

The virtues of consultation, coordination, and collaboration

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Within the overall framework of co-operation, one can recognise an increase of commitment and complexity from consultation via coordination to collaboration. Consultation is basic for the achievement of any common goals. Coordinating separate activities among independent organizations avoids duplication in work and waste of resources. As co-operation intensifies, soft factors like mutuality, impartiality, transparency, good communication, and trust gain importance. Collaboration may require contractual safeguarding, organizational adjustments, and investment in staff that may neutralize the advantage of cost reduction associated with mere coordination. For reasons of flexibility and effectiveness, it might be advisable to coordinate but keep projects autonomous. Nevertheless, consultation as well as collaboration can be helpful in promoting motivation and achieving sound and complementary results. Among groups whose identity, methods, and resources are diverse, division of labour is based best on an organisation's comparative advantage.

The number of public and private organisations that are committed to promote the documentation, protection, conservation, and study of plants seems to increase steadily. Competition for recognition and allocation of resources may foster a non-cooperative attitude. However, coordination and bundling of resources have become more than just an option with regard to funding, costs for Access and Benefit Sharing, access to suitable plant material in collections, and availability of specialists.

It is the declared aim of the IOS to encourage international co-operation by uniting scientists and amateurs and by improving communication and facilitating co-operation. The amateur's profound knowledge of plants and their habitats objectively qualify him as a collaboration partner for the interested professional. Vice versa the amateur can learn most about his plants when his expertise can be incorporated in professional research. However, social studies reveal a strong interest in amateur associations to isolate. Waste of resources or duplication of work might not be of prime concern. Therefore the ambitious intention to unite partners with different perspectives, motivations, and resources demands to recognise the manifold barriers to overcome. The advantage of amateur groups is their autonomy and flexibility to conduct small projects with a high cost-effectiveness. Such projects might not be easy to integrate in larger investigations without jeopardising the identity and the motivation of the amateur group. It is a challenging mission to counter a perceived threat that coordination will reduce autonomy, and concerns that the costs of co-operation will be higher than the benefits, and fear that credit for individual contributions may get lost or diffused in a coordinated effort.

It is suggested to review the IOS Internet presentation and compile information about worldwide research on succulent plants for a special website. This requires some effort in collecting information but less effort in bringing proper partners together. The interested individual who knows best what he is up to can select the most pertinent information and identify suitable opportunities to coordinate or collaborate. The entire community could benefit from this "blackboard" as it gains support, receives feedback, and provides access to research results. Since co-operation and competition are potentially conflicting issues, the willing flow of information is likely to promote desirable co-operative competition and superior results.