

# The challenges of coordination

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**T**he role of coordination is fundamental in the development of the relations and synergies that are essential for the good functioning of a small group of scientists specialised in very different fields. They develop thanks to personal and technical relations of course, but also by means of the links formed between the Labex and partner institutions. The challenges are as follows for coordination:

**1. Strategic vision:** an overall strategy must be proposed for the activities of the Labex to have both impacts of interest to the strategic objectives of research at Embrapa and benefits for its international partners. The coordination must understand the different environments in which the Labex operates and the expectations of the various stakeholders. It must thus share a common vision and objectives with the team in spite of the diversity of the expertise and persons that form it and difficulties resulting from geographic scattering. This forms the real challenge of finding common references for the supervision of individual activities and establishing transdisciplinarity within the team.

**2. Credibility:** Labex Europe aims at mobilising high-level scientific and technological knowledge from both Brazil and Europe by developing cutting-edge research projects. The coordination must work with the team to maintain a high credibility level for Embrapa and the Labex in terms of scientific competence and the capacity and determination to respect technical, financial and institutional undertakings.

**3. Parity:** another challenge is that of positioning the Labex and Embrapa as true peers of European institutions, making an intellectual undertaking to identify and develop activities that are of strategic value for both parties, to provide joint funding for these activities and to mobilise the human resources required to complete them.

It is necessary to convince partners that the aim of the Labex is to build and strengthen cooperation and alliances between peers and not to beg for assistance (in the paternalistic sense of the word) or to purchase services.

**4. Inspiration:** numerous activities and research themes of interest for Embrapa and Brazil can generate benefit for European partners and these benefits are not always perceived as such immediately. A challenge for coordination is therefore that of convincing partners of the shared benefits of these collaboration projects. Conversely, when opportunities for collaborative projects with great impact arise and are not at first perceived as such, the coordinator, aided by the team, must succeed in ensuring that the need for their re-evaluation is recognised.

**5. Impacts:** the Labex is designed to produce different impacts. Coordination must organise activities to make them visible:

- *for partners*, the hosting of Brazilian scientists must facilitate the organising and funding of cutting-edge strategic research, enable publications in reputed journals and exchanges of scientists and students;
- *for Embrapa*, the expected impacts are the incorporation of advanced, promising themes in its research programme, high quality publications co-authored with international partners and exchanges of scientists, post-docs and students. Coordination must propose a large portfolio of varied projects for international cooperation in research and training. Embrapa also expects coordination to make substantial contributions to developing innovative models of management of research and rendering them operational.

**6. Continuity:** the presence of a Brazilian scientist in a European institution is a significant investment for Embrapa in financial terms and in researcher-time. The work carried

out leads him/her to cooperation relations that go beyond his/her field of expertise. The person who replaces him or her does not necessarily join the same institution or team and may have a different specialisation. This results in two challenges for coordination: (a) working with the researcher so that his/her work allows the development of the cooperation expected by Embrapa and (b) the proactive development of models of relations that enhance the durability of the partnerships established during the stay so that the return on Embrapa's investment is as good as possible.

**7. Integration:** Embrapa is developing Labexes in the United States, Europe and Asia (coordinated from South Korea). Embrapa and several of its partners also wish to develop triangular structures to support and cooperate with other regions of interest, such as the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some work by Labexes in advanced biology and on HLB (Huanglongbing, a serious disease of citrus) shows that this is possible. This is important value-added for the Labex—being a facilitator of partnerships between institutions and research laboratories in countries in different continents. Coordination serves to mobilise, motivate, facilitate and execute, in contact with all the players involved. The materialisation of these ambitions is perhaps the main challenge for the coordination of all those involved and of each Labex.

**8. Representation and management:** the challenge most expected in the coordination of the Labex is doubtless representation of Embrapa with regard to European institutions and partners and the management of the resources and institutional relations established by preceding coordinators.

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