

## **Session 4: Workshop 1**

**Title:** Public-private sector partnerships  
Organising for collaboration: developing an institutional strategy

**Presenter:** Professor R. Natarajan, Director, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India

**Chair:** Professor Abdul Bayes, Vice-Chancellor, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh

**Rapporteur:** Dr Nigel Voak, ACU

Professor Natarajan began by noting the need for a multi-discipline, institutional strategy as regards collaboration. He observed that there were various benefits from collaboration, such as the avoidance of duplication and harmful competition, and a variety of possible obstacles. The latter might include: a lack of institutional and logistic support (not least of which can be a lack of commitment at the top), and the absence of a real desire for collaboration or, indeed, an understanding amongst the collaborators of their respective goals. He emphasized in turn the need for:

- system openness and transparency
- reciprocity
- trust and commitment
- flexibility and
- above all, individuals who can interface between the various collaborators

Professor Natarajan then pointed out that considerable effort needs to be made in the initial contacts, where the principal goals should be carefully mapped out. It is obviously beneficial, he observed, if the organisations fit together smoothly, and it is important to this end that academics adopt a customer service orientation, which industry expects.

He then went on to consider some cases studies of collaboration, with respect to the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, before considering briefly the various types of partners that universities can collaborate with. He ended by focusing again on university/industry collaboration, noting that, if they are to succeed, there needs to be a consensus amongst staff and faculty, at least in the part of the university concerned, about the benefits of such collaborations. This was the only way, he felt, to avoid the frustration often felt by industry about the lack of commitment to co-operation amongst academics. Truly successful collaborations, Professor Natarajan argued, should aim to involve both the heads of the university and the private-sector company concerned, and to establish formally how the two institutions should work together. Progress should be carefully monitored and evaluated by committees, and the resulting documentation should be used to demonstrate the benefits of collaboration, with future such projects in mind.

## **Discussion**

In the discussion that followed there was some criticism that industry should in general set out to help universities, and support general education, on the basis that their own graduates came from this source. In his reply Professor Natarajan vigorously argued that industry had no philanthropic duty, and that universities needed to earn their support, and should be grateful that industry took their graduates.

It was also observed that Professor Natarajan's comments on collaboration were very much from the perspective of a technology institute, and that the needs of less commercially oriented universities should also be borne in mind. In return, Professor Natarajan noted that collaborations need not be financial in nature, but also remarked that financial collaborations could involve a much broader spectrum of faculties than was sometimes supposed, pointing to the possibility, for instance, of social scientists becoming involved in the inter-personal aspects of the collaborative process.

Professor Natarajan ended by emphasizing the great importance of the person responsible for managing the collaboration, and argued that industry and universities should not be seen as competitors, but rather as partners working together with each other.

In his summing up, the Chair, Professor Abdul Bayes, argued that the examples that Professor Natarajan had provided from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, were highly market-oriented, and thus of very little relevance to general universities. He felt, though, that the social objectives of universities were not lost in private-public sector collaborations, and that universities should help generate their own resources. The market, he observed, cannot be shunned by universities, whose academic staff will go elsewhere if they are not properly remunerated. To this end, he concluded, universities need collaborations in order to survive.