



Leaders, Ideas & Partnerships

The Agora Think Tank's 2nd Conference
14 June 2007, at Zinc in Federation Square

Partnerships in Perspective plenary discussion

Facilitator – Tim Orton (Managing Director, The Nous Group)

Panellists – Rob Hunt (Managing Director, Bendigo Bank), Liz Gillies (Grants Executive, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust), Tom Bentley (Executive Director, Department of Premier & Cabinet), Tony Nicholson (CEO, Brotherhood of St Laurence), Prof Mark Considine (Head of School, Criminology, Sociology & Political Science, University of Melbourne)

Focus – Distilling the themes of the conference and the key take-aways

Conclusions by Tim Orton

The Panel discussion resulted in 6 lessons that might be carried forward.

- 1. Macro-opportunity of common economic and social benefit**
Looking at Australia's economic and social conditions over the next 2 decades, there appears to be real potential to simultaneously deliver better economic outcomes (by increasing participation) and reduce social exclusion (assisting people into productive work). Compared with the last 30 years, there is common cause between economic activity and social inclusion.
- 2. Micro-opportunity: common commitment to real problems**
Successful partnering requires a focus on the real problems that are adversely affecting people, and a common aspiration and commitment from partners as to how to solve these problems.
- 3. Skills of partnering**
Partnering successfully across sectors to solving these real problems does require some specific skills, such as mediation, being able to walk in the others' shoes, etc.
- 4. Inclusive mind set**
Even with these skills, successful partnerships also require an inclusive mind set: creating space for effective, inclusive conversations; investing in building trust between partners, being prepared to be different from today - in particular in terms of how partners engage with each other. For example, not for profit agencies need to have confidence that their business partners are interested, want to understand, and want to be more significantly involved than just providing cash to the partnership. Businesses need to understand the distinctive needs of the people they are helping and how not for profits work.
- 5. Good design, but iterative**
Effective partnerships do require good design, but will inevitably be iterative as well. Putting effort into the partnership design is a good investment, but partners should not impose a rigidity when flexibility is required.
- 6. Passion / transformative**
Effective partnerships will still require passion to carry them over the difficult times. Success will require that individual leaders bring their personal passion to solving the problems. And partners should anticipate that their partnership may be transformative - potentially of their organisation, and at least of the individuals involved in the partnership.