



Norwegian food system stakeholders' perspectives on participating in a cross-sector research partnership. A qualitative study

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Background

NewTools is a Norwegian cross-sector research partnership comprising 28 partners from research institutions, government, food industry, and civil society. NewTools aims to develop scoring systems for nutrition and sustainability and to explore applications of these in the Norwegian food system.

Factors influencing nutrition-related cross-sector partnerships in the Nordics have been scarcely investigated. Participants' own perspectives can help understand barriers and enablers for such partnerships.

Results

Expectations to participation

Theme 1: "Gathering around the table"

- The value of collaboration and the importance of including a range of stakeholders to address food systems challenges.

"(...) It's time to sit down together at the same table and solve these problems."
(Participant 3, civil society)

Theme 2: "In a position to influence"

- Expectations to influencing the project, European Union policy, and protecting a range of interests.

"(...) It is important to be able to participate and help steer what is being developed"
(Participant 5, food industry)

Conclusion

In this study, NewTools appeared as a strategic arena for promoting and protecting interests. Our findings suggest that trust and motivation for collaboration may facilitate the project. However, the presence of conflicting interests and expectations around influence will likely require good communication and project management going forwards.

Objectives

We explored (i) partners' expectations for participation in the NewTools project and (ii) their reflections around conflicts of interest (COI) and stakeholder management in an early project phase.

Methods

We conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with 17 NewTools partners from all sectors in June 2022 and analyzed these using reflexive thematic analysis.

Reflections around COI

Theme 3: "Acknowledging tension"

- Some partners worried that powerful stakeholders would dominate the project.
- Many potential conflict areas were acknowledged. These were considered legitimate parts of collaboration.
- Appropriate project management was considered important and sufficient for preventing tensions and COI.

"A concern we perhaps have, is that there are very different power relations within the partners involved. So that is a concern, how the power relations will be between the different participants". (Participant 9, civil society)

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