



**FACT
SHEET
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**Network
Leadership
& Management**



**Caribbean
Farmers
Network
(CaFAN)**

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**Management is doing things right,
leadership is doing the right things”
(Warren Bennis and Peter Drucker)**

**Leadership & management are
distinct, yet complementary systems
of action**

**"Effective Leadership + Good
Management = Healthy Network"**

CHARACTERISTICS OF FARMER NETWORKS

Small farmers and farm families need to create farming systems that better meet their needs. Networks help farmers distribute information, offer moral and technical support, and share resource leads.

There are many farmer networks in the world that provide different functions, some networks provide workshops that encourage a flow of ideas while other networks have established libraries, test the use of computers in making farm decisions, sought funding for on-farm research, develop marketing linkages, and coordinate conferences on topics of interest to farmers. Most networks hold public events to teach non-farmers about their work.

Successful farmer networks assume that each person has valuable knowledge and experience to contribute, “The supportive and informal atmosphere of networks facilitates the exchange of ideas, information sharing, and testing assumptions.”

Many networks are grown out of members’ interest in making change happen: in farming practices, management methods, quality of life, and lifestyles.

FOSTERING SHARED LEADERSHIP WITHIN A FARMERS NETWORK

Unlike the myth, Leadership is not just about coercion, power or mandating behaviour nor is it only about exercising positional authority. Leadership is the process of influencing others to contribute to a shared set of goals.

Leadership is a distributed process that creates change, which occurs at all levels of an organization. Since network organisations are built on personal interactions it is then vital that a shared leadership is fostered.

Leadership is critical in defining a long-term vision and mission of the farmer network function. It asks the key questions what and why and is important in developing strategic plans for the network. Network Leadership should inspire action among members and should challenge the status quo by effecting change through new perspectives. The bottom line is that network leadership is aimed at doing the right thing.

Often outside leadership that provides an organizing structure, facilitative support and money is important to early network development but not essential. Local leadership who recruits a good mix of members is the next important step. Ultimately, leadership must be assumed within the network and rotated within the membership.

Shared leadership within the network that rotates the responsibilities of group functions is likely the most difficult transition but is critical to longer sustainability of the network. The earlier this leadership is shared among many members increases the likelihood this transition will occur. If the network becomes dependent on just one or two people, those people will eventually tire of their duties and other members may avoid filling in the vacuum.

How can leadership be fostered within an organisation?

Leadership can be nurtured and shaped through individual personal development and shared development within a group.

Select spokespeople who will represent the network to the media: Early in the network's development, identify members who have experience in public speaking or interacting with the media or build capacity of members to become spokespeople. The spokespeople may or may not be the same people as the leadership team. It is wise to encourage young people in order to sustain the network therefore it is a good strategy to have a young person as a spokesperson. Members should agree on a process for handling inquiries from the media.

THE CARIBBEAN FARMERS NETWORK (CaFAN): An example of fostering shared leadership

The Caribbean Farmers Network is a network composed of National Farmer Organisations in over 12 Caribbean territories linked by water and not by land. Each Farmer Organisation has as their membership, farmers and agroprocessors.

As such, each organisation appoints a focal point individual responsible for bridging their local organisation with the broader CaFAN network through the secretariat. The focal point position is a leadership position. In countries where there are more than two (2) organizations, the organisations get together and appoint a focal point.

As the CaFAN network is decentralized, each focal point is empowered to represent CaFAN at the National, Regional and International levels. Therefore, even though CaFAN has its board of directors and its secretariat staff, leadership is shared amongst the network membership.

Each organisation is free to rotate the focal point persons to ensure continuity and to build the leadership capacity of members.

CaFAN hosts series of physical planning workshops and events to encourage sharing of information, training for organisation representatives. CaFAN also operates virtually because it is very expensive to coordinate regional initiatives within the Caribbean. So as a result, members engage and communicate with one another over the Internet (Email, CaFAN networking platform which has a chat instant messaging facility, Voice over Internet Protocol

Technology (VoIP), CaFAN Website), and Telephone. These events and tools facilitate the nurturing of shared leadership within the network.

Leadership is influenced by deep personal values/ethics and key competencies. These key competencies are:

1. Sense making – The ability of making sense of the environment.
2. Relating – The ability to relate to others.
3. Visioning – The ability to shape a vision.
4. Innovation – The ability to invent new ideas, being creative

SENSEMAKING

Another component of fostering leadership is the process of sense making, which is the first step in analysis, which has three main phases.

- a. **Identification** - In this phase, the process of identification of internal network strengths and individual strengths and weaknesses, network motivations, and networking needs are examined.
- b. **Understanding** – The second phase is the process of understanding the network, otherwise known as group dynamics. A thorough understanding of the group, i.e. similarities and differences of interests as well as their interdependencies. A mapping of interests is conducted in this phase in order to better understand the individuals and groups that make up the network.

- c. **Outlining the Problem** – The last phase is the process of outlining the problem. This is very important in order to clearly identify the problem and the root cause of the problem. So in order to do so there needs to be a Cause/Effect analysis done, this can be facilitated by the use of tools such as the Problem Tree approach which can help identify the problem.

RELATING

- a. Network Development
 - b. Building Support for positions, Neutralizing oppositions
 - c. Mapping of Key Stakeholders – Allies and Adversaries
 - d. Communication, Negotiation and Mediation
- a. **Network Development** - Networking offers an important route for individual farmers to address their problems as well as to improve their competitive position. By coordinating their activities, farmers can collectively achieve economies of scale beyond the reach of individual small-scale and obtain bulk purchase inputs, achieve optimal scale in the use of machinery and pool production capacities to meet large-scale orders. Farmer cooperation also enables SMEs to specialize in their core businesses and give way to an external division of labour thus improving their efficiency in production. Joint work also encourages farmers to learn from each other, exchange ideas and experience to improve product quality and take over more profitable market segments.

The first stage of Network Development is Network Formation: Members within a forming network will feel everything from excitement to anxiety. Discussions may be lofty and abstract with complaints about barriers. During this stage the group is determining membership and what are acceptable group behaviors.

Within the formation stage, the following steps occur:

Potential members set up an initial planning meeting. A shared purpose is the glue that adhere most networks. It inspires the group and gives it energy. A planning meeting can be simple—a few people with shared interests coming together to talk about their goals for a network, their plans for the community, and strategies for working together. From there, they can develop a list of common values, aspirations, and purposes.

- b. **Building Support for Positions** – The second phase is the process of developing support for positions. This is best way to foster this stage is for the initial members to develop a core group.

While the size of networks can vary widely, it usually takes the momentum of four or more people to start and maintain a viable one. Most networks have one or two coordinators who do on-the-ground management tasks: keeping members informed of events or acting as contact persons. Additional core members provide leadership through event planning, decision making, or recruiting new members.

Participation needs to be flexible, allowing other members to participate at the level most

comfortable for them, whether that's attending an occasional event or committing major time and effort to helping organize a large public gathering. Networks also usually develop a member roster to encourage people to contact each other between visits.

- c. **Mapping of Key Stakeholders** – There is a need to map key stakeholders involved. These stakeholders should not just be made up of beneficiaries, but also support agencies be it Government agencies, Private Sector Agencies and other stakeholders.
- d. **Communication, Negotiation and Mediation-** Constant flow of information is important. Hence this element is necessary. Constant communication, negotiation and mediation are necessary and part of the Network Management.

VISIONING

- a. Observing Gaps – See where you want to go
- b. Creative Thinking
- c. Reframing the Problem or Challenge
- d. Choose Strategy Direction and Action Plan
- e. Goal Setting

This is an important element of leadership where team members in the network need to observe the gaps to clearly see where the organisation or network is going. This will also involve creative thinking and will focus on the reframing of the problem or challenges.

From the identification of gaps, a strategy and action plan can be formulated.

INVENTING AND IMPLEMENTATION

- a. Building and Empowering the Team
- b. Aligning Resources and Incentives
- c. Providing Necessary Resources
- d. Communicating a Consistent Message
- e. Time and Stress management
- f. Conflict Management
- g. Holding People Accountable; evaluating results
- h. Feedback and Learning

Under Inventing and Implementation, like most organizations, farmer networks often begin with considerable enthusiasm and optimism. This is the best time to get network members to agree to key program requirements such as public outreach and reporting requirements. Early on, networks may be over-ambitious causing them later to be disappointed with unmet goals. It's important for network members to set some short term goals that can be realistically achieved to maintain a sense of momentum.

Other four stages that should be considered and would cover the aspects of invention and implementation are as follows:

1. **Forming:** Members within a forming network will feel everything from excitement to anxiety. Discussions may be lofty and abstract with complaints about barriers. During this stage the group is determining membership and what are acceptable group behaviors.

Within the formation stage, the following steps occur:

- a) **Potential members set up an initial planning meeting.** A shared purpose is the glue that adheres most networks. It inspires the group and gives it energy. A planning meeting can be simple—a few people with shared interests coming together to talk about their goals for a network, their plans for the community, and strategies for working together. From there, they can develop a list of common values, aspirations, and purposes.
 - b) **The first members develop a core group.** While the size of networks can vary widely, it usually takes the momentum of four or more people to start and maintain a viable one. Most networks have one or two coordinators who do on-the-ground management tasks: keeping members informed of events or acting as contact persons. Additional core members provide leadership through event planning, decision making, or recruiting new members. Participation needs to be flexible, allowing other members to participate at the level most comfortable for them, whether that's attending an occasional event or committing major time and effort to helping organize a large public gathering. Networks also usually develop a member roster to encourage people to contact each other between visits.
2. **Storming:** Conflict can stress groups, but it can also lead to growth. Requiring the group early on to identify how they will make decisions can help these groups manage their own changes.

Personality profiles and training in group dynamics can help networks understand that these growing pains are normal and success depends not on avoidance but rather on constructive management of their differences. Members may feel inadequate, impatient, or jealousy. Behaviors can be testy, erratic, defensive, and competitive. This is a stage where the group comes to terms with what are realistic and appropriate goals.

3. **Norming:** Members feel relief, acceptance, mutual respect, and team cohesion. Behaviors include listening, acceptance of differences, trust, fun in problem solving, and creativity.
- a) In this phase, the network holds regular meetings in person or by phone. How often a network meets depends on the group's needs, how that fits with the round of seasonal work on members' farms, and the distances members need to travel to get together. A network usually meets frequently at its beginning, as often as every two weeks to build cohesion and momentum. This can be stepped back as the group develops.
 - b) Experienced networkers stress the importance of organizing meetings carefully. For example, when planning events and meetings, what outside commitments do participants have? What are their on- or off-farm work schedules? Do they need help with child care? Will transportation be needed? This can mean the difference between a successful network and one that does not quite get off the ground.

4. **Performing:** Members feel satisfaction with progress and understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. Behaviors include constructive self-change, teamwork, and constructive action.

This phase also depends on Sustainability;

The core group finds dependable ways to finance the network. The amount of money a network needs depends on the types of activities the group plans. Depending on the desired level of activity, basic costs can include photocopying, postage, telephone, food for gatherings, laboratory test fees for on-farm research projects, research equipment, and stipends for consultants or coordinators. There are many ways farmer networks support themselves, but what matters most is that the support be sustainable so the network also can be.

- **Organizational support** - Networks can raise money or reduce administrative costs by establishing valuable relationships with local extension offices, government agencies, non-profit organizations, local banks, and cooperatives. For example, these groups may sponsor a dinner after a network event or donate money or time for a particular activity.
- **Membership fees** - Establishing the scale of fees may require research into what members are willing to pay and how much is needed for the network.
- **Grants** - Many government agricultural offices, churches, farmer advocacy groups, and community organizations offer grants to support specific

projects or provide short-term organizational support. While helpful for short-term projects, grants aren't dependable in the longer term, so additional fundraising may be necessary.

One way to encourage shared leadership is to form a formal schedule of members being responsible for meetings. These meetings can be rotated among the homes of members or members can be responsible for speakers and discussions held at a public location. Another helpful plan is to schedule meetings on a regular basis throughout the slower seasons of the farming year.

In CaFAN, events are held in different island locations in collaboration with the national member organisations. In addition, each national organisation assists in event planning and coordination. This again encourages shared leadership.

Regular meetings and a schedule of individuals responsible for those meetings avoids the trap of no one responsible for gathering everyone together again.

COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR NETWORKING

The acknowledgment of leadership within the network must be larger than traditional views of leadership. There are many roles critical to network effectiveness that doesn't involve highly visible functions.

Those include meeting logistics, record keeping, food preparation, networking members with additional resources, sharing practical expertise with other members, and team building communication.

- Good leaders know how to involve others and delegate. Network sustainability can be assisted through recruitment of new people who will bring new leadership into the local group.
- Farmer networks have found there can be a rural social barrier against exhibiting leadership. To help overcome this barrier, requiring a network to do some public outreach by the second year promotes
- Networks must be built upon friendship and trust. Programs shouldn't focus solely on the technical at the expense of hindering social networking. Build in opportunity for social and personal connections.
- Networks can effectively work with agency employees coordinating the group if this person takes on the role as a co-learner with the farmers. Farmers can positively shape this role.
- Groups with broad goals tend to have a larger and more fluctuating membership. These networks can be caught up in continually grounding new members, likely hindering overall group progress.
- Group transitions brought about by funding changes, changes in membership, and completed goals create a critical stage in the life of a network. Networks should consciously plan for these transitions.

NETWORK MANAGEMENT

Good Management is important in carrying out the programs designed to achieve the goals of the network.

The concepts of Management and Leadership are distinct yet complementary systems of action. Good Management principles ask the questions how and when? It focuses on administering leadership policies and guidelines, it maintains a lively network, it controls complexity within the network, e.g. conflict arising due to differences, it initiates activities and focuses on ensuring the effectiveness of the network.

To maintain momentum, clarify during each meeting what happens next, who does what, and when and where you will gather together again. The more these details are confirmed the less chance something important isn't communicated to each other. Make sure to inform those members absent. Reminder calls about duties or meetings always improve implementation and attendance.

During network meetings, separate problem solving from decision-making. If necessary, assign problem solving to a committee commissioned to make a proposal to the network. Make sure someone within the committee is delegated to explain the proposal to the full network. The chair of the meeting then limits network discussion and brings the proposal to action-either implementation, tabled for more fact finding, or rejection.

In the case of CaFAN, during face-to-face events, one of the roles of network management is to fully maximize the event, this is done by including a training topic to the

agenda, conducting side bar meetings to address other issues and to facilitate decision-making and side bar meetings to address or plan specific projects or programmes for the network.

As a virtual network, CaFAN's network management solicits ongoing meetings through email consultations, sends information using blanket emails and conducts virtual meetings using voice over internet software such as Skype or through normal telephone communications.

“Important tip to encourage network sustainability”

Keep people informed at all times

Maintain up-to-date mailing, phone, fax, and e-mail lists of network members and key contact people. Keeping members informed maintains trust, interest, and involvement. It also minimizes misunderstandings and identifies points of disagreement before they become problems. Network members should always receive minutes from meetings, updates, news clippings, and information on future events. Adequate advance notice of meetings and other events encourages participation in important discussions and decisions.

Accountability

The foremost accountability of the network activities and resources is between the members. Secondly, networks are accountable to the stakeholders. Farmer networks should be encouraged to be good stewards of the understanding that the best return for an investment is measured progress toward network goals.

Flexibility should be provided for farmer networks to accommodate the differences in group needs and interests in how they organize themselves.

The following are key guidelines in managing a farmer's network.

1. **Shared responsibilities** - Very similar to fostering shared leadership, shared responsibilities should be encouraged. The core group should encourage all members to participate in leading the group, organizing events, or acting as farm hosts or discussion facilitators. Developing these skills is an important part of farmer-to-farmer networking across a broad base. In this way, members gain a sense of belonging and the skills necessary for continuing the network, should key leaders step down.
2. **Give everyone a chance to speak** - Most networks have members who are natural talkers and those who are quiet. Yet, what looks like a member's "nature" may be a function of how meetings are conducted. Some networks ask one member to be the discussion facilitator at each

meeting. Their role is to make sure each person contributes to the discussion. Learning to facilitate discussions is a solid empowerment skill for everyone who values collaborating with others.

3. **Keep the network informal and flexible** - Most successful networks have an informal, flexible atmosphere that feels spontaneous, creative, and stimulating to its participants. Experienced networkers observe that organizations that are open to change are most likely to survive in the long run. Participants' interests and involvement will change over time. And too much formality can crush spontaneity. So some successful networkers warn against defining group norms, network structure, or individual roles too closely.
4. **Plan diverse events and activities** - The network's appeal will be broadest and most powerful if it offers a variety of events and activities. Example- During the growing season, activities may include farm walks, picnics, field days, and on-farm research meetings or sessions. The off growing seasons offer time for workshops, social events, meetings with neighboring networks, farm record analyses, and evaluations of the past season's activities. The more members who can contribute ideas on alternative meeting times, the more likely those farmers who have small children or spouses working off farm are likely to attend.

5. **Evaluate the network regularly** - "Successful networkers say this may be the most important activity the group can undertake, even though it's most often neglected. A simple look back at the network's original goals and the accomplishments and activities designed to meet them will let participants and leaders know whether the network is meeting expectations, needs, and interests. "Evaluation is often misunderstood as an exercise in fault-finding, yet it's unparalleled as a way of building trust and commitment through respectful problem solving and guiding a group effort back to its original purpose."

IN SUMMARY...

Key Elements to Consider in Network Leadership and Management of Farmer Networks are as follows:

- Big-Picture Thinking
- Coaching
- Mediation
- Negotiation
- Contract Management
- Ability to tackle unconventional Problems
- Strategic Thinking
- Interpersonal Communication
- Team Building
- Project and Business Management
- Risk Analysis
- Lessons Learnt from existing farmer networks



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