Science*. Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 285–305.
- Dorcas Robinson, Tom Hewitt, and John Harriss. 2000. *Managing Development: Understanding Inter-Organizational Relationships*. Sage.
- Dennis Rondinelli and Ted London. 2003. How Corporations and Environmental Groups Cooperate: Assessing Cross-Sector Alliances and Collaborations. *Academy of Management Executive*. Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 61–76.

# Further Reading

- Rod Sterne, Deborah Heaney, and Bruce Britton. Undated. *The Partnership Toolbox*. WWF World Wide Fund for Nature.
- Ros Tennyson. 1998. *Managing Partnerships: Tools for Mobilizing the Public Sector, Business, and Civil Society as Partners in Development*. Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum.
- Robin Vincent and Ailish Byrne. 2006. Enhancing Learning in Development Partnerships. *Development in Practice*. Vol.16, No. 5, pp. 385–399.

# Video

- ADB. 2012. *Creating and Running Partnerships*. Manila.  
Available: [vimeo.com/67184320](https://vimeo.com/67184320)

*Bruce Britton*

Organizational Learning Specialist  
Framework

[bruce@framework.org.uk](mailto:bruce@framework.org.uk)

[www.framework.org.uk](http://www.framework.org.uk)

*Olivier Serrat*

Principal Knowledge Management Specialist  
Regional and Sustainable Development Department  
Asian Development Bank

[knowledge@adb.org](mailto:knowledge@adb.org)

[www.adb.org/knowledge-management](http://www.adb.org/knowledge-management)

[www.facebook.com/adbknowledgesolutions](https://www.facebook.com/adbknowledgesolutions)

[www.scribd.com/knowledge\\_solutions](https://www.scribd.com/knowledge_solutions)

[www.twitter.com/adbknowledge](https://www.twitter.com/adbknowledge)