BULLETIN
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Key findings from the multi-disciplinary capacity development research project

Avoiding pitfalls in cross-disciplinary global health research

This bulletin summarises key areas and provides tips about how to avoid pitfalls in practice for conducting cross-disciplinary (i.e. multi-, inter-, trans-disciplinary) global health research. These key areas and tips are presented following a four-phase model of cross-disciplinary research process[1]. They are based on preliminary results from interviews with researchers and research administration team members within IMPALA.

1. Development Phase

Objectives: Develop a broad research question and vision, identify relevant disciplines and potential collaborators

Common integrative shared vision
- Match expectations and co-design programme goals

Alignment of the programme-level strategy and project-level research aims
- Maintain an element of flexibility
- Account for context specific needs
- Consider individual interests

Understanding and communicating the need for cross-disciplinary approaches
- Why, what exact approaches, and how?
- Agreed and reflected in an output plan

Management structure and decision-making
- Pre-defined and agreed consortium level strategic decision making
- External consortium representation
- Accessible platform for document sharing

Interactions and communications
- Clear, mutual agreed communication plan
- Team and consortium building

2. Conceptualisation Phase

Objectives: Refine the research questions; develop research design and an integrated framework, repurpose methods

Research question and design
- Negotiating discipline hierarchy and tensions
- Co-learning, inquiring, clarifying between disciplines
- Prioritisation of research needs
- Matching research ambition to budget at the onset

Translation goals including impact
- Knowledge mobilisation plan
- Stakeholder engagement strategy with multidisciplinary membership
- External advisory board with multidisciplinary membership
- Dissemination plan

Transition from a cross-disciplinary programme to siloed single disciplinary projects
- What cross-disciplinary research approaches at the project level? Why? How?
- Check points: Integrated outputs monitored through monitoring and evaluation plan

3. Implementation Phase

Objectives: Conduct and refine research activities

Assumptions regarding peoples understanding on roles and responsibilities
- Adequate and clear communications
- Reconciling expectations
- Accountability

Enabling environment
- Raising concerns, asking for support and providing support
- A psychological safe space

Going slow to go fast
- Getting going with research project content vs requiring speed
- Frustration can bring a tendency to fall back to ones own discipline

Internal communication across programme components
- Getting going with research project content vs cross-fertilisation across components
- Clear purposes for collaboration or learning
- What are the mechanisms and approaches?

4. Translation Phase

Objectives: Information sharing, knowledge mobilisation, translation into policy and practice

Translational skills and appropriate audience
- Knowledge mobilisation expertise
- Communication
- Stakeholder attrition
- What are the mechanisms and approaches?

[1]Hall, K.L., et al., *A four-phase model of transdisciplinary team-based research: goals, team processes, and strategies.* 2012.

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