

**An integrated framework for strategic institutional
partnerships: A mixed methods case study of higher
education at a TAFE institute**

Paramjit Singh Tyndall

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Professional Doctorate in Education (Research)

University of Canberra

2017

Abstract

This study investigates the workings of three higher education partnerships with Holmesglen Institute – a public Technical and Further Education (TAFE) provider based in Melbourne, Australia. Anecdotally, some such partnerships succeed more than others, but no systematic study has yet been conducted to support that claim empirically, possibly because partnership performance is difficult to measure. Partnerships often have multiple objectives, and their performance can be analysed at different levels. A further performance problem concerns whether organisations can build partnership management capability for beneficial outcomes.

The study therefore sought to answer two questions:

1. *Why are some partnerships more successful than others?*
2. *How can organisations build institutional capability to enhance partnership management and success?*

These questions were investigated using an explanatory mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) comprising two distinct stages – a purposive online survey, followed by face-to-face interviews with a sample of the survey population. Data from the survey and interviews was analysed and integrated in a case study (Mills, 2014; Yin, 2009), which also incorporated comparative assessments of management practices by contrasting the relative performance of different partnerships against the same success factors.

Overall, the study's findings corroborate those in the literature (mostly focused on generic organisational and corporate partnerships, with little available for the higher education sector) that:

1. Inter-organisational partnerships are established to meet a variety of needs.
2. Partnerships undergo several phases as they develop and evolve.
3. Leadership, governance structures and clear processes are needed for their effective management and operation.
4. Partnership performance is influenced by many, often inter-related factors.
5. Organisations can develop their capability to enhance partnership management through several mechanisms: greater (prior) experience, dedicated alliance functions, and deliberate learning processes.

The findings also suggest that engaging in partnerships is rarely straightforward; alongside the desire to collaborate, there may be competition, conflict, contradiction, and sensitivities, which leaders need to anticipate and manage.

Theoretical considerations for the study stimulated the adaptation of a conceptual framework from existing organisational constructs, while the implications offer lessons for professional practice:

1. Sufficient planning time should be allocated before starting a partnership.
2. Preferably, collaboration should start small, then grow progressively.
3. Effective leadership and clear, consistent and fair governance mechanisms are necessary for providing direction, and smooth running of a partnership.
4. Open, frequent communication between and within partner organisations helps to build trust, a critical success factor.
5. Partnerships need close monitoring and regular review to ensure they stay on track to achieve agreed goals and objectives.
6. Partnerships should ideally have a medium- to long-term focus.
7. Capability building for partnership management should be an integral part of overall organisational strategy.
8. Partnerships require constant nurturing and perseverance to be successful.

Although perhaps limited in generalisability to other sectors and institutions, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on inter-organisational partnerships by systematically developing and testing an integrated conceptual framework to further understanding of the complex workings of partnerships, particularly in the public higher education sector.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Form B: Certificate of Authorship of Thesis	iii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	xi
Acknowledgements.....	xiii
Chapter 1: Overview of the Study	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background to the study	3
1.2.1 <i>The partnership paradox</i>	3
1.2.2 <i>Partnerships in HE</i>	4
1.2.3 <i>Government policy and context for HE partnerships in Australia</i>	5
1.3 Contextual setting for the present study.....	9
1.4 Problem statement.....	10
1.5 Purpose statement	11
1.6 Research questions.....	12
1.7 Conceptual framework.....	14
1.8 Research design and methodology.....	15
1.9 Limitations and delimitations.....	16
1.10 Significance of the study.....	16
1.11 Definition of key terms	17
1.12 Structure of the thesis.....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review	21
2.1 Introduction.....	21
Section 1: Strategic partnerships and their motivations.....	24
2.2 Definitions and terminology	24
2.2.1 <i>Definitions of partnerships</i>	24
2.2.2 <i>Strategic versus non-strategic partnerships</i>	25
2.2.3 <i>Types of strategic partnerships</i>	26
2.3 Motivations for establishing partnerships	28
2.3.1 <i>Policy mandate</i>	29
2.3.2 <i>Cost argument</i>	30
2.3.3 <i>Access to resources</i>	31
2.3.4 <i>Learning opportunities</i>	31
2.3.5 <i>Strategic positioning</i>	32

Section 2: Collaboration models and partnership performance	34
2.4 Models for conceptualising collaboration.....	34
2.4.1 <i>Models based on lifecycle and phases</i>	35
2.4.2 <i>Models based on success and failure factors</i>	38
2.4.3 <i>Identification of success factors</i>	40
2.5 Performance of Partnerships	41
2.5.1 <i>Issues with measuring performance</i>	41
2.5.2 <i>Cause-and-effect relationship of factors</i>	43
Section 3: Addressing the primary research question – towards a theoretical framework for partnership success.....	44
2.6 Model 1 – Wohlstetter et al. (2005)	44
2.6.1 <i>Initiation Phase</i>	45
2.6.2 <i>Operational Phase</i>	46
2.6.3 <i>Evaluation Phase</i>	48
2.7 Model 2 – Kale & Singh (2009).....	49
2.7.1 <i>Alliance formation and partner selection</i>	50
2.7.2 <i>Alliance governance and design</i>	51
2.7.3 <i>Post-formation alliance management</i>	52
2.7.4 <i>Trust-building process</i>	55
2.8 Basis and features of the conceptual framework for the present study	56
2.8.1 <i>Basis for the conceptual framework</i>	56
2.8.2 <i>Key features of the framework</i>	58
Section 4: Addressing the secondary research question – building institutional capability	59
2.9 Capability building for alliance success.....	59
2.9.1 <i>Recent research on alliance capability</i>	60
2.9.2 <i>Drivers of alliance capability</i>	61
2.9.3 <i>Conditions for effective alliance capability building</i>	65
2.10 Summary	66
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology	67
3.1 Introduction.....	67
3.2 Design and methodology	67
3.3 Case study approach to data integration	70
3.4 Research setting and target population	72
3.5 Data collection methods.....	73
3.5.1 <i>Stage 1 – Quantitative data collection (survey)</i>	73
3.5.2 <i>Stage 2 – Qualitative data collection (interviews)</i>	79

3.6	Data analysis and integration	81
3.6.1	<i>Stage 1 – Quantitative data analysis</i>	82
3.6.2	<i>Stage 2 – Qualitative data analysis</i>	82
3.6.3	<i>Data integration</i>	83
3.7	Data validation issues and mitigation strategies	83
3.8	Ethical considerations	88
3.9	Researcher as ‘insider’ and ‘research instrument’ statement	90
3.10	Limitations and delimitations.....	91
3.10	Summary	93
Chapter 4: Results and Findings		95
4.1	Introduction.....	95
4.2	Motivations for entering into partnerships.....	97
Primary Research Question: Why are some partnerships more successful than others?		100
4.3	Key drivers of success.....	100
4.4	Phase 1: Planning and formation	100
4.4.1	<i>Champion</i>	101
4.4.2	<i>Compatibility</i>	103
4.4.3	<i>Complementarity</i>	104
4.4.4	<i>Commitment</i>	106
4.4.5	<i>Partner selection criteria</i>	108
4.5	Phase 2: Design and operation	108
4.5.1	<i>Leadership</i>	110
4.5.2	<i>Governance and decision-making</i>	110
4.5.3	<i>Accountability and responsibility</i>	112
4.5.4	<i>Communication</i>	113
4.6	Phase 3: Post-formation Management and Review	115
4.6.1	<i>Coordination and conflict resolution</i>	116
4.6.2	<i>Review and feedback</i>	119
4.6.3	<i>Impact and outcomes</i>	122
4.6.4	<i>Future prospects</i>	124
4.7	Cross-cutting themes – ‘trust’ and the ‘external environment’	126
4.7.1	<i>Trust</i>	126
4.7.2	<i>External environment</i>	130
Secondary Research Question: How can organisations build institutional capability to enhance partnerships management and success?		133
4.8	Building institutional capability to enhance partnership success.....	133
4.8.1	<i>Capability building mechanisms</i>	134
4.9	Summary	137

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions	141
5.1 Introduction.....	141
5.2 Models and phases of partnership development	142
5.3 Primary Research Question.....	143
5.3.1 <i>Partnership performance</i>	143
5.3.1 <i>Motivations to establish partnerships</i>	144
5.3.2 <i>Phase 1: Planning and Formation</i>	145
5.3.3 <i>Phase 2: Design and operation</i>	147
5.3.4 <i>Phase 3: Post-formation Management and Review</i>	150
5.3.5 <i>Cross-cutting themes</i>	155
5.4 Secondary Research Question.....	158
5.4.1 <i>Greater (prior) experience</i>	158
5.4.2 <i>Dedicated alliance function</i>	160
5.4.3 <i>Deliberate learning processes</i>	161
5.5 Implications.....	162
5.5.1 <i>Practical implications</i>	162
5.5.2 <i>Theoretical implications</i>	169
5.6 Towards a revised conceptual framework.....	171
5.6.1 <i>Phases of evolution</i>	172
5.6.2 <i>Motives to partner</i>	172
5.6.3 <i>Partner selection criteria</i>	173
5.6.4 <i>Trust building and sustenance</i>	174
5.6.5 <i>Capability building</i>	175
5.7 Partnerships reviewed through the lens of the revised framework	176
5.7.1 <i>Partnership A</i>	176
5.7.2 <i>Partnership B</i>	179
5.7.3 <i>Partnership C</i>	181
5.8 Limitations and future research.....	183
5.9 Conclusions.....	185
References	189
Appendices	211
Appendix 1: Participant Information and Consent Form.....	213
Appendix 2: Survey Questions	217
Appendix 3: Interview Questions	221
Abbreviations and Acronyms	223

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Mapping of survey items to the success factors in the framework.....	76-77
Table 3.2	Profile of respondents	78
Table 3.3	Responses by partnerships and employee groups.....	79
Table 3.4	Interview participants by employee groups and familiarity with partnership ...	80
Table 3.5	Potential validity issues and strategies for minimising them.....	87-88
Table 4.1	Phase 1: Planning and formation – survey results	101
Table 4.2	Phase 2: Design and operation – survey results.....	109
Table 4.3	Phase 3: Post-formation management – survey results.....	116
Table 4.4	Trust - Survey results.....	127
Table 4.5	External environment – survey results.....	131
Table 4.6	Capability building – survey results	133
Table 4.7	Summary of aggregated results.....	138

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Conceptual framework for the study	14
Figure 2.1	Types of strategic alliances	27
Figure 2.2	Alliance life-cycle stages and activities	37
Figure 2.3	The evolution of strategic alliances	44
Figure 2.4	Key success factors for an alliance	49
Figure 2.5	The trust-building loop	55
Figure 2.6	Drivers of organisation-level alliance capability	62
Figure 3.1	Research design for the present study	68
Figure 5.1	Revised conceptual framework	171

Acknowledgements

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”

- Lao Tzu -

My journey to pursue this doctorate began four years ago, with a hesitant first step. Like many long and arduous journeys, mine has not been without challenges and sacrifices. Suffice to say what seemed like an impossible dream at times, has now become a reality.

I would not be where I am today, if not for certain individuals. For that, I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisors – Professor Mike Gaffney, Dr Peter Copeman, and Dr Misty Kirby – for their counsel, assistance and constant encouragement.

I would also like to thank Mary Faraone, the Chief Executive of Holmesglen Institute for her support and confidence in me, and all staff members of the Institute who participated in this study. Without their contribution, there would be no journey to pursue in the first place.

As for my family – wife, Harwinder, and children, Ajay, Anil, and Asha – your blessings and affection gave me strength and determination to persevere in times of doubt. You can rest assured that I’ll be spending a lot more time with you, now that this stage of my life’s journey is complete.

Finally, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank my examiners for their valuable comments and advice. Their feedback, along with Dr Copeman’s eye for detail, has helped me improve the content and presentation of my thesis.

Paramjit Singh Tyndall

December 2017