

**A Literature Review on
Cross-Sector Partnerships
for the Agora Think Tank**

By the Department for Victorian Communities

January 2007

Table of Contents

Background..... 3

Definitions 4

Drivers of Partnerships..... 8

Process of Partnerships..... 8

Success Factors and Barriers to Partnerships..... 10

Key Lessons from the Literature..... 17

Conclusion 19

References 20

Background

The Agora Think Tank is collaboration between not-for-profit, business and government sectors to identify opportunities for cross-sector partnerships that address disadvantage in new and different ways. In 2004, the 1st Agora Conference brought together leaders from the business, not-for-profit and government sectors to explore how they could work together to build inclusive communities. In 2005, in conjunction with the Victorian Government's social policy, *A Fairer Victoria*, the Agora Think Tank was launched to 'promote the economic participation of young people and their families through workforce participation'. To advance this agenda, the Agora Secretariat agreed to establish four Working Groups in specific areas impacting young people and opportunities for innovation. In addition, a Common Themes Working Group was established to draw together the innovations revealed by other Working Groups and develop strategies for their scaling up and replication. Membership of the Working Groups represents a range of business, community and public sector organisations, including the Department for Victorian Communities, Melbourne Citymission, Nous Group, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, The Hornery Institute, Frankston City Council, VCOSS, Victoria Police, Bendigo Bank, The Body Shop, Committee for Melbourne and the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Introduction

This literature review is to assist the Common Themes Working Group to collate and interpret the findings from the research papers and public forums held by the other four Working Groups. The conclusions from the literature review can add value and context to the findings of the Working Groups and inform Agora's strategy to promote cross-sector partnerships.

The literature review is divided into the five sections:

- Definitions of cross-sector partnerships.
- Drivers of cross-sector partnerships.
- Organisational process of cross-sector partnerships.
- Success factors and barriers to cross-sector partnerships.
- Key lessons gleaned from the literature.

Section 1 defines the concept of cross-sector partnerships, drawing on definitions and characteristics of partnerships from the research.

Section 2 examines the drivers of cross-sector partnership. It identifies the motivations that bring different organisations together to develop partnerships.

Section 3 focuses on organisational processes of cross-sector partnerships to highlight the different stages of partnership identified in the literature.

Section 4 addresses the transferability of successful cross-sector partnerships. It collates best practice, and identifies barriers that may impede the success of cross-sector partnerships.

Section 5 summarises the key lessons gleaned from the literature that could be used in developing, implementing and assessing cross-sector partnerships. It also identifies research needs in this field.

Methodology

This paper provides an overview of the key learnings in the field from the significant body of literature in the field of cross-sector partnerships. Academic papers, 'how to' manuals, toolkits, and cases studies on cross-sector partnerships can be widely accessed through dedicated journals and online resources. The methodology of the literature review largely draws on academic and policy papers as distinct to the widely available internet resources such as manuals, toolkits and case studies. The selection of academic and policy papers is based on their particular relevance to the analysis of cross-sector partnerships. They are drawn from various fields including health, education, public policy, organisational theory and not-for-profit management through a comprehensive search of relevant databases from academic libraries. A number of relevant policy papers on cross-sector partnerships produced by government departments also will be considered. The paper will draw marginally on material from internet resources of particular relevance to broader discussion of cross-sector partnerships. This focus on research and policy papers will provide the underlying models and theories of cross-sector partnerships and comment on the prerequisites for effective partnerships and factors contributing to an effective partnership process.

Definitions

The notion of partnership has gained increasing currency in policy debates in recent years. The widespread references to partnerships can be found in policy documents, speeches and academic journals. It has captured the minds of many politicians, policy analysts and practitioners with the partnership model touted as the best way forward to tackle social problems. This rising interest in partnership has been demonstrated in a range of fields including education, health, housing and crime prevention.

However, the notion of partnerships is not an uncontested idea. Demos (2000: 26) comments that partnerships 'far from bringing coordination to tackling social problems, partnership working is spinning off into a series of haphazard initiatives without a clear set of priorities'. Hess and Adams (2001: 13) states that rhetoric of partnerships has become a 'muddle of ideas' in which 'potentially useful concept is in danger of becoming just another public policy reform fad'. Williamson (2004) notes that 'partnerships has now become the cure-all and we risk a kind of partnership-itis where everything gets renamed and the term is used so indiscriminately that it becomes meaningless'. The notion of partnership is further complicated by a 'terminological quagmire' with an abundance of related-terms found in the literature such as networks, alliance, cooperation, interorganisational collaboration, coordination, tri-sector partnership, multi-party working and joined up working.

A growing body of literature has attempted to bring greater clarity to the confusion surrounding partnerships. Researchers have looked to approaches from a variety of disciplines including organisation studies, public policy, sociology, political

science, economics, not-for-profit management, health care, and education to provide the theoretical underpinnings for the study of cross-sector partnerships. However, these multidisciplinary studies have seen the development of a body of literature marked by inconsistency in its approaches and definitions. Larner et al (2004) noted that that these diverse approaches to the studies of partnerships can be characterised by 'methodological anarchy and definitional chaos'. This conceptual haziness presents a number of challenges in setting the parameters of the literature review.

For the purposes of Agora, this literature review is focused on cross-sector partnerships with social outcomes. A number of researchers have attempted to define cross-sector partnerships. Amongst the definitions cited are:

- People and organisations from some combination of public, business and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial, innovative relationships to address common societal aims through combining their resources and competencies (Copenhagen Centre 1999).
- A public private partnership that is generally a medium to long-term relationship between the public and private sectors (involving the voluntary and community sector), involving a sharing of risks and rewards and the utilisation of multi-sectoral skills and finance to deliver desired policy outcomes that are in the public interest (Geddes 2005: 2).
- People and organisations from some combination of public, business and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial and innovative relationships to address common societal aims through combining of their resources and competencies (Seddon et al 2005: 567).
- Voluntary collaborative efforts of actors from organisations in two or more economic sectors in a forum in which they cooperatively attempt to solve a problem or issue of mutual concern that is in some way identified with a public policy agenda item (Selsky 2005: 849).
- A partnership is collaboration among business, non-profit organisations and governments in which risks, resources and skills are shared in projects that benefit each partner as well as the community (Hutchinson 1998: 7).

These definitions provide some common understandings of what is meant by cross-sector partnerships with differing emphasis on levels of collaboration between partners and motivations of partners. Some definitions stress the level of shared responsibility and risks and other definitions focus on social outcomes. However, a strict definition cannot capture 'variety of arrangements with different purposes, structures, time-scales, operating procedure and members' of partnerships (Wildridge et al 2004: 4). It is commonly agreed that there is no universally accepted definition of partnerships (Hutchinson 1998: 8).

More common in the literature is an attempt to scope out the key characteristics that differentiate partnerships across the broad spectrum of collaborative activity. These essential elements better capture the diversity and complexity of cross-sector partnerships than a simple definition.

In a review of statutory partnerships, Geddes (2005) outlines the key features of cross-sector partnerships. These features include:

- Relationships that are medium to long-term rather than those that are quick fixes.
- Expectations that are shared by all partners.
- The involvement of a wide range of partners.
- Sharing the risks, rewards and resources on the part of all partners.
- Where the shared aim is to deliver outcomes and services in the public interest on a continuously improving basis.

The Audit Commission (1998) identifies the key characteristics of a cross-sector partnership as a joint working arrangement. These characteristics include:

- The partners involved independent bodies.
- There is agreement to cooperate on a common goal.
- A new organisational structure or process is created to achieve this goal.
- A joint program planned and implemented.
- Relevant information, risks and rewards are shared.

From a review of cross-sectors partnerships in children services, Percy-Smith (2006) draws out the some shared characteristics. They include:

- The structure and/or way of working that involve two or more organisations.
- The organisations retain their own separate identities (i.e. this is not integration).
- The relationship between the organisations is not that of contractor and provider.
- There is some kind of agreement between organisations to working together in pursuit of an agreed aim.
- This aim cannot be achieved, or is unlikely to be achieved, by any one organisation working alone.
- Relationships between organisations are formalised (i.e. partnership is more than a network) and are expressed through an organisational structure and the planning, implementation and review of an agreed programme of work.

From a wide ranging review of the literature on cross-sector partnerships, Wildridge et al (2004) highlights variants along similar themes. The common elements that define cross-sector partnerships are:

- Initiative between organisations, groups, agencies, individuals, disciplines.
- Common aims, visions, goals, missions and interests.
- Joint rights, resources and responsibilities are shared.
- New structures and processes.
- Autonomy and independence.
- Equality.
- Trust.

In a study of integrated governance and partnerships in service delivery, the Queensland Department of Communities (2004) lists the key features of cross-sector partnerships as being:

- Joint decision making rather than principal-agent relationships i.e. shared authority and responsibility.

- Engaging partners early to develop joint outputs and arrangements rather than the government alone defining both problem and solution then choosing the most cost-effective private company for production or service delivery.
- Longer-term time frames over traditional contracting arrangements.
- Shared reward and mutual benefit.
- Joint investment, shared liabilities and risks.

These studies pinpoint a number of key characteristics that clearly differentiate cross-sector partnerships from the contractual or transactional end of collaborative continuum. A partnership that has a social outcome requires a greater sense of mutuality beyond service agreements, referral or information sharing. Overall, a number of common characteristics emerge from these studies. These key elements include:

- Common vision and goals.
- The involvement of organisations from two or more sectors.
- Shared decision making and responsibility.
- Shared risks and resources.
- Desire to address a social issue.
- Agreed outcome.
- Being long term.
- Having autonomy.
- New structures and process.
- Equality and trust between partners.

While these characteristics may not be essential to all cross-sector partnerships, they provide key features to distinguish partnerships from what may be a partnership in name only.

Within these parameters, there are still significant distinctions between cross-sector partnerships. Geddes (2005) distinguishes between voluntary partnerships and statutory partnerships. Statutory partnerships are typically mandated by legislation for specific purpose in contrast to voluntary partnerships that are convened by organisations for their common strategic purpose. Seddon et al (2005) divides partnerships in the following forms.

- *Enacted Partnerships*: initiated by central agencies but have goals shared by the community.
- *Community Partnerships*: originate in the community to address local concerns but reach out to an external agency.
- *Negotiated Partnerships*: formed between partners with reciprocal goals to secure service or support and require effective negotiation of interests and agendas.

Selsky (2005: 850) distinguishes voluntary partnerships between ‘transactional’ – short-term, constrained, and largely self-interested orientation – or ‘integrative’ and ‘developmental’ – longer term, open-ended and largely common interest motivation. For Agora’s objective, cross-sector partnerships that are ‘developmental’ voluntary and formed over the longer term for social outcomes are the most relevant to address social disadvantage. The studies cited in the remaining sections of the literature review are restricted to these types of cross-sector partnerships.

Drivers of Partnerships

The underlying assumption of partnerships is that they are a 'good thing' and will bring benefits beyond the capacity of an individual organisation (Larner et al 2004; Geddes 2005; Hutchinson et al 1998). The supposed benefits that motivate organisations to invest significant time and resources in pursuit of this goal have been analysed by several studies. The most common driver, identified in studies, is the existence of complex social problems that cut across the traditional boundaries that necessitate organisations to work together to tackle them adequately (Wildridge 2005; Audit Commission 1998; Geddes 2005).

From the study of cross-sector partnerships in children services, Percy-Smith (2006) specifies a number of reasons for the formation of partnerships. These reasons include:

- The elimination of contradictions or tensions between policies, programmes or interventions.
- More effective deployment of resources.
- More integrated and effective services.
- An enhanced capacity to resolve difficult policy issues.
- An increased understanding and trust between organisations.
- A greater willingness to innovate and take risks.

From a broad ranging review of cross-sector partnerships literature, the Audit Commission (1998) suggests a number of rationales for cross-sector partnerships, including the desire to:

- Deliver coordinated services.
- Tackle 'wicked issues' or interconnected problems.
- Reduce the impact of organisational fragmentation and minimise the impact of any perverse incentives that result from it.
- Bid for, or gain access to, new resources.
- Meet a statutory requirement.

Glendinning et al (2002: 5) presents a model which identify particular drivers of the partnerships. The 'synergy' or 'added value' approach is aimed at increasing the value created by combining the complementary competencies of the separate organisations. The 'transformation' approach emphasises changes in the aims and cultures on each organisation through vertical integration. The 'budget enlargement' approach seeks to leverage resources to tackle a policy or welfare problem.

Wildridge (2005) also identifies the drivers of cross-sector partnerships that can be split into internal and external motivations. An internal driver might be that there is a prior record of successful partnerships or the recognition that a 'critical mass' can be achieved through the leverage of a partnership. An external reason might be a policy shift or directive from government agencies to form partnerships in their field of activity.

Process of Partnerships

A number of studies have proposed models to capture the stages of partnership development. These models outline the 'lifecycles' of the partnership from formation, consolidation and dissolution. There is significant range of material including assessment tools, workbooks, manuals and toolkits mapping the developmental stages of the partnership. A survey of this material reveals that partnerships undergo distinct stages.

Developing a toolkit for assessment of partnerships, the Nuffield Institute for Health (2003) summarised the key stages of a partnership's development as:

- Principle 1 – Recognize and accept the need for partnership.
- Principle 2 – Develop clarity and realism of purpose.
- Principle 3 – Ensure commitment and ownership.
- Principle 4 – Develop and maintain trust.
- Principle 5 – Create robust and clear partnership working arrangements.
- Principle 6 – Monitor measure and learn.

From his study on statutory partnerships, Geddes (2005) proposed an alternative model. The developmental stages include the:

- Initial concept.
- Initial refinement process.
- Identification of partnership champions and interim structure.
- Development of a partnership strategy and formalisation.
- Implementation of partnerships.
- Delivery.
- Consequential action.

In a study of what makes partnerships work, Wilson et al (1997) described a five-stage development model. The stages are:

- Stage 1: coming together because of a recognized need; overcoming differences and building trust; building capacity.
- Stage 2: process of dialogue; establishing common ground; agreeing on a vision; identifying the task and actions required.
- Stage 3: establishing a formal structure; setting targets; establishing a management team.
- Stage 4: delivering the action plan; maintaining partner involvement; evaluating the partnerships and refining the action plan.
- Stage 5: planning an exit strategy where appropriate.

Ourpartnership.org.uk is a UK Cabinet Office project that has drawn up a 'partnership cycle' comprising of five key stages: The stages of the 'partnership cycle' are:

- Connecting: how potential partners can get to know each other and plan their future activities together.
- Contracting: how to negotiate and decide roles, rules and funding.
- Conflict: how to manage the inevitable conflict between partners.
- Collaborating: how to keep the momentum going when the partnership is working well
- Closing: how to end the partnership, or to end one partner's involvement.

These models of partnership development stress a number of common themes, although the emphasis on particular elements may differ. The initial stages of identifying the need for the partnership is followed by the refinement of the objectives and formalisation of the operating structure and strategy, implementation of the goals and a review of the partnership. Although these models provide a useful outline of the key stages of development, the reasons for the success or failure of these processes provide the interesting questions for researchers and, more importantly, can provide some useful insights for Agora's agenda.

Success Factors and Barriers to Partnerships

The OECD (2001) has compared partnerships to 'black boxes' where the processes by which the inputs are translated to outputs are difficult to assess. This absence of a model to articulate the critical factors at work make it difficult to conclude that the outcomes of the partnership wouldn't have occurred anyway. A comparative study of partnerships to assess success factors and barriers is complicated by the diversity of partnerships and the goals they pursue. However, Williamson (2001) notes that commonalities can be identified from the practice of partnerships, despite the context and circumstance of the partnership also being important determinants.

A number of studies have attempted to identify what makes partnerships successful. Wildridge et al (2004) has analysed the research on partnerships and identified 20 critical success factors grouped into six categories.

- Environment
 - History of collaboration or co-operation.
 - Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader.
 - Favourable political and social climate.
- Membership
 - Mutual respect, understanding and trust.
 - Appropriate cross section of members.
 - Members see collaboration in their self interest.
 - Ability to compromise.
- Process and Structure
 - Members share a stake.
 - Multiple layers of participation.
 - Flexibility.
 - Clear roles and policy guidelines.
 - Adaptability.
 - Appropriate pace of development.
- Communication
 - Open and frequent.
 - Information relationships and communication links.
- Purpose
 - Concrete, attainable goals and objectives.
 - Shared vision.
 - Unique purpose.
- Resources
 - Sufficient funds, staff, materials and time.

- Skilled leadership.

These success factors capture some of the key ingredients for a sustainable partnership with lasting outcomes for communities. The Queensland Department of Communities (2004) has developed a comprehensive checklist of the characteristics of successful partnerships.

- Strategic Fit
 - Shared or compatible vision/goals/purpose – ‘clarity of purpose is important for sustainability’.
 - Consensual objectives and agreed performance expectations.
 - Shared values.
 - Outcome focus.
- Structural Elements
 - Written agreement.
 - Strong accountability framework.
 - Co-ordinating structure.
 - Performance reporting and review framework.
 - Flexibility in funding mechanisms.
 - Clear roles and responsibilities.
 - Efficient, accountable and transparent administrative structures.
 - Dispute resolution and partnership termination process.
 - Periodic partnership review.
 - Resources.
 - Stakeholder inclusiveness.
 - Systems infrastructure.
 - Co-location.
- Relationship Management
 - Strong relationship – manage in a collaborative rather than hierarchical world.
 - Building trust and confidence.
 - Balanced expectations and capacities.
 - Power sharing.
- Operating Practices
 - Effective project and resource management.
 - Consultation and communication.
 - Common protocols and tools.
 - Service delivery process redesign.
- Supportive Context
 - Effective leadership.
 - Long-term, high-level political and executive commitment.
 - Ownership and operational staff level commitment.
 - Supportive cultures.
 - Joint working is rewarding rather than detrimental to bureaucratic objectives and career prospects.
 - Flexibility and openness to innovation.
 - Legislative and policy environment.

In a study of partnerships between service providers and government, the New Zealand Ministry for Social Policy (2000) identified the following factors as common themes to successful partnerships. The key features included:

- Involving a broad section of the community, including the project's target participants.
- Ensuring there are sufficient ongoing resources.
- Having realistic time frames (i.e. three to ten years).
- Employing a skilled, full-time paid coordinator.
- Demonstrating commitment from a senior level within all partner organisations.
- Building and nurturing shared vision and trust.
- Establishing shared, clear, tangible, flexible, and realistic objectives based on assessed needs.
- Developing a clear and flexible strategy for achieving these objectives.
- Supporting community partners to play a full role and valuing their contribution.
- Adopting a knowledge-based and learning-based frameworks (i.e. integrating findings of existing research, and other partnership's experiences into processes and projects, as well as evaluating and learning from own experience on a ongoing basis).
- Having organisational structures that support the partnerships (i.e. ensuring support by the macro-environment through legislation and government policy)
- Maintaining a balance between flexibility and formal structures.

Williamson (2001) suggested a number of key features are the prerequisites for partnership to work. These features include:

- Secure political legitimacy.
- Clarifying purpose: clear objectives and coherence.
- Identifying advantages and threats: financial, service-related and professional development.
- Ensuring equivalency: reciprocal contribution of money and resources.
- Establishing appropriate administrative structures: clarification of roles and responsibilities.
- Establishing appropriate procedures: lines of management accountability, systems for supervision, monitoring and evaluation.
- Ensuring communication and support: role of 'boundary spanners', stable management, communication systems.

Lyn (2005) identified the key success factors for working in partnership as:

- Being clear about the purpose of the joint project and then having sufficient time to enable organisations to work together to develop common goals that they are committed to implementing.
- Developing and sustaining shared ownership by frontline staff (paid or voluntary) but this needs to be coupled with robust and coherent financial and management arrangements that all partners understand.
- Recognizing and nurturing individuals who are skilled at identifying and developing useful networks, and have good social and interpersonal skills, and finding committed individuals who are seen by others as having sufficient legitimacy to assume leadership role.
- Organizational commitment to learning from all partners.

A commonality to these sets of success factors is the agreement on a shared vision identifying the rationale for the partnership coupled with a detailed strategy for day-to-day management and its delivery. Powell (2002: 23) notes that 'while the ends may be commonly agreed, the means to achieve these ends may be disputed'. Underpinning this commitment to a clear, common goal, and practical strategies to achieve these goals, is the essential element of trust between partners. The consensus is that successful partnerships are built on a high level of mutual trust that facilitates a healthy process of negotiation and compromise to meet the unexpected challenges partnerships may bring (Demos 2000: Audit Commission 1998). Powell (2002: 23) stresses the importance of trust to 'reduce transaction costs through developing trusting, long-term, embedded, obligational relationships'. Rummery (2002: 236) comments that the evidence suggests 'that trust makes it easier for the individuals and organisations involved to develop and, crucially, where necessary to adapt and change their goals and methods of working to accommodate the achievement of the partnership's objectives'.

Communication is similarly seen as a critical element, both on a formal basis and an informal nature. A willingness to listen and engage in the 'emotional labour' that partnerships entail builds the rapport and trust vital to the partnership (Larner et al 2004: 11). Other success factors cited in the literature include responsiveness and accountability in decision making, a focus on process and outcomes instead of structure and outputs, appropriate seniority of staff and investment in leadership development in middle managers (Wildridge 2004: 7).

Williamson (2001) also cites a number of factors for successful partnerships. Middle management concern with predictability and control through the day to day budgetary and administrative challenges can constrain successful innovation. Partnership also relies on well integrated and established organisations with the ability to invest in what can be perceived as 'unconventional and inconvenient' initiatives. This adaptive flexibility of organisations may depend on some initial reforms to internal policies and procedures.

Nelson et al (2000) discuss the structures for partnerships to move beyond the experimentation of a pilot phase to develop the partnership to a larger scale or replicate it elsewhere. The process of scaling up or replication can assist other potential partnerships to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' and learn from successful initiatives to adapt to their local circumstance. Nelson et al (2000) lists several ways of scaling up and replication; These are:

- Increasing the scope and/or scale of an existing partnership.
- Spreading the partnership 'model' through participant organisations
- Sharing the partnership experience with other institutions, sectors or countries.
- Reviewing other ways in which the partnerships approach can be used by existing participants to tackle issues or problems.
- Integrating cross-sector partnership approaches into public policy.

A summary of key success factor include:

- Shared vision.
- Mutual trust.

- Clear objectives.
- Leadership.
- Resources, skills and capacities.
- Transparency and accountability.
- Focus on process and outcomes.
- Well integrated and established organisations.
- Measurement and evaluation.
- Adaptive flexibility.

There are many more comprehensive checklists of what makes partnerships successful, however, these key principles should underpin a sustained and well functioning partnership.

Barriers

Commentary on the success factors of cross-sector partnerships is often introduced by word of caution to organisations contemplating prospective partnerships. Partners are advised to consider existing mechanisms and systems before setting up a new partnership, and whether there are other, simpler ways to achieve the outcomes sought (OECD 2001). These questions could save considerable time in the long run, and also avoid unnecessary resistance or hostility if the partnership is not the best approach to the issue. Sometimes, the issue may better suit one organisation taking primary responsibility. Other times, the issue may be of marginal interest to other agencies. The Audit Commission (1998) suggests that there may be times to consider alternatives to collaboration: such as networks of personal relationships that do not require organisational commitment or contractual arrangements. It should not be assumed that partnerships are a good thing per se. At other times, partnerships may simply be inappropriate for a number of reasons due to fundamental philosophical differences, a history of conflict or significant costs that outweigh the benefits the partnership may bring (Wildridge 2004: 8).

When a partnership is deemed appropriate, significant risks remain for partners seeking to work together on a sustained and productive basis. Inadequate resources are cited regularly as a key challenge for partnerships. Reluctance to fund the administrative costs can undermine the establishment and ongoing operations of the partnership (Geddes 2005). Similarly, lack of appreciation of the work involved can produce unsustainable workloads for partner organisations and disproportionate effort for the rewards involved. Inadequate resources can also produce a conflict if one partner organisation 'costs shifts' by imposing uneven responsibilities across the partnership (Wildridge 2004: 8).

The clash between organisational cultures may present difficulties for collaboration. Professional rivalry, geographic and structural differences may create barriers to finding ways to working together. Stereotypical views of their opposites in the partner organisations may take some time to break down for the development of a solid working relationship (Lyn 2005). Clarity of roles can be uncertain as partners negotiate shared responsibility for the partnership. Middle managers' need for accountability, predictability and control can clash with the unpredictability and volatility of partnerships. This balance between accountability and autonomy can be delicate. This tension can be inadequately resolved in some partnerships with the

many lines of accountability to different partners leading to a final accountability to none (Geddes 2005).

Differences between the sectors can exacerbate the clash between organisational cultures. Cultures of the public, private and not-for-profit sectors may be so ingrained that the partner organisations' language and processes may appear opaque to partnering organisations. These embedded cultures can be mirrored in the approaches to partnerships by specific sectors. Bureaucratic organisations can focus on structures and lose sight of the overall objectives. On the other hand, the private sector can place too little emphasis on process in pursuit of the objectives of the partnerships. The not-for-profit sector organisations may have unreasonable expectations of partners to influence social change on a wider basis (Lyn 2005; Geddes 2005).

A report by the New Zealand Ministry of Social Policy (2000) compiled a number of the key factors that threaten a partnership from working effectively.

- People
 - Lack of skills needed to help the partnership function smoothly (e.g. management, negotiation, and financial control).
 - No strategy or commitment to manage disparities in power, knowledge, expertise and resources available to partners; or the diversity in their values, interests and working styles.
 - Front-line staff are not supported to act in a way that reflects the partnerships spirit.
 - Partnership excludes the community sector, grass roots community, or by-passes local authorities.
- Commitment to achieving common goals.
 - Lack of clear direction, and the interventions undertaken on 'guessed' needs.
 - Government partnerships are unwilling or unable to adapt their cultures and ways of working in response to community needs and preferences.
 - The partnership does not achieve what is set out to do.
 - Some partners' commitment wanes.
- Operating environment
 - Disputes over definitions of partnerships.
 - Failure to network with other partnerships and providers.
 - Unclear divisions of tasks and responsibilities.
 - Lack of collaboration between agencies.
 - High costs in establishing the partnerships, complex organisational frameworks, and high transaction costs.
 - Onerous monitoring and accountability procedures.
 - Involvements in the partnership over-stretch resources of partner organisations.
 - There are legislative or government policy constraints.
- Time-frames and resources
 - Short time-scales, with insufficient time to establish the partnership, and for results to be achieved.
 - Insufficient resources and no ongoing funding.

Hudson (2002) highlights five categories of barriers to the coordination of partnerships:

- Structural
 - Fragmentation of service responsibilities across agency boundaries, both within and between sectors.
 - Inter-organisational complexity.
 - Non-coterminosity of boundaries.
 - Competition based systems of governance.
- Procedural
 - Differences in planned horizons and cycles.
 - Difference in accountability arrangements.
 - Differences in information systems and protocols regarding access and confidentiality.
- Financial
 - Differences in budgetary cycles and accounting procedures.
 - Differences in funding mechanisms and bases.
 - Differences in the stocks and flows of financial resources.
- Professional and Cultural
 - Differences in ideologies and values.
 - Professional self-interest and autonomy.
 - Inter-professional rivalry.
 - Threats to job security.
 - Conflicting views about interests and roles.
- Status and legitimacy
 - Organisational self-interest and autonomy.
 - Inter-organisational rivalry.
 - Differences in legitimacy between elected and appointed agencies.

Williamson (2001) pinpoints key factors that inhibit partnership working:

- Structural issues: geographical boundaries, management hierarchies.
- Procedural issues: different lines of accountability, different degrees of discretion.
- Professional issues: different values and cultures.
- Financial issues: budgetary constraints.
- Policy issues: different priorities, overlap and gaps in service.

All of the above concerns can mean that an organisation can find itself spending more time on the mechanisms of partnership working than on achieving outcomes.

Evaluation

The poor evaluation of outcomes of partnerships is a persistent criticism in the literature. Asthana (2002) recommends a number of steps be taken to ensure evaluation is established as a key component of a partnership. These steps include:

- Linking ongoing performance objectives and financial reporting to sophisticated ongoing data on local outcomes.
- Developing information networks and cultures of communication that will increase transparency, so that information is more readily accessible at any stage of a partnership's progress.

- Developing cultures of accountability which reinforce shared commitment and responsibility for securing the partnerships objectives.

An evidence-based approach can promote a culture of evaluation to measure the effectiveness of the partnership and maximise the value of investment in these collaborative initiatives (Geddes 2005). El Ansari (2001) lists a number of key challenges. These are the assortment of individual-level and collective outcomes, measuring a moving target; suitability of randomised controlled trials; difficulties in measurement of notions; and the array of long-term and short-term effects. Geddes (2005) identifies one approach to these challenges by listing the appropriate characteristics of the targets that may underpin an evaluation. Targets should be relevant, realistic, simple, controllable, attributable and reliable with continuity in data and definitions to ensure proper data capture and ongoing evaluation.

Key Lessons from the Literature

The literature on cross-sector partnerships has progressed beyond manuals and motherhood statements to provide a growing body of knowledge and critical analysis of the way partnerships work. It is evident from the literature that the policy and practice of partnerships contain a number of tensions, contradictions and possibilities. The strength of partnerships is their adaptability and flexibility of response to fluid, fast changing and cross-cutting social issues. Partnerships can bring new perspectives to tackling social problems and can have a powerful demonstration effect that leads to valuable innovations. A significant body of literature identifies the key success factors. These factors may include relationship management, strategic fit, structural elements, operating practices and communication. Workbooks and manuals are readily available for practical guidance in every phase of the partnership development and implementation.

On the other hand, a long list of potential pitfalls awaits partnerships. The instability and volatility of partnerships entail new and difficult processes of learnings, negotiation and co-ordination, and of organisational and cultural change. The literature acknowledges the risks for partnerships when characterised by poorly defined role and responsibilities, under-resourcing, clash of organisational cultures and inadequate emphasis on evaluation and review. Partnerships, particularly if they are ill conceived from the beginning, can be fraught with difficulties as the original aspirations fail to materialise.

There are several discernable gaps in the literature with relevance to Agora's agenda, where further research may provide greater clarity on the tensions and possibilities of cross-sector partnerships.

Evidence-based Approach

There is a clear emphasis in the literature on the *process* of partnerships rather than the impact partnerships can make. It assumes that partnerships are a 'good thing' without demonstrating their capacity to make a difference with clear, measurable outcomes. There is a discernable tension between the view that 'we'll do it because it's a good thing' and the understanding that 'we'll do it because we know it will work'. As previously noted, the task of evaluating partnerships is problematic.

Practical steps have been proposed in developing targets that are sound and realistic, however, theoretical questions remained unanswered in the literature on how to address the challenges of differentiating between individual and collective, short-term and long-term outcomes, and how to make the underlying notions more precise and measurable. The refinement of an evaluation methodology will provide the basis for more substantial, longitudinal empirical research that can provide greater insights into cross-sector partnerships.

Sectoral Differences

The clash of organisational cultures of different sectors is highlighted in a number of studies and there is clearly a need for research to understand the differences between partners from different sectors. The limited commentary in the approaches of public, private and not-for-profit sectors to cross-sector partnerships fails to shed light on the dynamics between different sectors and how cross-sector partnerships may need to be tailored to meet the specific needs of the sectors. This research could develop a deeper understanding of the language and culture of particular sectors or identify ways to overcome cultural or institutional barriers between sectors.

Types of Partnerships

Partnerships can differ markedly in size and scope whether geographically or organisationally. The commentary on the literature distinguishes partnerships on a statutory, commercial or voluntary basis, yet there is little discussion of the scale and the subsequent implications for partnerships. For Agora's purposes, partnership is an initiative to develop new and innovative approaches to multi-layered and complex social issues. These initiatives may be scaled up or replicated in the appropriate conditions. However, this scale of partnership is of a fundamentally different order to larger scale regional bodies bringing together institutional players for a common purpose. These 'institutions of collaboration' are completely different to the workings of cross-sector partnerships seeking an innovative collaborative approach to a social policy question. The learnings from these differing partnerships may be too broad and generic to provide any significant insights. The requirements of accountability and flexibility may differ significantly between the informal arrangements of a smaller scale initiative and a statutory body constituted on a regional basis. A comprehensive typology of partnership may enable clearer distinctions between cross-sector partnerships. This typology may provide greater clarity of the particular characteristics of subgroups of cross-sector partnerships. Identifying the particular 'modalities' of partnerships may be a useful guide for further research to better classify cross-sector partnerships and specific dynamics of each category.

Scalability of Partnerships

Cross-sector partnerships are often initiated as small-scale projects to pilot a collaborative approach across sectors. Often the success of the initiatives presents a range of challenges, if the scope and scale of partnerships is expanded. The tools and structure of this process to scale-up or replicate these partnerships have been examined on the margins of the literature. This diffusion can occur through learnings networks, integration into public policy and through the networks of existing partners.

However, there are number of issues posed by the scaling-up and replication that require fuller treatment in the literature. Questions for further research could include the impact on the complexity of the partnerships in the process of scaling up and replication, the way learnings can be adapted to local context and circumstance and the capacity of different sectors to meet the challenges of scaling up and replication.

Conclusion

There is a growing body of literature on cross-sector partnerships. The concept of partnership is examined with many studies identifying the possibilities of a collaborative approach and their institutional and procedural constraints. There are comprehensive checklists on the success factors and barriers to the formation of partnerships. A wealth of manual and toolkits are readily accessible to assist partnerships in the stages from initial development to conclusion. Beyond this well mapped terrain on the process of partnerships, there is significant scope for further research. The literature review identified a number of key areas for further enquiry including:

- Evaluation and an evidence-based approach.
- Differences between sectors.
- Different types of cross-sector partnerships.
- Challenges to scale-up and replicate cross-sector partnerships.

There is growing recognition that partnerships are adaptive and can cut across traditional boundaries and divisions. In a fast changing and complex society, this flexibility and adaptability can bring together additional resources and capabilities to test new approaches to social problems. As evident in the literature, the promise of partnerships as a tool for innovation, problem solving and coordination must be balanced with an understanding of its volatility and the significant costs in time and resources.

A number of fundamental questions remained unresolved in the literature. Can partnerships demonstrate the evidence-based approach to prove that they are not only a 'good thing', but also work? Can partnerships be tailored to meet the needs and dynamics of specific sectors? Can critical analysis of partnerships capture the learnings from different types of partnerships? What are the key challenges for partnerships to scale-up and replicate beyond pilot programs? Further research on these unresolved questions will move the notion of partnership beyond a 'solution in search of a problem' towards a reliable tool of social policy applied with precision to pressing social problems.

References

- Asthana, S., Richardson, S., and Halliday, J., (2002) *Partnership Working in Public Policy Provision: A Framework for Evaluation Social Policy and Administration*, Volume 36, Number 7, December 2002, pp. 780-795(16) Blackwell Publishing
- Balloch, S. and Taylor, M., (2001) *Partnership Working: Policy and Practice*. The Policy Press, UK.
- Copenhagen Centre (1999) *Partnership Alchemy: New Social Partnerships in Europe*. On website http://www.copenhagencentre.org/graphics/CopenhagenCentre/Publications/Partnership_Alchemy.pdf
- Demos (2000) *Working Together: Creating a Better Environment for Cross-Sector Partnerships*. London, UK.
- El Ansari, W., Phillips, Ceri J. and Hammick, M., (2001) *Collaboration and partnerships: developing the evidence base Health & Social Care in the Community* Volume 9 Page 215 - July 2001 Blackwell Synergy.
- Geddes, M., (2005) *Making Public Private Partnerships Work: Building Relationships and Understanding Cultures*. Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT : Gower.
- Glendinning, C., Powell, M. and Rummery, K., (2002) *Partnerships, New Labour and the Governance of Welfare*. The Policy Press, UK.
- Hess, M. and Adams, D., (2001) *Community in Public Policy: Fad or Foundation* Australian Journal of Public Administration. 60(2), 13-23.
- Hudson, B. and Hardy, B., (2002) *What is a 'Successful' Partnerships and How can it be Measured* in Powell, M and Exworthy, M (2002) *Partnerships, Quasi-Networks and Social Policy* in Glendinning, C., Powell, M. and Rummery, K., (2002) *Partnerships, New Labour and the Governance of Welfare*. The Policy Press, UK.
- Hutchinson, J. and Campbell, M., (1998) *Working in Partnerships: Lessons from the Literature*. Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University.
- Larner, W and Bulter, M (2004) *Governmentalities of Local Partnerships, Research Paper No.12*. Local Partnerships and Governance Research Group, University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Lyn, T., (2005) *Partnerships, Community Groups and Social Inclusion*. Studies in Continuing Education, Vol. 27, No.1, March 2005, pp. 1-15
- New Zealand Ministry of Social Policy (2000) *Models of community-government partnerships and their effectiveness in achieving welfare goals: a review of the literature*. On website <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/publications/sector-policy/reportgovtpartnerships.pdf>

Nuffield Institute for Health (2003) *Assessing Strategic Partnership: The Partnerships Assessment Tool*. Office of Deputy Prime Minister, UK

OCED (2001) *Local Partnerships for Better Governance*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, France.

Percy-Smith, J., (2006) *What Works in Strategic Partnerships for Children: A Research Review*. Children & Society. 20: 313-323.

Powell, M. and Rummery, K., (2002) *Partnerships, New Labour and the Governance of Welfare*. The Policy Press, UK.

Queensland Department of Communities (2004) *Partnerships for Service Delivery: Review of the Research and Practice Literature*. On website
http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au/share_your_knowledge/resources/documents/pdf/partnershipreview.pdf

Rummery, K., (2002) *Towards a Theory of Welfare of Partnerships* in Glendinning, C., Powell, M. and Rummery, K., (2002) *Partnerships, New Labour and the Governance of Welfare*. The Policy Press, UK.

Seddon, T., Billett, S. and Clemans, A., (2005) *A Navigating Social Partnerships: Central Agencies-Local Networks* British Journal of Sociology of Education, Vol.26, No.5, November 2005, pp. 567-584.

Selsky, J. and Parker, B., (2005) *Cross-Sector Partnerships to Address Social Issues: Challenges to Theory and Practice*, Journal of Management, Vol.31 No.6, December 2005 849-873

Wildridge, V., Childs, S., Cawthra, L. and Madge, B., (2004) *How to Create Successful Partnerships – a Review of the Literature*, Health Information and Libraries Journal 21 pp.3-19

Williamson, V., (2001) *The Potential of Project Status to Support Partnerships* in Balloch, S. and Taylor, M., *Partnership Working: Policy and Practice*. Policy Press. Bristol. UK

Wilson, A. and Charlton, K., (1997) *Making Partnerships Work: a Practical Guide for Public, Private, Voluntary and Community Sectors*: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York Publishing Services.