Business-community partnerships: understanding the nature of partnership

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to offer a New Zealand perspective on how business and community organisations engage to develop mutually beneficial partnerships to tackle pressing social issues. Specifically, the paper seeks to examine the collaboration motivations for business and community partners involved in seven business-community partnerships in New Zealand.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper utilises data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key business and community managers involved in seven partnerships in New Zealand. The transcripts of the interviews were analysed using elements of content and narrative analysis. Findings to be presented in this paper include: explaining what ''partnership'' is; understanding a business case; and community organisations' motivations for engaging in partnerships with business.

Findings – This research finds that, while partnerships involving business and community organisations may ideally be associated with shared societal concerns, in this study there was a very strong focus on individual community organisation goals and a dominance of business priorities. This was not balanced by an interest in the broader meta-goals of the partnership.

Originality/value – This paper draws attention to diverse and often competing motivations that characterise business-community partnerships. The research demonstrates that, while partnerships are often discussed in the context of societal benefits, individual organisations frequently form partnerships primarily for their own instrumental self-interests. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate understanding of the practical challenges to developing business-community partnerships, given differences among the partners in goal orientations and expectations.

Keywords Social responsibility, Communities, Partnership

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Collaboration plays a pivotal role in tackling pressing social and environmental issues, with business increasingly recognised as a key player in such collaborations. As businesses re-examine their traditional community involvement practices, partnerships between business and community organisations are becoming one of the most visible aspects of a company's social responsibility agenda (Kanter, 1999).

Business-community partnerships encompass a variety of competing definitions (Selsky and Parker, 2005). For the purposes of this research, business-community partnerships are defined as relationships involving private business organisations and non-profit community organisations, formed largely to address common-interest social issues and causes. These relationships engage the partners on an ongoing basis and are often strongly project-oriented (Googins and Rochlin, 2000).

Business-community partnerships are promoted in the belief that cooperative relationships provide the potential to achieve significant social benefits through joint action (Austin, 2000). In addition to tackling pressing community issues, the case for business-community partnerships argues that bringing together unique and complementary resources can

benefit the various participants in the collaboration. However, much of the discussion to date has been linked to business objectives and priorities. Few articles examine ways community interests are reflected in business-community partnerships. Moreover, much of the literature assumes that the partner organisations share a common interest in the broader social goals of the partnership and that these meta-goals are the key purpose for the partnership (Macdonald and Chrisp, 2005).

There is a need to investigate the diverse and often conflicting motivations characterising business-community partnerships. This article explains research examining seven business-community partnerships to address social issues in the New Zealand context. The discussion explains how the term ''partnership'' is understood, focusing on collaboration motivations for both community and business partners. The article contributes to conceptual and practical understanding of the diverse motivations and interests of business and community organisations involved in business-community partnerships.

The following section examines the rise of business-community partnerships, as a mechanism to tackle pressing social, economic and environmental challenges.

The rise of business-community partnerships

Many businesses seek to be good corporate citizens through involvement with the local communities in which they operate. However, in recent years the role of business in addressing community issues has changed significantly. In an emerging global world, relationships between government, civil society and private business organisations are changing rapidly. Businesses are facing increasing pressure to play more active social roles in addressing community issues. In response, some businesses have been experimenting with a range of new managerial instruments to deliver their social objectives, including the forging of business-community partnerships (Elkington and Fennell, 2000; London et al., 2005).

Business-community partnerships encompass a variety of often competing definitions (Selsky and Parker, 2005). Related terms ''include strategic alliances'' (Ashman, 2001), ''social partnerships'' (Waddock, 1991), and ''social alliances'' (Berger et al., 2004). Cross-sector partnerships, according to Nelson and Zadek (2000), involve some combination of business, government and civil constituencies working together to address common societal aims by combining their resources and competencies. A number of commentators suggest that business involvement in business-community partnerships to address social issues is growing (Kanter, 1999; Warner, 2004).

Business-community partnerships that focus on capacity building programmes within community organisations are becoming increasingly important. For example, a business community partnership involving Cisco Systems, an information technology company and The Smith Family, a non-profit organisation working with disadvantaged families in Australia, is built around a shared understanding of the importance of information technology and education in society. Partnership projects have resulted in significant improvements to the Smith Family's information technology capabilities contributing to the creation of e-learning opportunities for disadvantaged families (Loza, 2004).

But why do business and community organisations collaborate in partnership relationships? The following section reviews the various motivations for business-community partnerships, as discussed in the literature.

Motivations for business-community partnerships

The ''win-win'' potential of partnership draws extensively on efficiency arguments – maintaining that organisations working in partnership can access broader networks, combine complimentary resources and expertise, and share good practice in order to accomplish specific tasks. These synergistic benefits constitute what Huxham (1996, p. 1) terms ''collaborative advantage'', or what Nelson and Zadek (2000, p. 13) call ''partnership alchemy'' – outcomes not possible if organisations work independently.

In addition to alleviating social problems, some commentators claim that business-community partnerships can provide partner-specific benefits. Benefits for business include:

- obtaining a competitive advantage;
- building trust in communities;
- managing external perceptions by enhancing public reputation;
- increasing attractiveness to prospective employees; and
- improving stakeholder relations (Warner, 2004; Porter and Kramer, 2002).

Indeed, it is overwhelmingly argued that corporate social responsibility activities, such as business-community partnerships, *should* be evaluated in the light of their ability to produce benefits for business (Porter and Kramer, 2002). The predominance of a "business case" can be seen with the many publications emphasising the use of social or environmental initiatives to attain corporate objectives (for example see Grayson, 2004; Prahalad, 2004; World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2000).

Little attention has been given in the literature to the experiences of community organisations collaborating with business. However, a few general observations on the pressures community organisations face to collaborate with business can be drawn from the existing literature. While social problems have grown in enormity and complexity, traditional funding sources and organisational capacities within the community sector have not kept pace (Weisbrod, 1997). For community organisations, the need to access funds and technical resources can be a strong driver for engaging collaboratively with business organisations (Froelich, 1999).

Community organisations may also view partnerships as ways to become more important institutional actors (Teegen and Doh, 2003) or to influence social change (Fabig and Boele, 1999). Community organisations need wide support to accomplish their advocacy goals and deliver services to clients. Partnering with business organisations has the potential for community organisations to influence business leaders' thinking on social issues, garner wide political support and obtain greater visibility for their programmes (Moore, 2000; Parker, 2003).

Identifying partner interests and motivations is an important issue in understanding business-community partnerships. Mitnick (2000, p.425) stresses the importance of identifying motivation: ",doing apparently good work (outcomes) for bad reasons (principles) is not the same as good work for good reasons". Evers (2003) argues that the motivations driving the involvement of an organisation in a partnership will have a vast influence on their behaviour. Macdonald and Chrisp (2005) believe that while partnership arrangements may allow complementary resources to be combined to address common social issues, partnership working may also mask the diverse and often competing interests of the partners. Similarly, Hamann and Acutt (2003) contend that notions of partnership, dominant in much of the corporate social responsibility discourse, may mask underlying motivations and downplay conflicts of interest, thereby perpetuating the myth that partnership is essentially about collective endeavour.

The literature on business-community partnerships offers a range of alternative, often competing explanations for involvement in business-community partnerships. To a large extent the literature has a strong functional and managerial emphasis, often focusing on the benefits of partnership and how these might be increased. However, this characterisation of partnership as "desirable" does beg the question "desirable for whom and in what ways?".

Businesses are encouraged to view partnerships with community organisations as initiatives that can and indeed should provide a return on business investment. In contrast, little attention is paid in the literature to community sector motivations and interests in business-community partnerships. Moreover, there is scant empirical research into business-community partnerships that addresses the tensions that must be reconciled if

partners are to achieve both their social goals and individual organisational objectives. This paper seeks to address that gap by focusing on the central issue of the diverse expectations and motivations that characterise partners involved in business-community partnerships.

The following section discusses the findings of research offering a New Zealand perspective on business-community partnerships. It reports on research examining motivations for collaboration within seven business-community partnerships that address social issues in the New Zealand context.

Methodology

This paper specifically reports on results of qualitative research exploring the dynamics of partnership working within seven established business-community partnerships, involving six businesses, six community organisations and one government agency in New Zealand. Eighteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in total. Sixteen interviews were held with key managers from both business and community organisations directly involved in managing and implementing activities in the seven partnerships. The research was also informed by two interviews with community managers extensively involved in partnership relationships with business organisations.

All of the businesses were large enterprises, often multinational enterprises, with the exception of one SME. The businesses represent a variety of industries, primarily in the secondary sector (mostly manufacturing) and tertiary sector (mostly service). The majority of community organisations in this study were large, national organisations providing a range of services using a national network of offices throughout New Zealand.

The business and community organisations were purposively selected on the basis that they were involved in what they termed as business-community partnerships, where shared long-term goals for partnership activities focused on improving social outcomes. Partnership goals focused on youth development, health, environment, community welfare ($\times 2$), disability issues and support services for children and families. The business-community partnerships included in the study ranged in age from 18 months to four years, with the average age being two years. The business-community partnerships encompassed a range of exchange mechanisms including financial assistance, in-kind donations, employee volunteering, and cause-related marketing.

This section examines the empirical data specifically relating to collaboration motivations, for partners involved in seven business-community partnerships in New Zealand.

Explaining what ''partnership'' is

Synergy. During the interviews, some managers discussed the value of cross-sector partnerships in terms of sharing resources and expertise to tackle a societal problem, drawing on the logic of collaborative advantage. The rationale of collaborative advantage is to bring together actors with a shared interest and concern for a problem around which the partnership is built. The actors draw on different resources, skills and expertise and these differences are seen as complimentary in relation to addressing the problem (Huxham, 1996). For example, one business manager commented:

> Well for me it's taking a much more holistic view and being creative about what we have got to offer, what are our resources and what are we good at and what are they good at; what are their resources and what's possible here. It's sort of one and one makes three (Business 4).

Addressing social issues. Partnership was about having a sense of collective purpose and contributing to the resolution of a social problem, as one community manager commented:

> If you're in a partnership you both go in it together and you both head down the road together, not dragging that person with me ... So it has to be a togetherness to go. Our partnership with business had to be two way and that was why it was really crucial for us to make sure we got someone who was committed to doing community, you know, that whole community aspect and also to have their whole organisation being part of us (Community 7).

Sustained interaction. In this study all of the partnerships were strongly project-oriented. Working together to plan and implement projects implied a high level of interaction and sustained engagement between key managers of the organisations involved. This theme was reflected consistently in both business and community managers' accounts of what partnership means, as one business manager commented:

> We spent maybe four months at the beginning of last year working on establishing the partnership and finding the way we were going to work together and then from that point develop the programme. That's where I see the partnership element. It's not that we give them money, they have a project and we give them some money to help pay for it, we've actually developed it together . . . it's fairly hands-on (Business 1).

Mutual benefit. Closely linked to the logic of collaborative advantage is the idea that partnership is a way of organising that not only addresses societal issues, but also provides benefits for all involved (Gray, 1989). In this study partnership was presented by both business and community sector managers as a way of organising that must be about meeting the needs of both business and community organisations. Reciprocal advantage was a particularly strong element in the business accounts of what partnership might mean, as one business manager commented:

> We obviously want benefit from partnering these organisations but we want them to benefit from it as well, we don't see it just as a handout, much more as a two-way relationship (Business 2).

Community managers also emphasised the need for partnership arrangements to provide value for the individual organisations involved. Many community sector managers perceived value for business organisations in terms of direct commercial benefits. Community managers saw themselves playing a key role in working with business to realise benefits for the business organisation:

> The key thing has been developing the relationship, developing one that we're both in tune. That we both feel we're gaining from it. It's very important for me to make sure that X (business partner) feel in the loop and that they're getting value. I can never just assume that they're going to feel valued. I've got to always make sure that I'm working to make sure that they are part and parcel of the partnership, by constantly having contact with them and constantly bringing out new initiatives, all of that sort of thing (Community 7).

However, some community managers were sceptical of the ability of business-community partnerships to share the benefits equitably. Some community managers raised questions as to who might be the main beneficiaries of partnership arrangements and challenged what were perceived as inconsistencies in business motives:

> It's like yeah, we are concerned about values [in reference to business organisations in general] and about the issues out there. But there's a certain cynicism . . . On one hand they [business organisations] are saying we need to participate in society and help to make this a better place to live. Then they have this little tag – not because it's a good thing to do because we're a caring society, but because it will improve our bottom line (Community 4).

Partnership – more than funding. For many managers in this study, understandings of philanthropy were directly contrasted with notions of mutual benefit perceived to be inherent in ''partnership'', as one business manager explained:

> I think the term ''partnership'' is our way of trying to define a relationship that's not philanthropic. It's not about giving money to a cause, or an organisation or a programme because it's a jolly good idea and it's doing a lot of really good work out there and is deserving of support . . . ''Partnership'' is a term we hit on because it means that it does have that two-way element to the relationship . . . I owe it to my shareholders to develop a partnership that is good for our business (Business 6).

A recurring theme in discussing what ''partnership'' encompasses was the need for partnership arrangements to satisfy organisational objectives for the partner organisations involved. The following two sections examine in further detail key collaboration motivations for business and community organisations involved in this study. The first section discusses the business motives for participation in partnership relationships with community organisations.

Business motives

In this study the potential for simultaneous business and societal benefits drew the overwhelming majority of the businesses into strategically targeted involvement with community organisations. Business managers talked of partnerships with community organisations as strategic in terms of achieving business goals and objectives, rather than community outcomes.

Ethical motivations. The strategic significance of partnerships with community organisations was commonly explained by business managers within broader corporate social responsibility or corporate citizenship frameworks. Partnership activities were positioned by business managers in this study as actions designed by the business to address social goals and benefit others. All of the business managers in this study explained partnerships with community organisations as an expression of a culture of social responsibility and ethical behaviour, often suggesting altruistic motives for corporate community involvement. For example, one business manager viewed partnership with a community organisation as a key strategy to action commitment to corporate social responsibility values:

> We have said that we are committed to corporate social responsibility. So what we get out of our partnership is putting our money where our mouth is . . . We believe as a business, we are part of the community and we want to be seen as part of the community (Business 4).

Reputation building. Building an image of a good corporate citizen with external constituencies, including government, customers and employees, can be one important reason why businesses engage with community organisations (Hess *et al.*, 2002; Porter and Kramer, 2002). Enhancing business reputation was a key business motivation for forming business-community partnerships, as one business manager explained:

> I think reputation amongst our customers that's quite a large one. In particular, X [business organisation] has previously had quite a bad reputation and we're really working on bringing that up and our partnerships are one way that's helping that (Business 2).

Working in partnership was justified in this study in terms of opportunities for enhanced image and goodwill for the business over the long term:

> Corporate citizenship and community work I think you've got to go into understanding that there's not going to be an immediate bottom line benefit. What you're looking at is a reputational benefit which will take a while to establish . . . I think at the end of the day working in communities is part of the way that you maintain your permission to operate in a community (Business 1).

Engaging with stakeholders. An inclusive stakeholder approach to community involvement, including business-community partnerships, requires organisations to consider the interests of stakeholders and stakeholder engagement (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). One way of understanding the motives driving partnership activities is to assess the attention businesses pay to particular stakeholders. In this study many references were made by business managers to partnership initiatives providing opportunities to address the needs of employees, customers and communities. But often this attention given to multiple stakeholders was for business ends.

Employees were key stakeholders for businesses in this study, with employee volunteering a core element in many of the partnership projects undertaken. Participation in employee volunteering was seen as providing business benefits through enhanced team work, increased employee morale and staff retention, as one business manager commented:

> We've got an amazing culture of volunteering, our staff are very passionate and they like to get involved with things . . . So we wanted to be able to empower employees to participate in the relationship . . . Everything that we try and do is about, does it make our staff feel great, is it good for the community group and does it make sense for our business (Business 5).

Both internal and external stakeholders can affect organisational willingness to partner (Nasi *et al.*, 1997). Some business organisations in this study faced pressures from external stakeholders to address broader social concerns. Developing partnership relationships with

community organisations were seen as one response to pressures from external stakeholders, as one business manager commented:

> What we want to do is demonstrate that we're doing something proactive and positive in this area. One of the risks of being involved in partnerships with community organisations is cynicism and I guess we've had a degree of that particularly in the context of concerns about the obesity issue . . . not so much from consumers but from lobby groups in particular (Business 1).

Making sense of business motives. One way to examine business motivations for business-community partnerships involves the degree to which the business is seeking to further its own business interests versus furthering broader societal aims (Wymer and Samu, 2003). In this study business community partnership was justified by all of the businesses in terms of an ethical framework or set of core values guiding the business in its commitment to society. Business managers stressed the importance of social criteria as a basis for actions that help others. This is reminiscent of an ethical or altruistic model of community involvement as described by Young and Burlingame (1996). An ethical or altruistic model suggests that business does what is right for society, based on a culture of social responsibility and ethical behaviour (Young and Burlingame, 1996). However, in all cases in this study there is also evidence of some instrumentality in terms of seeking a business ''return''.

The presence of a business benefit is evident in all the business narratives explaining business community partnership. This is not balanced by a matching interest in benefits to wider society. Positive image and reputation building, gaining legitimacy with key stakeholder groups, risk reduction for the business and employee satisfaction were some examples of specific business objectives sought by the businesses involved in partnerships with community organisations in this study.

Some businesses focused almost exclusively on business benefits and enhancing relationships with primary stakeholders, such as employees and customers. Others demonstrated more balanced business/society interests, speaking less overtly of explicit business benefits. All businesses indicated that they pay attention to multiple stakeholders, particularly primary stakeholders such as customers and employees, but often for instrumental reasons.

There is also evidence to suggest some businesses in this study pay particular attention to relationships with community organisations in order to maintain some element of social legitimacy (Galaskiewicz, 1985). Partnerships with community organisations might be interpreted as ways for businesses to build strategic relationships with key stakeholders such as government, customers and the public at large and position themselves as good citizens. The motives for business community sector collaboration seem to be less about promoting social good per se and more about protecting and advancing the long-term interests of business in society.

In summary, evidence from this study suggests that business community partnership behaviour is positioned by the businesses as both an ethical and a strategic activity. On the one hand, businesses use the frameworks of corporate social responsibility, corporate citizenship or sustainability to position themselves as exemplary citizens. On the other hand, an equally compelling motive is the strategic desire for business community sector engagement to meet both business related objectives and increase long-term political legitimacy.

The following section examines motives for community sector involvement in partnership arrangements with business organisations.

Community organisation motives

Accessing resources. For all of the community organisations in this study a prime reason for working with business was to access resources. Community organisations looked to business organisations to provide money, goods, services or expertise towards meeting organisation needs that might otherwise go unfunded:

> Their financial director is our treasurer, she does our monthly accounts ... to get that sort of expertise would cost us a fortune that we don't have. They have been involved in terms of facilitating our planning days and have offered support with team building, performance reviews (Community 8).

The motivation to access resources was reflected in a number of transactional business community sector relationships. Transactional relationships may consist of activities such as cause-related marketing, event sponsorships and contractual service arrangements (Austin, 2000). Managers from community organisations used words such as ''the deal'', ''transaction'', ''prospecting'' and ''value equation'' when describing these kinds of transactional relationships with business organisations in this study. Transactional relationships were seen as an efficient and effective way to work with business organisations, as one community manager indicated:

> I think one of the tidiest ways to work with business is cause-related marketing. Find a product, an ethical product in the first place and use of the charity's brand to benefit the sale. It simplifies the involvement of business because then they are merely handing over an amount of dollars, the transaction takes place and good is done, relatively straightforward and clear-cut (Community 1).

In addition to monetary resources, community organisations wished to tap into a range of business capabilities, including access to business networks, technology and expertise:

> It's the added value stuff we get, the leveraging we get rather than the monetary amount. It's their staff supporting us on an annual appeal, it's the fact that I've got the support of their agencies, they can swing deals, like our annual appeal they knew who to go and see ... so for a small organisation like us it's the contacts that they have that we can use and that's of value and that's what you get out of a partnership (Community 7).

Building brand recognition. The potential to generate greater brand recognition and meet marketing and communications objectives was a key driver for some community organisations:

> All of our relationships have a significant brand promotion within them ... So the two most important elements of our business partnerships are the marketing potential and communications potential and then it's whatever revenues are raised (Community 5).

Enhancing organisation credibility. Community organisations may view partnerships as ways to enhance an organisation's credibility. In this study enhanced credibility with key constituencies was an important source of value for some community organisations, as one community manager commented:

> It adds to our credibility that an organisation such as X [business partner] wants to have a relationship with us. So I use that relationship when I am talking to possible funders or people who may want to support us or have a relationship with us (Community 8).

Making sense of community organisations' motives. A recurring theme in the literature regarding partner goals is that community organisations' motives tend to be altruistic (Selsky and Parker, 2005). However, evidence from this study suggests that the key collaboration motives for community organisations are a mix of altruism and self-interest. The three motivational themes identified in the previous section, accessing resources, building brand recognition and enhancing organisation credibility, relate to meeting specific community organisation needs. Few community organisations in this study viewed partnerships with businesses as opportunities to influence social change by working with business to be more socially and environmentally responsible (Fabig and Boele, 1999). In this study partnerships with business were seen primarily as opportunities for community organisations to achieve organisational objectives that would better enable the social mission of the organisation to be fulfilled.

These motivational themes also illustrate the many pressures community organisations are facing to address social issues and causes. Community organisations face greater demands for additional services as governments increasingly decentralise services from the national to local level (Weisbrod, 1997). It is not surprising that new revenue providers are being sought by community organisations as private contributions, including individual and

corporate donations, become more uncertain and funding from government sources varies over time with changes in political leadership and public policy initiatives (Froelich, 1999). Findings from this study demonstrate that increasing demands for services, coupled with an increasingly competitive environment, are fuelling a growing need for community organisations to access different sources of funding.
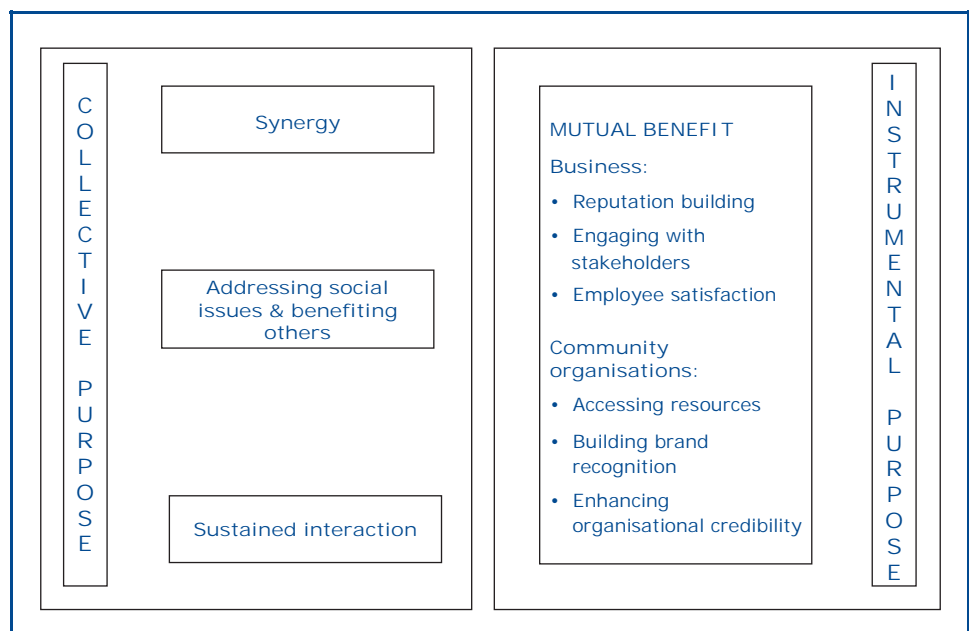
There was also evidence in this research that some community organisations are responding to funders' demands to become more business-like. A number of community organisations in this study were adopting business marketing tools such as branding, cause-related marketing and event marketing and promoting services to influence target audiences. This is line with other research suggesting that the importance of business marketing knowledge is growing in community organisations (Andreasen *et al.*, 2005).

Versions of partnership. Two contrasting versions of what ''partnership'' encompasses emerged from the accounts presented in this study of business-community partnerships. Figure 1 summarises the key characteristics of both versions as they emerged from the various accounts. One version presented business community sector collaboration as essentially being about collective purpose – a way to address social issues and generate value for broader society. Partnership was associated with collective work around shared societal concerns, business and community organisations acting as co-citizens, sharing experience and ideas to address social issues. Partnership behaviour that was desired and expected was about sustained interaction, openness, cooperation and exchange.

In contrast, in this study a second version of what ''partnership'' encompasses focused strongly on the pragmatic instrumental purposes of the partners involved. Partnership working was presented by both business and community managers as a rational way of organising that must be about meeting the instrumental needs of the individual organisations involved.

Positive image and reputation building, gaining legitimacy with key stakeholder groups, and increased employee satisfaction were some examples of specific business objectives sought by the businesses involved in partnerships with community organisations in this study. For community organisations in this study, sources of value were associated with accessing resources, building organisational capacity and leveraging relationships with business to provide enhanced organisational reputation and credibility.

Figure 1 Understandings of partnership

Reconciling individual participant benefits and broader societal benefits may seem straightforward for community organisations since they embrace societal goals in their primary mission. However, community organisations also have other goals that need to be satisfied, such as financial viability and a recognised record of success to ensure on-going funding, support and legitimacy with key constituencies (Froelich, 1999).

While business organisations may embrace societal goals, a primary focus often remains on financial performance, particularly within a shareholder-focused environment. Expectations about what the partnership will produce will often focus strongly on business benefits, even where these are long-term and indirect (Burke, 1999).

Some writers suggest that a focus on instrumental goals and business priorities sets limits on what partnership initiatives may achieve in terms of community development goals (Blowfield, 2005; Frynas, 2005). Compatibility between business goals and broader societal goals cannot be assumed. Corporate goals that focus on reputation building and employee satisfaction may also mean that the very engagement in partnership activities becomes the focus, rather than the long-term community benefits (Frynas, 2005).

Conclusions

In many of the research endeavours to date, the concept of business community partnership is associated with positive images of collective working, cooperation and mutual obligation. This paper contributes to understanding of the dynamic micro-level workings within business-community partnerships, by focusing on examining tensions between self-interest goals versus meta-goals for the partnership. The findings illustrate that, while partnerships may be thought of and discussed in the context of societal issues and societal benefits, individual organisations often enter and form partnerships primarily for their own instrumental interests.

Results presented in this paper suggest that ''pragmatic'' versions of partnership are more concerned with the self-interests of the partners rather than shared community concerns. While partnership may ideally be associated with shared societal concerns and collective interests, the findings indicate that there was a very strong focus on individual organisational objectives. This was not balanced by an interest in the broader meta-goals and social impacts of the partnership.

It is also possible to derive from these findings some implications for the practice of partnerships involving business and community organisations. These findings provide a timely reminder for community organisations – rather than assuming that the altruism of community organisations can be taken for granted, partnerships with business organisations should always enhance the primary social goals of community organisations.

The results should also prompt business organisations about the importance of the social goals of partnerships with community organisations. There is a danger that the primacy of self-interest motives for collaboration and dominance of business objectives in partnership work, could potentially limit the contributions cross-sector partnerships might make to addressing wider societal issues.

Reliance on a business case and business priorities, at the expense of considering the meta-goals and broader social impacts of the partnership, may potentially mean partnership initiatives will only be established and sustained if business has, what they perceive as, clear business benefits to gain from their involvement in partnership initiatives. An over-reliance on business priorities is likely to set limits on what community issues are likely to be addressed, which community and business organisations are likely to form partnerships and the processes by which business and community organisations will work cooperatively to address community issues.

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