



## **Deliverable 2.7**

### **Report of best practice in advisory services support of interactive innovation**

December 2023



## Task 2.6

### Harvest common best practice from the field reviews of practical cases

## Deliverable 2.7

### Report of best practice in advisory services support of interactive innovation

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Project funded under the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement number 863039.

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<b>PU</b>	Public	X
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<b>RE</b>	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
<b>CO</b>	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	



THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM  
THE EUROPEAN UNION' HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH  
AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME  
UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT N. 863039

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Version number	Implemented by	Submission date	Reason
D2.7	Tom Kelly		

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## Summary

**Project number:** 863039

**Project:** i2connect – Connecting advisers to boost interactive innovation in agriculture and forestry

**Duration:** 5 years

**Start date of project:** 1/11/2019

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**Deliverable:** 2.7

**Due data of deliverable:** 30 June 2023

**Actual submission date:** December 2023

**Work package:** 2

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## Executive Summary

This document outlines a process used to identify, describe and validate good practices evident in the 9 original cases and 5 additional practical innovation cases selected and reviewed in 2022 and 2023 in WP2 as described in D2.5.

These practical cases are examples of successfully established innovation cases which demonstrate advisor/innovation broker involvement support for interactive innovation. These cases were selected from successful operational groups, projects and activities within the i2connect partners, third parties and their networks. The challenge in Task 2.6 is to identify good practices and to describe them so that they are informative and useful to advisors, teachers and policy makers. These good practices will also provide a support to activities in WP3 and WP4 where they provide a legitimate validation of theory and the adoption of interactive innovation by advisory service and other innovation support actors.

## **1. Background and context of i2connect and the contribution of WP2 to the project**

The aim of the i2connect project is to build the capacity and motivation of agricultural and forestry advisors in interactive innovation methods and improve their support roles in innovation networks. Advisors will be better enabled to effectively support interactive innovation processes and thus contribute to faster and more successful innovations in rural areas.

This work package (WP2) sets out a clear objective to learn from successful innovation support practical cases which are identified by project partners in their different contexts. The main effort is to create a credible knowledge base of good practices which can be used in the training objectives, policy recommendations and the general practice of advisors who are actively involved in supporting interactive innovation with farmers.

The plan is to define and use criteria to select successful practical cases which can be reviewed by peers and the learnings used to identify, describe and validate good practices which are evident. The action is repeated in three cycles reviewing up to 10 cases in the initial round and 5 in the second round and 15 in a final round.

All partners in the i2connect project have submitted potential successful practical cases (Task 2.2). Practical cases are examples of successful multi-actor projects, activities and networks which partners feel or expect could provide opportunities to analyse and learn how they were successful and in particular the role that advisors played and continue to play in supporting that particular case. This was completed in Task 2.4 and Task 2.5, where 10 cases were reviewed and their success and experience reported in D2.5. This report provides a rich insight and source of good practices for nine of the ten practical cases. Each case report is a description and analysis of the nine cases, where learnings and success stories provide practical experience and evidence of good practice, which may or may not have been unique to that case.

## **2. Presentation of Task 2.6: Harvest Common Best practices from the field reviews of practical cases**

This task is ongoing throughout the project and is focused on identifying, describing and validating good practices from the reports of all completed field reviews. While the process is largely a desk-based review of written material where partners look for evidence of good practices by advisors supporting

interactive innovation in their work. The partners involved in this task were Teagasc, WUR, EUFRAS, SEASN, CREA, CDA France (APCA) and SZE.

The task commenced using a co-designed template as described in D2.5 where 18 good practices were described based on field reviews of 9 practical cases. A further 5 field reviewed cases form the basis of second round of harvesting good practices. The template was populated with an additional 14 proposed good practices which were discussed and modified in an online workshop with Task 2.6 partners on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023 using a Mural workspace. Arising from the workshop two more proposed good practices were described and added to the template, giving a total of 16 good practices in this deliverable.

A working definition of i2connect interactive innovation support good practices (GPs) was agreed as:

***“Deliberate actions where there is evidence showing a contribution to success in practical innovation cases involving advisors, farmers and other actors”***

This definition aligns well with two widely accepted definitions:

FAO (2013) *“A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it”.*

ENRD (2018) *“Good practice refers to strategies, programmes, projects, procedures, management and implementation practices that should be at least: Implemented with positive results; Successful, (innovative), tested and validated: it contributes to the improved performance of an entrepreneurship/farm/organisation and this contribution is recognised; Transferable: it can be adopted in and adapted to other contexts”.*

**Table 1. Good Practice Harvesting Template**

<u>Proposed Template- name and partner, description, source</u>	Good practice description, evidence and details	Commentary person 2- Reflection, Comments & score
Main Source Author(s) name		
e-mail		
Name of partners organisation		

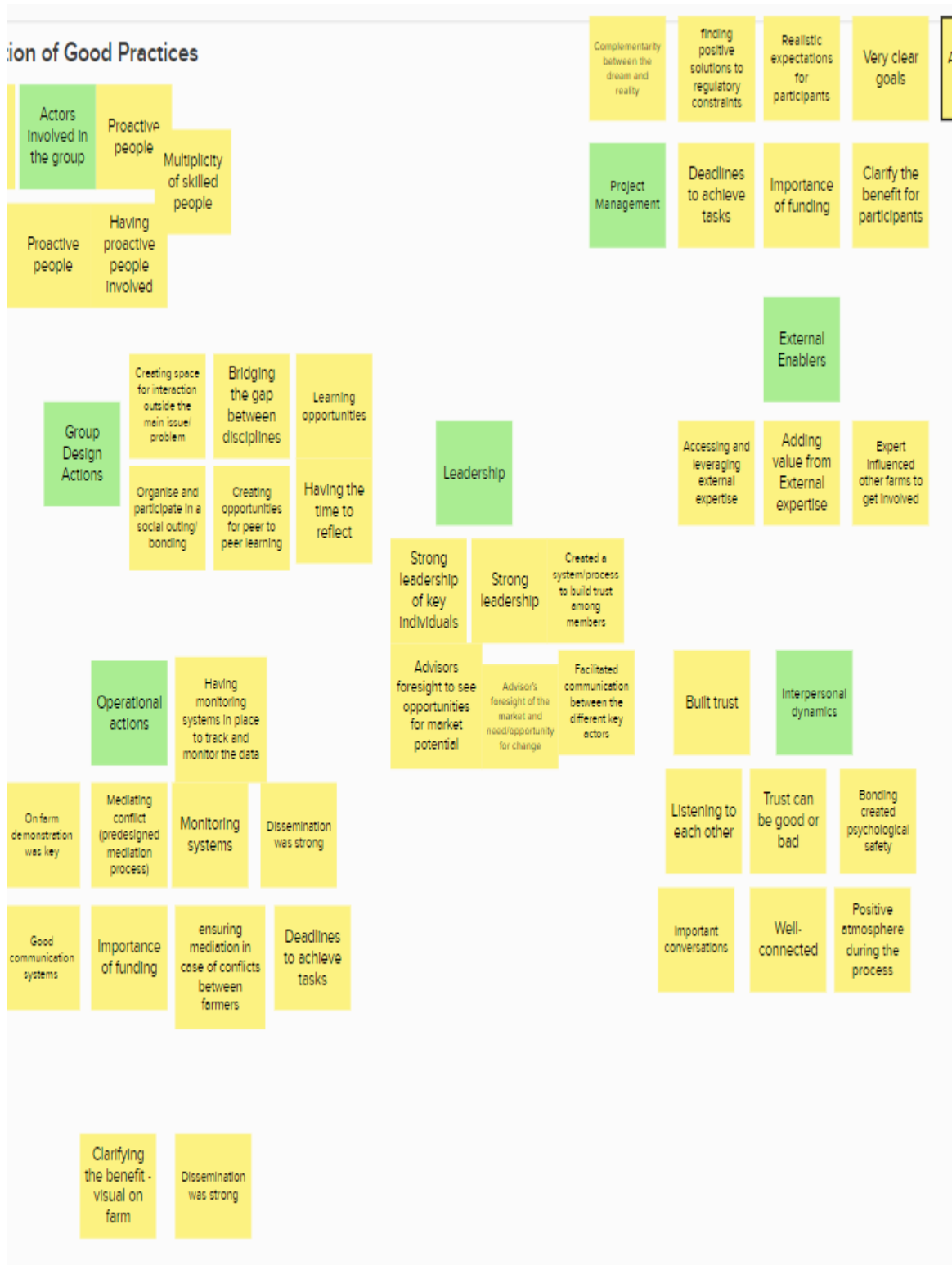


Insert photo or any visual image or diagram e.g. Social Network Analysis (SNA) diagram/Word or Image Collage (Optional)		
Good Practice Title (three to five words)		
Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice		
Good practice description (free text) Express in few words what is for you the Good Practice (limit to 60words)		
Context of environment and actors why was this done? (limit to 20words)		
Challenges addressed relating to advisors/experts (limit to 40 words)		
Challenges addressed relating to participants		
Wider Application potential		
<i>How is it transferable? And the conditions for the transferability? (limit to 20 words)</i>		
<i>How is it successful? And the key factors? (limit 20 words)</i>		
<i>How is it implemented with positive results? (limit 20 words)</i>		
Main target groups		
Agricultural sector		
Evidence of Benefits and Impacts (for farmer participants or target audience) (limit 20 words)		
<i>Contributed to Activity/Action</i>		
<i>Contribution to participants sense of ownership</i>		
<i>Contribution to personal satisfaction ( 10 words)</i>		
<i>Contribution to attitude change (10 words)</i>		
<i>Contribution to learning or knowledge gain -(10 words)</i>		
<i>Contribution to innovation (limit 10 words)</i>		
<i>Litreature references supporting this practice (limit 5 references)</i>		
Relevant training programmes and materials (limit 5 publications or videos)		
Validation: is this a good practice Yes/No/Unsure		

Partners in Task 2.6 were asked to read the field review reports (deliverables D2.3 and D2.5) and to identify potential good practices from the field reviewed cases. A 3-hour virtual workshop was held on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023 using an interactive MURAL workspace (figure 1) where partners collaboratively proposed and categorised 16 potential good practices and helped to describe these in the practice template. The good practices most evident in each practical case were listed. They were then clustered as potential good practices and were categorised

under the following headings: 1. Activities, 2. Structure and Governance, 3. Enabling Environment, 4. Communications, 5. Skills and Competence

**Figure 1. Screen shot of the MURAL workspace used to harvest good practices and to categorise them in T2.6.**



A total of 16 good practices are described and categorised presented in this deliverable. These good practices overlap with some of the good practices identified in D2.4. However they are reported in this deliverable as unique to these cases. In Table 2 and Table 3 the combined listings of good practices from round 1 and round 2 are presented and categorised by type.

### 3. Good Practices identified in i2connect

**Table 2. Good practices, May 2021 (D2.4)**

No.	Title of Good Practice	Type
1	Seeking an International Perspective	Activity
2	Diversity among actors in projects	Structure and Governance
3	Identifying and understanding farmers needs	Activity
4	Advisors with complementary skills working together	Skills and Competence
5	Planning good internal and external communication	Communications
6	Ensuring that the project is steered by the farmers and end users, not expert-driven	Structure and Governance
7	Advisors having a strong network within the AKIS	Activity
8	Institutional support and creating an enabling environment	Enabling Environment
9	Regular upskilling of advisors	Skills and Competence
10	Knowledge and ability to write project proposals and access funding	Skills and Competence
11	Providing opportunities for social interaction among partners	Activity
12	Having the opportunity to learn from other successful practices	Enabling Environment
13	Developing a communication channel between research and advice	Communications
14	Create an environment to enable the advisors to create and build a wide network	Enabling Environment
15	Upskilling of farmers	Skills and Competence
16	Reflection and capitalisation during the project	Activity
17	Integrating farmers in research and experimentation	Enabling Environment
18	Involve an advisor, who has a good relationship with the farmers and a real interest in the issue	Skills and Competence

**Table 3. Additional Good practices, December 2023 (D2.7)**

No.	Title of Good Practice	Type
2.1	Clarify benefit of the participants	Activity
2.2	Bridging the GAP between disciplines	Activity
2.3	Monitoring system to build trust	Activity
2.4	Conflict management - Dissolve disputes	Structure and Governance
2.5	Social bonding	Communications
2.6	Demonstrations at farm or field level	Activity
2.7	Strong leadership from key individuals	Skills and Competence
2.8	External Expertise	Skills and Competence
2.9	Sending the right signals to Actors	Communications
2.10	Getting Funded	Structure and Governance
2.11	The right mix of knowledge and skills	Skills and Competence
2.12	Proactive vs reactive	Skills and Competence
2.13	Positive atmosphere	Enabling Environment
2.14	Important Conversations	Communications
2.15	Actors emotionally involved (motivated)	Skills and Competence
2.16	Building and maintaining Trust	Activity

## 4. Descriptions of Good Practices for the enhancement of interactive innovation (Round 2)

Each of the 16 new good practices are described in this section.

### 4.1. Clarifying benefit for the participants

*Participant's expectations are set early in the process of joining an innovation project, it's natural for individuals to look at their own self-interest first and then the wider community. The role of the advisor working with a group is to manage the expectations so that actors arrive at a clear picture of how the innovation will impact on them and their business and the other actors involved.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Contract rearing group, Go Citrus

**Description:**

At first, the farmers had many reservations, but as a group the farmers worked with the advisor and others to ensure that the service was of high quality and offered a fair and valued option to both the dairy farmer and the contract rearing farm. In order to change long established practices, participants need to work out for themselves the clear benefits and to see the benefit for their group and the contracted partners. Creating conditions for a group to share and be open with each other on farm legal, technical, financial and marketing issues is sensitive and delicate challenge for advisors, information meetings are important to set realistic expectations for participants.

Participants need to have a clear understanding of what is in it for them. Advisors need to show that the proposed innovation is profitable and sustainable. This helps to convince different parties to participate. This also relates to the need for different actors and disciplines to have similar perspectives on the added value.

Putting the farmers' previous experiences and achievements into the discussion was central and to shaping a trustful, open community, allowing this (radical) innovation was accepted and embraced by other farmers.

**Wider application potential:**

In almost all situations where a major change of practice is required clarity about the benefits, risks, costs and returns is required at the beginning and throughout the project. Advisors are in a great position to do this in an open and transparent

way, so that the right questions are asked and answers given so that there is a clear picture of the outcome for everyone.

**Benefits**

Common understanding, buy-in from different actors, clearer expectations

Literature: [Facilitating MSPs : a sustainable way of changing power relations? \(wur.nl\)](#)

Relevant training programmes and materials:

[Multi-actors agricultural innovation platform: guideline for master trainers \(fao.org\)](#)

Contributions: Dora Lakner, Tom Kelly,

## 4.2. Bridging the gaps between participants

*Having a diversity of actors in a group is important has already been described as a good practice. However, this demands an effort from the advisor to facilitate interactive processes where this diversity can be advantageous and non-contentious. Benefits (added value) may vary between actors and within actor groups. In an interactive project where there is a commercial relationship between actors the expectations of individuals needs to be supported and worked on by the group, throughout the project so that it is fair to all parties and sustainable.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Contract Rearing Groups.

**Description:**

Interactive innovation is a multi-actor process. In order create innovation unusual combinations of disciplines and actors are needed, in the Contract Rearing Case the advisor worked step by step towards bridging the gap between two areas, contract rearing farmers and dairy farmers. These different actor disciplines often carry baggage from the past and preconceived beliefs that may not be easily overcome. The role of the advisor is to recognise this and to address it from the start so that it is clear what different actors and different actor groups get from the relationship. Being able to communicate with different target groups was important and in this case there were specific legal aspects, which needed to be included in the draft contract.

**Wider application potential:**

This good practice has the potential to be applied by any advisor or farmers group who are faced with a challenge that requires a major strategic change to the farms business model. For the Dairy farmer who supplies the animals this reduces labour and land area required and simplifies the operation. For the beef farmer it provides a diversification and a specialisation potential. Because this co-operation is supported with a legal contract, it is more extreme than other forms of co-operation. In this case, the contract is an important part of bridging the gap. In the context of other co-operations where you have a group of smaller farmers who can as a group offer a service for which there is a demand, it is a huge incentive and shows a wider application potential for other initiatives.

**Benefit:**

The implementation of this good practice by advisors leads to a business relationship between actors, which goes beyond the contractual commitments and leads to a shared ownership of the success as individuals and as a group. There is clearly more at stake than the financial returns for the farmer's contract rearing but also a pride in their own achievements and contribution to the success of an important and valued industry.

**Literature:**

[report-preparing-for-future-akis-in-europe\\_en.pdf \(scar-europe.org\)](#) page 107 to 112

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

Many training courses in facilitation for example CECRA

Contributions: Dora Lakner, Tom Kelly

### 4.3. Monitoring system to build trust

*Within interactive innovation projects, sharing data within the actors is an essential part of the ongoing communications and decision support system at individual and group level. At this level of interactivity, the agreements on sharing and use of data from monitoring systems and protocols which are accurate, reliable and verifiable, adds value to the relationships of the different actors and builds a higher level of trust in the innovation process.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Contract Rearing

**Description**

Measurement, recording and reporting data is key to continuous improvement and to stronger relationships. It also adds value to interactions between actors. It

adds to motivation of individuals and allows the advisor to add valued inputs at individual level and to the group and wider community.

Planned meetings with the local district veterinary officers by both farmers. Regular weighing of stock should be undertaken to identify underperforming animals for timely corrective action. The ICBF weight recording link will allow the dairy farm to view weighing's and monitor heifer performance. In the first year of the contract agreement, both parties found it beneficial for the dairy farmer to hold onto a percentage of the heifers and rear them himself as a means of comparison. This can be used as an aid in the trust building process.

The detailed contract agreement included a monitoring system in order to clarify the roles and build the trust between the actors, involvement of an independent body in this case, vet, was a very good choice.

**Wider application potential:**

It is a huge advantage to have access to individual and group data in sufficient detail to monitor the health and performance of animals. In contract rearing case the data does not lie and where it is possible to share data in a group context there is always a benefit. Where it is possible to monitor and share data between farms it shows an interest and a higher level of trust which underpins the sustainability of the relationship.

Advisors acting as honest brokers who interpret farm data and support farmer decision making are building trust among actors at the group level where the outcomes are transparent and visible.

**Benefits:**

There were immediate benefits for farmers who were contract rearing for the first time, the advisor and dairy farmer could be alerted to health or performance problems. The economic success of the new enterprise was linked to specific targets and it was possible to quickly identify problems and manage them at individual or group level. For established group members the monitoring systems provided valuable benchmark data for continuous improvement of their management.

Farmers in the contract rearing group seem to compete amongst each other. That became clear when discussing the importance of setting performance targets for the rearing. Setting targets and presenting the farms' results on reaching the targets seem to trigger farmers to perform better.

**Literature:**

[Understanding the social and economic value of sharing data \[report\] | The ODI](#)



[Data sharing platforms: How value is created from agricultural data - ScienceDirect](#)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributors:** Dora Lakner, Tom Kelly,

## 4.4. Conflict management - Dissolve disputes

*Conflict management within a group needs an agreed process, the advisor may not be the right person to take on this role. It is the advisor's role to help the group to agree to a process which could include an independent intermediary person appointed by parties within the group to dissolve disputes and find solutions beneficial to the group.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Contract Rearing

**Description:**

The use of an independent intermediary person appointed by both parties to dissolve disputes and find solutions when things don't go to plan.

The advisor played a special role in mediating between the parties at the start and during a conflict situation. He did this naturally, and realised it during the field review talks, what role he actually took and the way he did it. However, he admitted that a planned approach was needed for mediation of more serious conflicts. A process is described and agreed in the rearing contract, however disputes which arise within the contract rearing group also need a process and nominated mediator.

**Wider application potential:**

At the outset a group should agree a conflict management and dispute resolution process and appoint a mediator. There are many templates available, which are used in business and community clubs and groups which offer guidance for this. The advisor may not want to do this role in conflict situations, which arise within the group.

Advisors acting as honest brokers who interpret farm data and support farmer decision making are building trust among actors at the group level where the outcomes are transparent and visible. Planning in advance how conflicts can be avoided and dealt with in groups and between individuals is part of a broker's job.

**Benefits:**

More success, less stress and better inter actor relationships.

**Literature:**

<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/~assets/doc/hr/Five%20methods%20for%20managing%20conflict.pdf>

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

<https://cloudacademy.com/course/module-3-managing-conflict/other-practical-steps/>

**Contributors:** Dora Lakner, Tom Kelly

## 4.5. Social bonding

*Making time and opportunities for social activities as part of meetings and field trips generates a less formal atmosphere where people communicate at a different level. They get to know each other at a personal level as well as at a business level and understand their different situations better. This leads to a better and more trusting relationship.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Contract Rearing

**Description:**

A means of building a long-term trustworthy relationship between contract rearing farmers and dairy farmers is fundamental to the success of rearing groups. While each farmer was focused on how the business relationship would benefit both, the other side of this was the social side of the relationship where the need to understand the wider implications for different farmers and their families. In developing trust amongst discussion group members, social bonding seemed to play a role. Social bonding strengthens the relation between the farmers and has a positive effect on the exchange of information.

**Wider application potential:**

There are lots of possibilities to organise small side events around meetings where groups share some interest outside the main agenda or purpose of the meeting. The advisor should make use of these opportunities to allow time for informal interactions. This might be as simple as a cup of coffee together, a night out, a day trip on a bus to an event. Agreement to organise and do something where everyone can participate.

**Benefit:**

It gives confidence to actors to speak freely and to build longer lasting relationships. This is an important role for advisors working with newer formed groups and older ones where they need new energy. It is often much appreciated by farmers who need to interact with peers but may not get the opportunity due to workload.

**Literature: The Discussion group Facilitators hand book p93 ingredient 3 fun and enjoyment**  
<https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/the-discussion-group-facilitators-handbook.php>

**Relevant training programmes and materials: CECRA modules 9 and 16**  
<https://www.cecra.net/en/overview-of-the-modules/>

**Contributions: Dora Lakner, Tom Kelly**

## 4.6. Demonstration at Farm and Field level

*Demonstration at farm and field level generates a platform for focusing actors on the technical, logistical, social and environmental issues around a particular innovation challenge. The demonstration provides a background, which is an attractive and positive experience and a solid basis for interaction of different actors in a practical environment.*

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Salad Potatoes

#### **Description:**

Having demonstrations at farm and field level where actors can see and monitor the practical results of the innovation and to look at variations of the practice and discuss these with other farmers, advisors and researchers.

When a new practice is introduced and discussed our natural instinct is to wait and see how others get on. This slows down the innovation process. The demonstration farms in the Salad Potato project acted as a focal point and reference for the other farmers and allowed the adviser and external experts to support decision making in real time.

A major challenge was to get farmers who were already growing salad potatoes to share their experience and to see the benefit to them for the bigger picture. This was helped by arranging farm visits with the external expert consultant, research and advisory staff, to agree and plan the set-up of demonstration plots on these farms.

The challenge for advisors was to convince farmers to radically innovate in their farm practices. Although they see the empirical evidence the question remains

whether as a farmer you can leave your old practices behind and change to another crop completely.

Farmers must be able to see whether this radical change for them is feasible. While in the case there is no attention paid to farmer's willingness and ability to radically change, we must assume that this is dealt with on a one-to-one basis through the advisor and that their involvement in the project shows interest in the possibility of making the change.

**Wider application potential:**

Being able to demonstrate practice in the field and discuss the results is transferable: all you need is a farmer willing to share data and experience and design a demonstration around that farm or plot.

Even very simple demonstration plots can generate great interactions where other farmers underpin the results by sharing the experiences on their farms as well. More successful demonstration events could also be that farmers would have time to share their doubts and share their own strategies to go through such a radical change.

**Benefit:**

When producing a very specific product to a strict specification, having demonstration plots on farm with similar conditions, results can be very powerful when shown and demonstrated in the field.

The farmer can make better decisions based on the data and observations from demonstrations and the peer-to-peer influences of other farmers.

**Literature:**

[STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF ON-FARM DEMONSTRATIONS: KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESS \(glos.ac.uk\)](https://www.glos.ac.uk/research/centres/centres-for-research-in-agriculture-and-rural-studies/structural-aspects-of-on-farm-demonstrations-key-considerations-in-the-planning-and-design-process)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

[Design-guide-for-on-farm-demonstrations.pdf \(farmdemo.eu\)](https://www.farmdemo.eu/design-guide-for-on-farm-demonstrations.pdf)

<https://www.cecra.net/en/overview-of-the-modules/>

**Contributions: Tom Kelly, Geoffrey Hagelaar**

## 4.7. Strong leadership from key individuals

*Supporting actors who are prepared to step into leadership roles is a good practice and is an incentive for participation in interactive innovation projects and networks. Clearly, the need for formal structures exists in groups and these have a role, however the ability of key individuals to step into leadership roles to support the group or project is important and requires an open approach to allowing and enabling individuals take on roles and challenges on behalf of the group.*

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

GATE Innovation, Salad Potato, Contract Rearing

### **Description:**

Interactive innovation projects require leadership, this comes in many forms top down and bottom up. The key to success is that there are strong leaders who can step into roles and be accepted at different stages in the life of the project.

Different actors bring different skills and may perform key roles in projects. However, the challenge is to get these actors to put aside their own ambitions, egos and interests, to interact, address a common problem or issue, and at times be prepared to take the lead or to follow the lead of others. Creating a culture where leaders emerge from within the group to fill the leadership gaps is important. Actors who lead even minor things are valued by others for their contribution, while others may be happy to follow but if the need arises, they feel comfortable and confident that they too can fill a leadership role or gap.

### **Wider application potential:**

The personal interests and personality of individual actors need to be managed so that all are valued to an equal extent. The group should avoid giving way to overly dominant actors who do not listen or have empathy with others. It is all about the TEAM and it is very important for less dominant actors to be offered a leadership role even in small things.

Creating a culture where leaders emerge from within the group to fill the leadership gaps. They are valued by others for this contribution, while others may be happy to follow but if the need arises, they feel comfortable and confident that they too can fill a gap.

### **Benefits**

The value of situational leadership in groups is that the responsibility is shared, the advisor should step back and allow a leader to emerge from the group. Having

been trusted to perform a leadership role can be hugely motivational and adds to the personal development of the individual.

Literature: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Situational\\_leadership\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Situational_leadership_theory)

Relevant training programmes and materials:

<https://situational.com/solutions/curriculum/situational-leadership-curriculum/situational-leadership-building-leaders-2/>

Contributions: Tom Kelly, Jane Kavanagh

## 4.8. External Expertise

*Within Interactive Innovation projects, using an external expert to support technical, market, legal, financial, environmental or regulatory innovation opportunities is a practice which can support, energise and unify the group. The technical contribution of the expert may already be known and practiced by the group, but the reassurance that they have access to a higher level of expertise is valued by them as individuals and as a group.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Salad Potato

**Description:**

Bringing external expertise to a group can help to bring a confidence and discipline to a group, which can provide motivation far beyond the technologies and practical solutions they bring. In the Salad Potato case the expert was recognised by existing growers and they valued having the expert as part of the project.

With many innovations where there is a lack of knowledge, practical skills and experience, it is of value to have external expertise available to support the innovation process.

Even where there is no lack of knowledge an external expert, being involved, can raise the profile of the group and attract new people, providing added confidence and affirmation to the actors in the group as they look for knowledge and skills gaps within the challenge and motivate a deeper understanding.

Expertise costs money and is often not available when needed, by bringing the expert into a group the cost was shared.

**Wider application potential:**

Expertise costs money and is often not available when needed, however where knowledge gaps exist and external expertise is available it should be used.

This good practice has been seen to motivate and give confidence to both farmers and advisors. The expert technical knowledge added to the advisors and groups practical knowledge enables the group to take on challenges which otherwise could be seen as being too risky.

### **Benefits**

The added value is in the reassurance that experts may have access to knowledge and experience which can be called on when needed.

**Literature:** [Full article: Studying expert influence: a methodological agenda \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:** [The External Innovation Partners You Need Most - IdeaScale](#)

[How to Select and Hire an External Expert Consultant - ProsperSpark](#)

**Contribution:** Tom Kelly

## 4.9. Sending the right signals to Actors

*Giving the right signals to participants is important in creating a successful interactive innovation group. These signals can be verbal or nonverbal; they can be words or actions. It is important that advisors are aware of the need to be careful how they are perceived by other actors and the degree to which their words and actions can have different meanings to different actors. Building trust is dependent on creating a good impression and delivering results which actors can see, these signals are the basis of this relationship.*

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Go Citrus

#### **Description:**

Choosing the right person as project manager in Go Citrus who was seen as sensible, likeable and had skin in the game (personal interest), went a long way to win the trust of the wider groups of actors. Trust must be built up slowly and be prepared to be tested at different stages. In any group trust should not be taken for granted and it is important to give time and effort to those who are less trusting and prepared to ask difficult questions. Time must be allocated, allowing this interaction can happen at different stages. The signals given to actors plays a huge

part in winning the support and confidence of those actors both in terms of the interactive innovation support process and in terms of the immediate challenges facing actors.

Within projects different languages are spoken by different actors and different preferred speeds of development exist amongst actors. One bridge being the project manager or nominated leaders who, in facilitating the interactivity, are in a strong position to influence the continuity of the project through signals both in terms of language and how actions are planned, implemented and evaluated. These signals can be successful in stimulating the same language and understanding between actors but also taking into account the attitudinal barriers of farmers to the new technology being introduced.

Participants should be encouraged to be open-minded towards other partner groups, about their own contributions to the project and the speed at which they can partake in the development of the project. On the other hand, signals verbal or nonverbal, can if misdirected, undo the good work of building trust and confidence in the project.

**Wider application potential:**

Introducing new technology is happening more frequently where different actors with different backgrounds are included. Building bridges between these partners through signals from and to the leadership of the project is widely applicable to many situations where a shared understanding and trust is valued.

**Benefits:**

The relationships between actors requires a commitment to work together to some end, this relationship needs to be fed throughout the project with signals which are understood and have meaning for actors and actor groups.

All actors felt listened to and involved and their commitment was rather high (as described) this is supported by the commitment of partners to the continuation when the current financial support stops.

**Literature:** <https://9principles.com/learning/send-the-right-message/>

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contribution:** Tom Kelly, Geoffrey Hagelaar, Jane Kavanagh



## 4.10. Getting Funding

*This good practice adds to GP 10 “Knowledge and ability to write project proposals and access funding” which addresses the need for skills and competence in project funding applications. GP2.10 is a variation which identifies with the positive and sometimes negative effects of funding for projects. The positive effect is that something happens that supports the innovation process and the actor’s efforts to innovate as a group. The negative of getting funded is that the conditions of funding may well pull actors in a different direction to what they intended with additional workloads, or restrictions which limit the flexibility of project. The other issue with funding could be that it becomes all about the funding and not about the actors and their innovation challenge.*

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Corn silage case Slovenia, Go Citrus

### **Description:**

Funding can enable individuals to take time to plan and execute a project and know that their effort will be fully or at least part funded. Funding brings a discipline to a project which helps to motivate and professionalise the actions. In the Corn Silage case the advisor adapts to the role of finding ways to support an initiative of a farmer to develop a new technology innovation, one of these was to secure some funding.

There are many streams of funding open to innovation projects from local, regional, national and EU level. These can be public or private sources, but they are competitive and require some administration and evidence of actions and results. Selecting the most promising call to enable success of the proposal requires knowledge and experience of different funding sources. Such an overview is difficult to have for a farmer or advisor who has no experience.

It may be difficult to put a lot of time and effort into preparing project proposals with no guarantee of acceptance. To select the right funding call, can be challenging and take a lot of time. This advisory time may not be approved if the advisors boss needs to be convinced.

This is a new experience for many farmers and third parties, they can be put off by the amount of administration and rules. The farmer had to comply with deadlines ruled by the proposal and call requirements.

### **Wider application potential**

Advisors can help either directly or indirectly to identify and secure funding. This advisory practice could stimulate initiatives among farmers to innovate. However,

as funding can be very competitive the advisor and farmers involved need to be realistic and have a clear proposal to attract the interest of funding sources.

**Benefits:**

Funding has clear benefits for the farmer and advisor who has a good fit where the funding speeds up or enables the project. However, it may also bring a heavy reporting workload and a requirement for additional reporting. Funding should always be looked at as an enabler for interactive innovation processes and not the objective of the project.

**Literature:** [Are rural regions prioritizing knowledge transfer and innovation? Evidence from Rural Development Policy expenditure across the EU space - ScienceDirect](#)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:** [A Guide to EU Funding - Google Books](#)

**Contributions:** Tom Kelly, Geoffrey Hagelaar

## 4.11. The right mix of Knowledge and Skills

*Creating a group with the right mix of knowledge and skills is important for the success of an interactive innovation project. This requires careful consideration and planning from the outset, it is wise to anticipate that some gaps will exist and that a process is needed, to fill these gaps where possible or to navigate around the gaps while still focused on the prize of a successful innovation.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Corn silage system,

**Description:**

In setting up a new project, there is a need to anticipate the skills and knowledge necessary for success. The mix of technical, mechanical, electronics as well as project management and funding in the corn silage project was one of the positive aspects of the project. The initiating farmer had a particular skill set, he was aware of the skills and knowledge gaps and the value of sourcing these elsewhere, the advisor helped to design the project so that the knowledge and skills gaps were minimised throughout the project. This extended from the early stage of the project preparing the application for funding to the dissemination of the innovation to other users.

Recognising the need for help with facilitating information and experience sharing from key informants leads to interactions with people of different disciplines and backgrounds. Being able to ask the right questions on technical issues and discussing them accelerates idea-development with others and helps to implement an innovation or how to deal with innovative ideas in a partner's specific situation.

**Wider application potential:**

This good practice is very transferable across other advisors and should be part of the discussions with different actors at the very start of the project. What skills and knowledge, strengths and weaknesses do we have in the group? What do we do to bring in the necessary skills and knowledge needed to fill gaps and to enhance the activities and increase the chance of success? Where major gaps exist in the group, the actors should be prepared to “press pause” and give some time to evaluate the next steps in the process.

**Benefits**

This good practice ensures a better chance of success and a smoother process within the innovation spiral where there is more confidence among the actors that they can deliver through their own combined effort. Their ability to apply their combined knowledge and skills by interacting in the day-to-day challenges of the innovation project is a reward in itself but also backed up by the realisation that if there are challenges, they are in a good position to look for help outside the group.

**Literature:** Many Human Resource Management textbooks and websites address these in the context of employed labour and project management.

[https://uniseco-project.eu/assets/content/resources/02 deliverables/UNISECO%20D7.1%20Guidelines%20for%20the%20Selection%20of%20Multi-Actor%20Platform%20\(MAP\)%20Members%20publication.pdf](https://uniseco-project.eu/assets/content/resources/02_deliverables/UNISECO%20D7.1%20Guidelines%20for%20the%20Selection%20of%20Multi-Actor%20Platform%20(MAP)%20Members%20publication.pdf)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpd7DLGmH\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpd7DLGmH_U)

**Contributions:** Tom Kelly, Jane Kavanagh

## 4.12. Being Proactive versus being Reactive

*Proactive participants in interactive innovation groups sets the culture for the whole group. They want to move on and try new things and want others to contribute with similar enthusiasm and pace. Their energy is infectious and valued by their peers. On the contrary, people who are reactive, spend a lot of time talking*

*and thinking about what they will do and may not complete any action until some external event or request forces them to act.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Salad potato, Contract Rearing, Go Citrus

**Description:**

Being proactive in a group context is important as some people are more action oriented and want to get started while others are more reactive or even non active. This is a problem in multi actor groups where there are no clear expectations set for actions to be completed or targets to be met. We often see a lot of great discussions leading to no action. Actions can be as simple as making a timely phone contact, asking a question, holding a meeting or sending vital information or complex in making an investment, test a new product or undertaking strategic change in a business or research programme.

In the Salad Potato case there was a need to move quickly to fill a growing market opportunity, so it was dependent on several actors agreeing and completing actions in step.

Technical challenges for farmers switching growing systems, supply side and marketing logistics were all dependent on each actor taking a risk and a leap of faith that there would be a successful outcome for everyone.

Bringing in external expertise and demonstration farmers helped to hit the ground running (start the action) and brought on board some of the existing growers in a positive and proactive way.

**Wider Application Potential**

Action and initiative taking can be actively encouraged in a multi-actor group from the start with good results even if this is to proactivity and discourage the wait and see attitude, where there can be a tendency to think that this someone else's role or responsibility. When this approach is open and shared with others in an honest and transparent way, proactivity is expected, recognised and appreciated in the context of the challenges facing the group. The advisor should ensure that proactivity is never dismissed or underappreciated, in this context.

There also needs to be good example from the main actors or leaders to encourage action and to have open discussion on the experience so that others are also enabled and encouraged to act.

There is a risk in organisations that proactivity suffers due to multiple layers of management and bureaucratic systems. Many large organisations reward proactivity of employees through open innovation prizes and team-based incentives and awards.

**Benefits:**

This good practice may contribute to action plans for participant actors which are part of the group effort and clearly focused on the target. The sharing of one's own experiences/practices with others, will give an increase in satisfaction for both advisors and participants.

**Literature:** The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308521X22001081>

[https://uniseco-project.eu/assets/content/resources/02-deliverables/UNISECO%20D7.1%20Guidelines%20for%20the%20Selection%20of%20Multi-Actor%20Platform%20\(MAP\)%20Members%20publication.pdf](https://uniseco-project.eu/assets/content/resources/02-deliverables/UNISECO%20D7.1%20Guidelines%20for%20the%20Selection%20of%20Multi-Actor%20Platform%20(MAP)%20Members%20publication.pdf)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributors:** Tom Kelly, Jane Kavanagh

## 4.13. Positive Atmosphere

Farmers are generally optimistic in nature. However, the environment they live and work in can be negative and influenced by interactions with other actors, family, friends and media. Farm advisors working with individuals and groups addressing specific challenges try to maintain a positive atmosphere and keep the focus on the individuals' issues, planned actions and results.

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Go Citrus, Salad Potato

**Description:**

Having a happy and positive atmosphere helps to get the best out of actors who may not know, understand or trust each other. The capacity of a group to create this atmosphere was evident when actors have opportunities to help each other to make better decisions or to sort out logistical or technical problems. Open collaborative structures with clear goals, roles and responsibilities helped, as did fair and transparent leadership.

It could be that in the Salad potato case, this was accidental, however it is much more likely that the strong buy-in from all actors and the positivity of some individual actors contributed in an atmosphere which was driven by a common goal and an acceptance of the need for shared leadership in a period of change.

While technical challenges relating to seed, husbandry and harvesting allow no room for mistakes, these were well supported. However, the group took a leap of faith in the market growth and long-term stability, which was rewarded. This positivity was supported by genuine trust between all actors.

**Wider application potential:**

This good practice may be least transferable due to the risk that the attitudes of actors may not be easily changed if there is a lot of negativity within actors and actor groups. The use of i2connect interactive innovation theoretical tools and frameworks can help in building long-term relationships and exploring the positive energy of actors. The value of facilitation training for advisors and the completion of i2connect training modules will equip advisors with the skills to help groups to develop and maintain a positive atmosphere.

**Benefits:**

The environment in which farmers operate can be negative, bad weather, poor prices, new regulations, disease outbreaks etc. This background sets the base for a farmer's outlook. If things can't get much worse people with positive outlook believe that they will get better while those with negative outlooks may not agree. The advisors' role is to support all farmers and to help through a thought process where they can see a more positive future. There is a huge benefit in a group situation to explore the positives and negatives through discussion and to help individuals to see the big picture.

**Literature:** <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S004016252100648X>

The literature is full of information about how both positive and negative emotions can be contagious.

<https://www.civilsocietyacademy.org/post/multi-actor-partnerships>

[https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Success%20Factors%20MAP\\_EN\\_HF-1.pdf](https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Success%20Factors%20MAP_EN_HF-1.pdf)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

[\(PDF\) How, When, and Why Bad Apples Spoil the Barrel: Negative Group Members and Dysfunctional Groups \(researchgate.net\)](#)

<https://youtu.be/0Lev1mnonUM>

**Contribution:** Tom Kelly

## 4.14. Important Conversations Matter

*Advisors engage with their farmer clients on a day-to-day basis using many different communications channels. These conversations should be used to dig deep into the topic, so that a level of understanding is reached which leads to decision making based on better understanding rather than compliance.*

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Go Citrus

#### **Description:**

The need for important conversations in organisations and between actors from different organisation is key to initiating and supporting interactive innovation. These conversations are the building blocks for working together and collaborative actions, they build relationships and trust between actors and stimulate action. In the Go Citrus case, conversations between key actors in the early stages of the project formed the basis of the approach taken. There was agreement that farmers needed time and effort to discuss the environmental challenges and listen to others before taking action so that they could assess the value added of the new irrigation control system before installation. Having these conversations with farmers was aimed at establishing a high level of trust in the system and supports provided by advisors. Even where there was believed to be an existing high level of trust between advisors and farmers, the conversations were considered important and it was argued that trust could be good or bad. Trust is good when people accept the course of action and do it but have made a decision themselves. Trust is bad if they trust the other party and don't think it through. These advisor farmer and farmer to farmer conversations help to think it through.

#### **Wider application potential:**

Conversations as part of a communication plan should go far beyond the what, how and when to do and focus on the why. Planning for this level of interaction is part of the innovation support strategy and needs to influence the trust in the technology and reasons for the adoption of new technology.

Identify people/actors who are open and willing to get involved and build a conversation which is positive and action oriented.

#### **Benefits**

Advisors who have long established trust relations with clients build on this through conversations with and services to their clients. This two-way

communication helps the farmer and advisor meet the challenges and opportunities on the farm in a knowledge exchange process. The level of trust should always be protected by the conversations with and understanding of the farmer. There is evidence of important conversations leading to a sense of urgency and action. As conversations are usually two way, there is more ownership and commitment.

**Literature:** [Conversations and idea generation: Evidence from a field experiment - ScienceDirect](#)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:** CECRA training modules 1 and 2.

**Contributors:** Tom Kelly, Jane Kavanagh, Patrizia Proietti

## 4.15. Actors emotionally involved (motivated)

*The value of tapping into the emotional side of people in an interactive innovation project is that you can help them to try harder, be happier and more motivated in finding satisfaction from their efforts and contributions towards sustainable solutions. Having a good knowledge of the actors and their beliefs, emotional needs and ambitions helps to interact with them at this emotional level.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Go Citrus

**Description:**

Getting actors emotionally involved as well as technically involved is important as we move away from traditional and standard production systems. Many farmers are technically competent and like to try new technology. However, in Go Citrus the project needed to work hard to get all farmers interested, this required a plan to tap the emotions and deeper interests of farmers.

Introducing complex irrigation technology on a regional basis to different regions in Spain identified the need to persuade/influence individuals as well as institutional actors.

The major challenge was to change practice and to get as many farmers as possible to adopt the new way with significant environmental benefits.



**Wider application potential:**

There are many ways to motivate actors in an interactive innovation project setting up teams and competing for prizes being a good way to tap into the competitive side of people. The value of emotional involvement is that people who are emotionally involved try harder and go beyond the expected not because they have to but because they want to.

**Benefits:**

Creating this emotional reward for people is related to the positive atmosphere and the general sense of satisfaction with the process and results.

**Literature:** [Land | Free Full-Text | Multi-Actor Partnerships for Agricultural Interactive Innovation: Findings from 17 Case Studies in Europe \(mdpi.com\)](#)

[IFSA 2010 \(wur.nl\)](#)

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions:** Tom Kelly, Jane Kavanagh

## 4.16. Building and Maintaining Trust

*The development of trusted relationships between actors in interactive innovation projects, mirrors the relationships that farmers have with their farm advisors. Transactional relationships (one to one) are part of trust building. However, a deeper relationship is formed when the relationship moves deal in groups where the breadth and depth of issues are greater and challenging due to the different actors and their needs and wants.*

**Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Go Citrus, Contract Rearing

**Description:**

The deliberate actions of building and maintaining trust relationships between actors is evident in many cases and has been mentioned as an outcome of many practices related to interactive innovation cases. Trust is important in implementing change at farmer level and in the acceptance of new or better practices and technologies. Trust can be a good asset in getting followers to take advice and action it. There is a negative effect if the trust relationship is strong and does not encourage reflection and ownership of the action by the actors involved.

New technology represents a step change for farmers and advisors. The change from tried and tested production systems to more environment friendly systems is difficult and urgent. It is important for the planning and execution of projects to build and maintain trusted relationships by engaging at a wider community level engagement and getting a shared ownership of the problem and solution.

Introduce a new technology to change irrigation practice in two Spanish regions and getting citrus farmers to change their irrigation practices by using a new technology represented a major challenge. Similar challenges of implementing change in different contexts and regions have shown that trust among actors is hard earned and easily damaged.

**Wider application potential:**

There are many situations where trust needs to be build up from a low or negligible level, having been built, it needs to be maintained. Farm advisors who have worked with farmers themselves and their advisory companies have established levels of trust which are maintained through service delivery and regular contact. This is an asset when there is a difficulty or challenge where change is needed and farmers need advice and support which they trust to be in their long-term benefit.

**Benefits:**

Creating a trusted relationship is of benefit to the advisors in the support they provide to their client farmers while the benefit to the farmer is that they can get on with the job of running the farm without having to spend a lot of time making decisions.

**Literature:** <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00267-022-01647-2>

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yxNJUfe-jQ>

**Contributions:** Tom Kelly, Jane Kavanagh

## Annex 1. Analysis of the practical cases and evidence of good practice

No.	Title of Good Practice	Agrosyl	DIAL	Star Terre	SUAS	TRANS IRRI.MA	ALT Forage	Finn D.Groups	Technique day	Hungarian cattle	Contract Rearing	Corn Silage	Go citrus	Salad Potatoes	innovation gates
GP 1	Seeking an International Perspective			1				1	1						
GP 2	Diversity among actors in projects	1	1	1	1			1				1			1
GP 3	Identifying and understanding farmers		1		1		1	1			1	1	1	1	
GP 4	Facilitator team with complementary							1							
GP 5	Planning a good internal and external	1	1	1							1	1	1		1
GP 6	Ensuring that the project is steered by the farmers and end users, not expert-	1	1				1				1			1	
GP 7	Advisors having a strong network within						1		1						1
GP 8	Institutional support and creating an	1	1		1		1		1	1		1	1		
GP 9	Regular upskilling of advisors		1	1	1								1		
GP 10	Knowledge and ability to write project proposals and access funding	1	1	1	1		1						1		
GP 11	Providing opportunities for social		1		1					1	1				
GP 12	Having the opportunity to learn from other successful practices				1			1		1	1			1	
GP 13	Developing a communication channel between research and advice					1	1								1
GP 14	Create an environment to enable the advisors to create and build a wide		1		1	1		1		1					
GP 15	Upskilling of farmers	1	1	1	1								1	1	
GP 16	Reflection and capitalisation during the		1	1				1					1		
GP 17	Integrating farmers in research and	1	1		1										
GP 18	Involve an advisor, who has a good relationship with the farmers and a real							1	1	1	1		1		
GP 2.1	Clarify benefit of the participants											1	1	1	1
GP 2.2	Bridging the GAP between disciplines										1				1
GP 2.3	Monitoring system to build trust										1	1		1	
GP 2.4	Conflict management - Dissolve disputes										1				
GP 2.5	Social bonding										1		1	1	
GP 2.6	Demonstration at farm or field level												1		
GP 2.7	Strong leadership from key individuals											1	1		1
GP 2.8	External Expertise										1				1
GP 2.9	Sending the right signals to Actors														
GP 2.10	Getting Funded										1	1			
GP 2.11	The right mix of knowledge and skills										1				
GP 2.12	Proactive vs reactive										1	1		1	
GP 2.13	Positive atmosphere										1			1	1
GP 2.14	Important Conversations												1		
GP 2.15	Actors emotionally involved (motivated)												1		
GP 2.16	Building and maintaining Trust											1	1		1