

Forming, Developing and Sustaining Social Partnerships

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Project objectives and aims

This project investigated the principles and practices underpinning effective social partnerships that support VET and enhance workplace capability development.

It had 3 specific aims; to:

1. investigate key principles and practices that underpin the formation, development and maintenance of social practices that are effective in assisting localised decision-making and capacity building associated with vocational education;
2. describe effective enactment of these principles and practices; and
3. identify ways in which these principles and practices create robust social partnerships.

Social partnerships

‘Social partnerships’ are localised networks that connect some combination of local community groups, education and training providers, industry and government to work on local issues and community-building activities (Seddon & Billett 2004).

Approach

- 10 social partnerships investigated in Queensland and Victoria
- Interviews with up to three participants within each partnership
- Data returned for verification and endorsement

Table 1: Characteristics of types of partnerships

| | genesis | goals | processes |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>Enacted partnership</i> | From outside the partnership which is to be the target of the engagement, yet with goals or resources that the community is interested in engaging with | To secure outcomes aligned to external funding body | Responding to requirements and accountabilities of external partner/sponsor through engaging the community in activities associated with those goals |
| <i>Community partnership</i> | Concerns, problems, issues identified within the community | To secure resources to address issues, problems and concerns, often from agencies outside the community | Consolidating and making a case and then working with external agencies to secure adequate responses |
| <i>Negotiated partnership</i> | Need to secure a provision of service or support that necessitates working with partners | To develop effective working relations outside of the organisation that comprises the social partnership | Working with and finding reciprocal goals with partners |

Partnership work

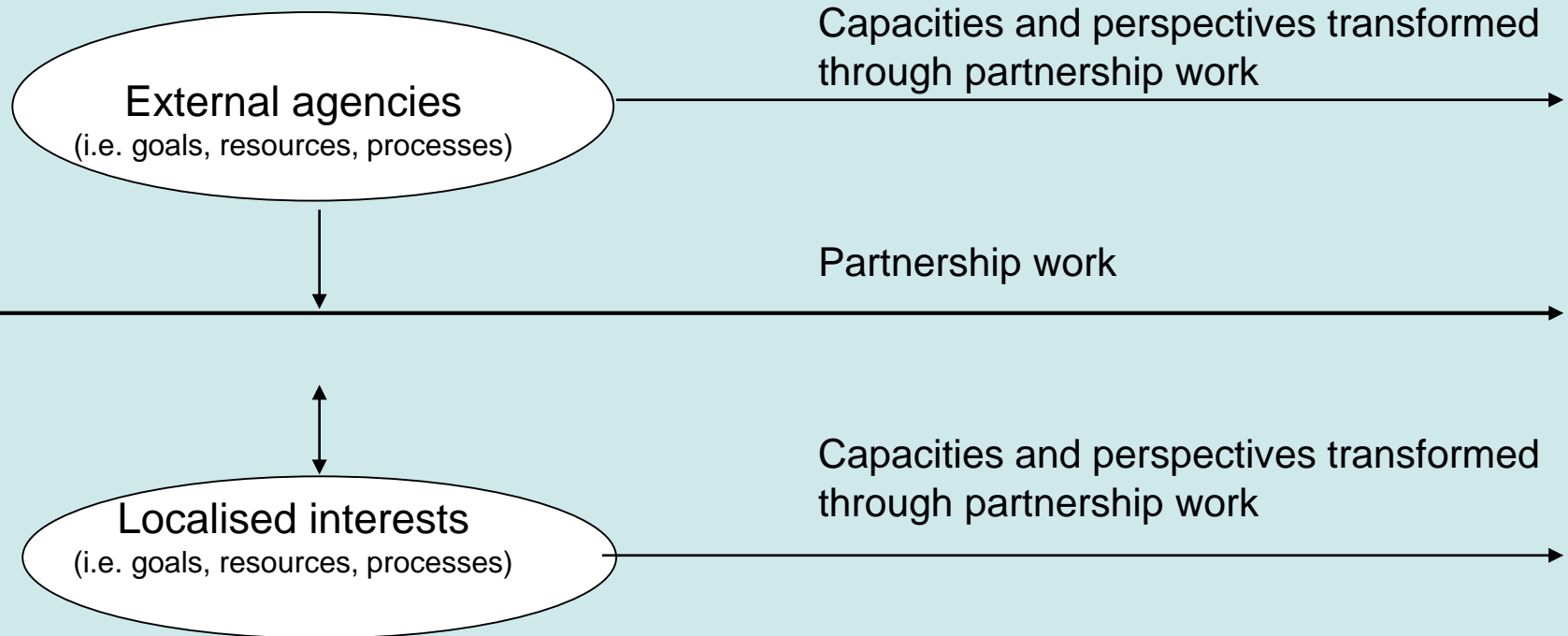
At one Victorian LLEN, the EO talked about the way she built relationships of trust. She described herself and her role as:

“...It’s like being a madam. You’ve got to get the lighting right, get candles on the table, and good food and good wine, and people comfortably into the room together, good music, so I set the ambience and to get the ambience happening takes a bloody lot of work- so that when they [working party and committee of management members] get there everything’s right.”

Partnership work

“partnerships is the way the ITC does its work” (QCS&HITC)

A central concern was to identify the processes, or social practices, that constitute social partnerships and the kinds of work that enable partnerships to be developed in ways that make them effective and successful overtime. We call these processes of working together ‘*partnership work*’.



Five dimensions of partnership work

Cultural scoping work

“...The benchmark of a commitment of a partner is their willingness to give something up...” (LLEN)

Connection building work

Be patient and chat so that all parties are heard – government heard and people heard as well.” (DBCYP)

“[Our] group meetings were powerful events – safe places. Government people seeing the change that can occur if they listen with their heart. The community learned – it shifted in understanding. The heart was fundamental... the spirit of it all took the people with it...” (DBCYP)

Capacity building work

“Recognise the value and input, keep the space fluid, create opportunity through dialogue, you can’t use the ‘in and out’ approach but pathways...” (DBCYP)

Collective work

“You need different personalities involved in the group BUT make sure the negative ones are not invited to the next meeting! It is important that the skill base of the group is complementary. ...You need to come together as a core... but be accepting of parallel players and their needs. The core talked carefully before each meeting and discussed how they would approach issues. They would massage egos if necessary.” (MI)

Trust building work

“The [partnership] engendered and deepened relationships. It continued to work and commit to incremental changes so it is relationship based. The heart commitment – you want to make a difference – is central to the capacity to move through... (LLEN)

Five principles of partnership work

Each dimension of partnership work is underpinned by an important principle:

1. Building/ Maintaining shared purposes and goals.
2. Building/ Maintaining relations with partners.
3. Building/ Maintaining capacities for partnership work.
4. Building/ Maintaining partnership governance and leadership.
5. Building/ Maintaining trust and trustworthiness.

Together, the five dimensions and the principles create practices which form the basis of partnership work over time.

Issues presented by findings

- Partnership work is complex, highly contextualised and demands significant cross-cultural and interpersonal capacities.
- The practices within SPs are shaped by:
 - The character and purposes of the SP
 - The readiness of partners
 - The kinds of organisations that auspice the SP
 - Its history and culture
 - The scope of challenges before it
 - The frequency with which goals shift

While we can define a social partnership according to the genesis of its formation, in fact, the qualities and forms of social partnerships are not fixed. They take on different forms as they evolve.

However, genesis and antecedent conditions for its existence did shape the scope of partnership work undertaken.

Issues presented by Phase 1 findings

- Partnerships just don't happen as result of external demand: they have to be enabled and supported. Social partnerships, themselves, need to initiate, develop and sustain the capacities required for partnership work.
- Partnership work requires working across difference in ways that mirrors trends in contemporary society
- The principles act as a kind of applied ethics, providing universal guidance about what is needed to make partnerships work.
- Partnership work in SPs might then be seen as an expression of the significance of networks in contemporary society.
- The qualitative nature of this work might, indeed, be generalisable beyond SPs into other kinds of work and settings.

Implications of Phase 1 findings

- Government and government agencies may find evaluating social partnerships could be best achieved through appraising the quality and sustainability of partnership work.
- This framework draws attention to the substantial 'emotional' (soft skill) dimensions of partnership work.
- Locating the partnership as a specific moment or node within a wider network (rather than a single initiative) might open up possibilities for understanding SPs in wider social systems.

Issues presented by Phase 1 findings

- Understanding partnerships and partnership work within distinctive localised needs/skills ecosystems may provide a way of more tightly contextualising and conceptualising the motivations, goals, work practices, resources and definitions of success.
- Consideration of the dimensions, principles and practices within social partnerships may be an important reference point for the development of vocational curriculum that authentically reflects current and global organisational forms.