

GOVERNMENT–NONPROFIT PARTNERSHIP: A DEFINING FRAMEWORK

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SUMMARY

Partnership has emerged as an increasingly popular approach to privatization and government–nonprofit relations generally. While in principle it offers many advantages, there is no consensus on what it means and its practice varies. Following a review of partnership literature, the article refines the partnership concept, developing two definitional dimensions: mutuality and organization identity. Based on these dimensions, partnership is defined on a relative scale and is distinguished from other relationship types: contracting, extension, and co-optation or gradual absorption. Examples of each are provided. The model enables actors to assess their relative tolerance for partnership approaches, and provides a common language among potential partners. Linking its defining dimensions to partnership's value-added assists partners to advocate for partnership approaches from an instrumental as well as normative perspective. The model and inter-organizational relationship matrix can inform continuing theory building and practical experimentation both to refine defining dimensions and indicators of partnership practice, and to enhance responsiveness to partners' expectations of partnership. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

The last few decades mark a notable trend towards the privatization of public service delivery. This began as a response to what some perceived as the excessive growth of the welfare state, necessitating a third-party government solution (see Salamon, 1989). It was then extended to a recognized need to increase responsiveness and results orientation alongside efficiency, the purported benefits of the New Public Management (NPM) (see Ferlie *et al.*, 1996). Regardless of the precise rationale, there is a growing popular consensus that the private sector—commercial and nonprofit—is generally more efficient and effective than government, and that government should steer, or at least facilitate, and the private sector should row (see Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

The trend is now global, as evidenced by: re-engineering in the United States (Gore, 1993); the concepts of pluralism and partnership in the United Kingdom (Young, 2000); the prominence of the New Zealand model (Boston *et al.*, 1996); the importation of similar models into donor policy and programmes for developing countries (see, for example, Wallis and Dollery, 2001); and the international donor community's 'New Policy Agenda', where donors look to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as implementers of donor-driven development policy, bypassing government and co-opting NGOs (Hulme and Edwards, 1997).¹ In addition to their emphasis on efficiency and results, these models are also consistent with the principle of subsidiarity. That is, responsibility for meeting individuals' needs should always be vested in the 'units of social life' closest to the individual (e.g., the family, parish, community and nonprofit organizations), and larger/higher units should only intervene when meeting the need exceeds the capacity of those lower levels (Salamon and Anheier, 1998).

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¹Traditionally, 'NGO' is used to connote nonprofit organizations in the international development arena, while 'nonprofit' typically refers to not-for-profit organizations and/or associations in industrialized countries. In this article, the terms nonprofit and NGO are used interchangeably.

Privatization, then, has a long history, which has evolved in terms of increasingly ambitious objectives. Criticisms of NPM, specifically those relating to equating citizens with consumers, have also led to the promotion or expectation of citizen involvement, either directly or indirectly, in defining service needs and holding deliverers accountable (see, for example, Behn, 1998). This has placed the nonprofit sector more prominently within the privatization agenda. These trends have led to a search for new models of inter-sectoral cooperation, beyond traditional privatization through contracting out. Most noticeably, partnership rhetoric in the context of public service delivery has increased substantially (see, for example, Boris and Steuerle, 1999). The exploration of partnership is growing at a fast pace and increasing examples are noted, particularly at the local levels of government (see, for example, Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Local Government Management Board, 1995).

The potential advantages of partnership are many. The nature and scale of public service needs and challenges are impossible to address in isolation. Their complexity and intransigence require multiple actors and resources to solve (see Gray, 1989; Chisholm, 1989). Partnership can provide a means of developing strategic direction and coordination in this context, affording a scale and integration of services that is impossible for any actor operating alone. Partnerships are advocated due to national governments' growing inability to protect individual and community rights—e.g., workers' rights, human rights, environmental justice—in a globalized world (see Murphy and Bendell, 1997). Without the cooperation of multiple and diverse actors, each with their own perspective and comparative advantages, we risk treating symptoms rather than causes and becoming frustrated by systemic forces that preserve the status quo (Brown and Ashman, 1996).

Not surprisingly, as with many terms in good currency (such as civil society and social capital), while many embrace the notion of partnership and stake a claim in its promotion, there is little agreement on what partnership means.² The design and management of partnerships have been little informed by theory (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998) or conceptual frameworks (Lister, 2000). Partnership is in danger of remaining a 'feel good' panacea for governance without a pragmatic grasp of what it is and how it differs from business as usual.

Following a review of relevant literature, this article defines partnership in terms of two defining dimensions: mutuality and organization identity. These dimensions form the basis for a framework to distinguish partnership practice from other forms of inter-organizational cooperation. Brief examples illustrate the resulting relationship types. The article concludes with an exploration of partnership's value-added.

PARTNERSHIP IN THE LITERATURE

The literature specific to partnership can be divided into three categories or streams. First is the normative perspective.³ This perspective is primarily promoted by NGO advocates. It critiques government and donor practices, advocating a larger role for NGOs and civil society, and, more specifically, views partnership as an end in itself. It posits that partnerships should seek to maximize equity and inclusiveness. In a democratic fashion they should mobilize, legitimate and engage all parties potentially affected by or potentially contributing to a particular public service delivery effort. This literature takes the moral high ground. Partnership, it argues, is the most ethically appropriate approach to sustainable development and service delivery. Building upon democratic values, this perspective encompasses the more general normative view of participation and empowerment, and specifically promotes partnership values and principles of mutual influence, equality and reciprocal accountability. Additionally, this literature often argues that partnerships should incorporate long-term commitments that include explicit capacity-building objectives. This literature stream can be somewhat self-serving, whether on behalf of civil society as a whole, or particular organizations. In addition, NGO advocates may find it in their interest to use the partnership rhetoric, both because 'partners' may be perceived as morally superior to contractors, and because the rhetoric can afford opportunities to negotiate and create space for more mutual arrangements.

²Even in the private sector, partnership is considered 'the buzzword of the 1990s' (Woodward, 1994) and 'one of the most overused and abused terms' (Pollack, 1995).

³See, for example, Garilao (1987); Van der Heijden (1987); Malena (1995); Fowler (1999); Bush (1992); Smillie (1995).

A second stream of literature has emerged in response to the normative stream. This reactive perspective is illustrated in some international donor, government and corporate materials, including mission statements, annual reports, strategic planning efforts, special reports and programme/project documentation.⁴ It typically describes an organization's partnership work in glowing terms, in an attempt to counter criticism of the past, whether or not this criticism is explicitly acknowledged, and to promote better public relations. Not all donor, government and corporate public statements are reactive. Some of these efforts are well intentioned and may actually represent some current practice. In other instances, the rhetoric is strong but the practice is weak. It is difficult to distinguish the public relations objectives from actual practice without a more critical view of subsequent results.

The third stream consists of a set of related threads that have a pragmatic analytic focus.⁵ This literature views partnership as instrumental, that is, a means to reach other objectives, typically having to do with effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness. One analytic thread considers particular types of relationships (e.g., government–NGO relations and donor–NGO relations) and purposes (e.g., advocacy/policy versus programme implementation, and corporate citizenship). It is accompanied by an emerging 'how-to' literature.⁶

Another analytic thread derives from the business alliance literature, which has a long history. The partnership terminology in this context is evolving, increasingly referring to less formal exclusive relationships, as opposed to its limited historical application to legal structures, mergers and contracting relations.⁷ This new literature addresses equality in decision making, autonomy of the partner organizations and corporate citizenship.⁸

A final set of analytic threads includes network theory, political economy, and the NPM and new governance models literature.⁹ This literature examines inter-organizational relations, particularly between the public and private sectors (including civil society). While some of this literature is arguably the most analytic within the partnership literature, it can also have a normative orientation, such as NPM and public choice. Network theory, however, is highly analytic, with the most rigorous identification and examination of inter-organizational coordination challenges, incentive systems, control mechanisms and structural alternatives.

PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE

The ideal type of partnership can be defined as follows:

Partnership is a dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. Partnership encompasses mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability and transparency.

Partnership is promoted both as a solution to reaching efficiency and effectiveness objectives, and as the most appropriate relationship as defined by its value-laden principles. In this sense, it is similar to participation. For some, participation is predominantly normative (see Clark, 1991; Korten, 1990). From the grassroots perspective

⁴See, for example, World Bank (1996); Department for International Development (DfID) (1998); US Agency for International Development (USAID) (1997); Shell International (1998); Environmental Partnership Czech Republic and Project for Public Spaces Inc. (1996).

⁵See, for example, Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2001); Brown and Ashman (1996); Coston (1998); Edwards (1996); Evans (1996); Fiszbein and Lowden (1998); Kolzow (1994); Lowndes and Skelcher (1998); Murphy and Bendell (1997); Smillie and Helmich (1993); Uphoff (1993); Waddell (1999).

⁶See, for example, Arsenault (1998); Bell and Shea (1998); Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum (1998); Charles *et al.* (1998). This literature is replete with generalizations and some codification of experience. It may be informative in a general sense, but it can be analytically weak, overlooking many constraints and opportunities associated with partnership work and how to improve its effectiveness.

⁷This includes supply chain partnerships (Lambert *et al.*, 1996), or the integrated value chain (Dobbs, 1999).

⁸On corporate citizenship, see, for example, Kanter (1994); Googins (1997); Harbison and Pekar (1998); Kumar and Seth (1998); Pollack (1995); Williams (1994).

⁹For network theory, see, for example, Agranoff and McGuire (1999); Bogason and Toonen (1998); Börzel (1998); Machado and Burns (1998); Chisholm (1998); for examples from political economy, see Lipsky and Smith (1989–1990); Ostrom (1996); Peters (1998); for selections from the new governance models, see Ferlie *et al.* (1996); Boston *et al.* (1996).

the ideal type of participation is initiated from below, voluntary, organized, direct, continuous, broad in scope and empowering (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). Similar arguments are made with respect to partnership. The ideal-type partnership, drawn primarily from the normative literature, encompasses a range of values-based partnership principles.¹⁰

There are three obvious problems with these ideal-type definitions: (1) the extent to which they can be operationalized is unclear; (2) they may not be universally appropriate; and (3) their justification is subjective and values-based. As a result, ideal types tend to hinder understanding of how partnerships can be helpful in the real world. It may be more appropriate to map partnership practice onto some scalar dimensions. This allows us to examine empirically the extent to which an inter-organizational relationship is operating like a partnership. Hereafter, 'partnership' will refer to this relative practice.¹¹

DEFINING DIMENSIONS OF PARTNERSHIP

Literature and experience combine to suggest that two dimensions are salient for defining partnership. Mutuality encompasses the spirit of partnership principles; and organization identity captures the rationale for selecting particular partners, and its maintenance is the basis of partnership's value-added. Figure 1 combines these dimensions to define partnership.

Mutuality

Mutuality refers to mutual dependence, and entails respective rights and responsibilities of each actor to the others (see Kellner and Thackray, 1999).¹² These rights and responsibilities seek to maximize benefits for each party, subject to limits posed by the expediency of meeting joint objectives. Embedded in mutuality is a strong mutual commitment to partnership goals and objectives, and an assumption that these joint objectives are consistent and supportive of each partner organization's mission and objectives. In defining mutuality in the context of inter-sectoral partnerships, Austin (2000) adds 'value balance'. When partners generally benefit equally from their relationship, partnerships tend to be more enduring (Austin, 2000) and high performing (Kanter, 1994).

		Mutuality	
		Low	High
Organizational Identity	High	2 Contracting	1 Partnership
	Low	3 Extension	4 Co-optation & Gradual Absorption

Figure 1. Partnership model.

¹⁰Malena (1995), for example, identifies the following: (1) jointly agreed purpose and values; (2) mutual trust, respect and equality; (3) reciprocal accountability; (4) transparency; (5) understanding each other's political, economic, cultural context and institutional constraints; and (6) long-term commitment to working together.

¹¹Cohen and Uphoff (1977) took a similar approach in the Cornell studies on participation, examining it as a theory; an adjective; and a rubric, outlining various components and types.

¹²This view is promoted by the concept and movement surrounding mutualism. Borrowed from biology, the term mutualism refers to a form of symbiosis in which two partners form a close relationship that produces equal benefits for both parties. The New Mutualism is a UK-based effort to promote mutual and cooperative approaches to society with government (see <http://new-mutualism.poptel.org.uk/>).

More specifically, mutuality refers to interdependence, as opposed to sequential dependence.¹³ This implies a greater degree of process integration in the joint value to be produced by a partnership, and contrasts with simpler models of supplier or production contracting. Relative integration necessitates more frequent interaction, communication and decision making, both formal and *ad hoc*, throughout the stages of programme design, implementation and evaluation. Mutuality means equality in decision making, as opposed to domination of one or more partners. All partners have an opportunity to influence their shared objectives, processes, outcomes and evaluation. Mutuality can be distinguished as horizontal, as opposed to hierarchical, coordination and accountability.¹⁴ Additional principles (from the ideal-type partnership) include jointly agreed purpose and values; and mutual trust and respect.¹⁵

Organization identity

Organization identity generally refers to that which is distinctive and enduring in a particular organization. It is generally believed that the creation and maintenance of organization identity are essential to long-term success (see Gioia *et al.*, 2000; see also Albert and Whetten, 1985). Gioia *et al.* (2000) make a convincing case that successful organizations do not ensure that organization identity endures as much as they maintain continuity of core beliefs and values across time and contexts.¹⁶ In fact, they cite Gagliardi's (1986) argument that successful organizations change in response to turbulent environments precisely in order to maintain their identity over time. This is consistent with nonprofits' entry into partnerships and strategic alliances in order to more effectively pursue their missions. The key is not to maintain organization systems, processes and strategies over time, but to maintain their core values and constituencies.

Organization identity can be examined at two levels. First, an individual organization has its own mission, values and identified constituencies to which it is accountable and responsive. *The maintenance of organization identity is the extent to which an organization remains consistent and committed to its mission, core values and constituencies.* This is especially significant in the nonprofit sector, where nonprofits define the value they produce in terms of their mission rather than financial performance (see Moore, 2000). Here, constituencies are distinguished from stakeholders more generally. Mitchell *et al.* (1997) identify the most important stakeholders as those who possess power, legitimacy and urgency.¹⁷ In the partnership context, those stakeholders with the most immediate access to power and urgency are often partner organizations who control important resources or may provide access to important opportunities. These attributes can be found in many inter-organizational relationship types. The distinction here is the emphasis on stakeholders with legitimacy. Legitimate stakeholders are the constituents for the value that the partner organization currently produces. They may be beneficiaries, individual contributors, staff or other supporting organizations. These are the stakeholders with whom the organization has an implicit contract to provide value in accordance with its mission and core values.¹⁸

Second, from a broader institutional view, *organization identity also refers to the maintenance of characteristics—particularly comparative advantages—reflective of the sector or organizational type from which the*

¹³Alter and Hage (1993) distinguish sequential coordination, where one agency performs its piece of the task and passes it on to the next responsible agency in the process, its job complete (e.g., A to B); and interdependent coordination, where an agency may have to perform intermittent tasks in a reciprocal process as it coordinates with other actors (e.g., A to B to A etc.).

¹⁴According to Fowler (2000), 'If you cannot demonstrate the ways in which you are held accountable from below . . . , then authentic partnership is unlikely to be present' (p. 10).

¹⁵Oxfam America recently recognized its need to re-examine its partnership practice to better 'capitalize on trust to optimize partners' capacity to achieve real impact on their own terms', and to 'reframe the relationship to one that is more two-way in character, offers more opportunities for exchange and collaboration, and makes clear the philosophy of mutual accountability' (Offenheiser *et al.*, 1999, p. 129).

¹⁶They further argue the inherently dynamic nature of organization identity, emphasizing that core values and beliefs are often practically ambiguous to allow for reinterpretation over time. While this is generally true, I maintain that to a relative degree nonprofits have less flexibility in their reinterpretation owing to their distinctiveness as values-based organizations. Their legitimacy and social value rest on stakeholders who are not direct service beneficiaries; they support and purchase this social value, not necessarily direct services (see Moore, 2000).

¹⁷These are obviously subjective assessments.

¹⁸While organization identity and legitimacy have always been important factors in the nonprofit sector, some argue that they are increasingly so, given the expanding competition within the nonprofit sector and between the nonprofit and commercial sectors, particularly for service delivery. Frumkin and Andre-Clark (2000), for example, argue that nonprofit human service organizations need to develop strategies to better emphasize the 'unique, value-driven dimension' of their programmes (p. 141).

organization originates. A primary driver for partnership is accessing key resources needed to reach objectives, but lacking or insufficient within one actor's individual reserves. Such assets can entail the hard resources of money and materials, as well as important soft resources, such as managerial and technical skills, information, contacts and credibility/legitimacy. While each actor has its own unique portfolio of assets and skills, generalizations can be made with respect to the comparative advantages of particular types of actors. Actors are often prescribed potential roles according to these presumed comparative advantages. These prescriptions are frequently normative; there is a fair share of government and donor bashing as well as biases of nonprofit praise or criticism in the literature. Nevertheless, there are some generally accepted comparative advantages. For example, national governments can provide important legal and institutional frameworks for partnership work, in addition to scale and financial and material resources; nonprofits often play an important intermediary and social mobilization role *vis-à-vis* local communities, and are frequently presumed to be more flexible, responsive and innovative than governments in their service delivery; local communities and community-based organizations can mobilize local resources and engender ownership; the private sector can contribute financial and technical resources (including managerial); and international donors and development agencies can fulfil a facilitating role in addition to providing financial and technical support.

This aspect of organization identity is related to the selection of different organizational partners. Presumably a nonprofit partner is selected both on the basis of its expertise and mission as an individual nonprofit, as well as those characteristics deriving from its nature as a nonprofit more generally. The most common exception is when government or donors seeking efficient service deliverers contract with nonprofits, when they could have as easily contracted with a private commercial entity.¹⁹ Besides being central to partnership effectiveness, the maintenance of organization identity is necessary to partner commitment (see Huxham, 1993) and sustainability (see Frumkin and Andre-Clark, 2000).

CASE EXAMPLES OF THE MODEL

The labels in each of the boxes in Figure 1 are illustrative only. Each type should be seen on a relative scale; different inter-organizational relationships can be plotted in any of the four quadrants, but might not necessarily be seen to correspond to the ideal-type labels provided. The intention is to distinguish relationships on a relative scale. In other words, depending upon the extent to which there is mutuality among the actors and each actor maintains its organization identity, an alliance can be said to be a partnership, though it may have subtle leanings towards contracting, extension, or co-optation and absorption. All relationships are also dynamic; their identification within the framework and their particular leanings towards other types of alliances will vary with time. Assessment of organization identity typically considers the presumed 'weaker' partner's identity, thus focusing attention more on the maintenance of the nonprofit's identity, rather than government's. To help concretize the model, examples of each quadrant follow.

Quadrant 1. Partnership

Quadrant 1 represents partnership, where mutuality and separate organization identity are maximized. Only alliances with a high degree of these dimensions would be plotted in this quadrant and labelled partnership. INMED's (International Medical Services for Health) *Healthy Children, Healthy Futures* programme in Brazil exemplifies a partnership with multiple partners. The partnerships between INMED and government agencies are highlighted here.

INMED's mission is to empower communities to improve their health and quality of life. The international NGO pursues this mission by assembling diverse actors—including multinational corporations, government agencies and other NGOs—to create and strengthen local programmes for preventing and controlling disease. INMED Brasil is a separately registered Brazilian NGO. INMED's Children as Agents of Change strategy consists

¹⁹For example, Brown and Korten (1991) describe how donors often apply the wrong conceptual lens in identifying potential NGO partners. They recommend donors identify those comparative advantages they seek and choose NGO partners accordingly. They distinguish among various types of NGOs, each offering different advantages. These include: service delivery organizations with a welfare orientation, development catalyst organizations, sector support organizations, networks, public service contractors, and people's organizations.

of treating children for parasitic infection, teaching them about health and hygiene to prevent reinfection, and training them to take these health lessons to their families and communities. Most of these activities take place in the context of primary schools, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education (MOE). Fecal examinations are also administered by local hospitals. INMED maintains general (written) agreements with the local government offices in each project area. Government agreements tend to primarily describe the project, the sector involved and the interface that the project will have with government actors/agencies.

In addition to keeping the Ministry of Health (MOH), the MOE and their local implementation units informed of its activities, INMED Brasil also partners more actively with these government agencies. For example, INMED Brasil recognized that its prevention programmes would be more effective if in addition to relying on the children as messengers they could take the lessons directly to the household. INMED has entered a partnership with the MOH to train their home visitors. Furthermore, in addition to providing free fecal examinations, government hospitals have agreed to treat children, at their expense, who in the process of initial screening are diagnosed with ailments not directly addressed by INMED's *Healthy Children, Healthy Futures* programme. Such partnerships have emerged on a case-by-case basis as need and opportunities arise. The government agencies do not impose their own programme structure or requirements; rather they rely on INMED's existing programme and expertise.

Mutuality is affirmed in the actors' acknowledged, shared objectives concerning health and human welfare and their links to children's ability to learn and develop mentally, as well as physically. These jointly negotiated partnerships assist the NGO and the government agencies to demonstrate results in accordance with their respective missions. The partners are mutually dependent: INMED requires access to the government education system to implement its Children as Agents of Change strategy; the MOE relies on INMED's programme to ensure children are physically capable of learning; INMED's programme would not be effective if the MOH and its hospitals did not treat diagnosed ailments beyond the scope of the *Healthy Children, Healthy Futures* programme; and without the programme, the MOH could not effectively reach all of the children to treat parasitic infection, both due to the cost of medication (provided for free by INMED's corporate partners) and its limited capacity and comparative advantages for preventive education.

Quadrant 2. Contracting

Quadrant 2, contracting, represents a situation where specific organizational characteristics and contributions—determined by one organization—are sought in another, based on organization identity, to fulfil predetermined ends and means. Contracting is illustrated by a forest conservation effort in Nepal (Molnar, 1989), which enlisted beneficiaries as village workers and monitors (e.g., nursery foremen, forest watchers). Local government agents provided training and the national government provided financing, materials, support services and regulation. The programme was managed through a contract relationship between the government of Nepal and traditional village panchayats (non-governmental decision-making bodies). Panchayats were not given autonomy in determining the goals or methods of the programme; rather the specifics of the programme were designed *a priori* by the government. Hence, the relationship was not characterized by mutuality. The programme did, however, result in 3500 planted seedlings and the development of a permit system to regulate the existing forest.

Quadrant 3. Extension

When one organization calls all the shots and the other organizations have very little independent identity (Quadrant 3), the latter can be seen as being an extension of the more dominant organization. The other organization(s) have little identity of their own and follow the dominant organization's lead. Most mergers fall into this quadrant, though depending on how they are structured and transitioned, they might be plotted in Quadrant 4.

Mexico's experience with Community Food Councils (CFCs) (1979–1986) (Aron and Fox, 1988) demonstrates extension. The programme was a collaborative effort between government and government-created CFCs to facilitate the distribution of government-provided subsidized food. The relationship was regulated at the regional government level, with national government provision of financing and trucks, and regional delivery of food for distribution. The CFCs distributed food and managed rural stores in the hopes of providing essentials at reasonable costs. The CFCs had very little autonomy or identity, ultimately acting as implementers of the government's plan.

In most cases CFCs were essentially taken over by local elite interests along with their governmental counterparts. Price abuses did generally decline, and where more beneficiary participation was achieved traditional regional power structures were more effectively challenged.

Quadrant 4. Co-optation and gradual absorption

As for Quadrant 4, sometimes organizations appear to mutually agree on ends and means, and/or an organization is convinced that it is in its interest to follow the more dominant organization's lead. In reality, by entering into the relationship, the 'partner' organization may be seriously compromising its organization identity, perhaps exchanging its service to its constituencies for the benefits of serving the dominant partner—whether consciously or not.²⁰ More common is the subtle, long-term loss of organization identity that comes through processes of compromise and adaptation (see Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Hulme, 1995).

Chile's experience with health committees in the 1980s illustrates co-optation. Health committees of the government of Chile organized local community organizations for the pursuit of local self-reliance in primary health services. Specifically, the programme set out to include beneficiaries in the decision-making processes relevant to health care services, to train them in primary health care information and basic skills, and to monitor the delivery of services. The relationship was regulated at the national level of government, with national governmental provision of finances, materials and relevant services. Innovations included beneficiary participation as representatives in decision making, creating a degree of mutuality as beneficiaries identified health priorities and corresponding action plans for fundraising to acquire medical equipment, and technical skills building. Beneficiaries were also trained as health monitors to make diagnoses independent of MOH staff in newly created first aid outposts.

Although national policy was supportive of the programme, it faced bureaucratic resistance at the local government level, resulting in the transfer of the Health Centre's Director. Innovations were gradually phased out and the local health department resumed exclusive management and decision-making responsibilities for the Health Centre and its newly created outposts (Infante, 1989). This experience demonstrates the dynamism of inter-organizational relationships and their mapping onto the model. The effort began as a partnership (Quadrant 1) but became gradually absorbed and co-opted by the local health department (Quadrant 4).

PARTNERSHIP'S VALUE-ADDED

Partnership's value-added is rooted in its defining dimensions. Organization identity is the impetus for initiating a partnership strategy. Partnerships with other actors are pursued precisely because these actors have something unique to offer, whether this is resources, skills, relationships or consent. If organization identity is lost, by definition comparative advantages are lost, the organization loses legitimacy in the eyes of its defined constituencies and its effectiveness wanes. Absorption, co-optation, bureaucratic creep or, more broadly, the infiltration of one organizational culture into another can all lead to a diminished capacity of a partner to maximize its contribution in the longer run (see, for example, Edwards, 1996). There is no longer a strong rationale to justify the extra effort required for a partnership. Organization identity is also closely related to mutuality. Since each partner's value-added is ultimately based on its mission (Moore, 2000), to some degree, partners must remain true to that mission and its contribution to the partnership in order to maintain value balance (see Austin, 2000).

In the INMED partnership, INMED and the government agencies remained consistent with their current programming and comparative advantages. The government has the scale, infrastructure and finance base to provide for a wide system of home visitors, but these staff were not necessarily trained in the state-of-the-art health and hygiene prevention methods and approaches. INMED gained expertise in these areas through its experience and its partnerships with pharmaceutical companies, who provide anti-parasitic medication, and additional health expertise and training. Together these actors are able to present a consistent health message reinforced through a variety of channels.

²⁰Lister (2000) draws upon Lukes' (1974) notion of power as 'socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour' (p. 22) to demonstrate how power can be exercised to shape the needs of others, influencing them to pursue behaviour in the interests of the power-holder. Thus, consensus, she argues, may imply a deeply ingrained power play.

Mutuality can reinforce organization identity.²¹ The opportunity to participate and influence equally means that each actor can more easily protect its organization identity, and hence the efficiency, effectiveness and synergistic rewards of the partnership. At the outset, no one organization can understand the implications of its or the partnership's actions for members' organization identity. Mutuality at least affords partner organizations the opportunity to consider and explain these implications and potentially defend their distinctive advantages, skills and legitimacy—all of which are necessary for the partnership's success. The maintenance of organization identity can also enable organizations to enter into more than one partnership.

From a normative perspective, mutuality implies fairness and equity to maximize responsiveness to each actor's constituencies and organizational needs. From a pragmatic perspective, mutuality affords opportunities for partner organizations to contribute their skills and other advantages as needed. With mutuality, these partners can more easily raise new ideas and propose new, more effective approaches. Mutuality enables partners to contribute to the partnership with fewer constraints (e.g., approvals, scrutiny, regulation and other forms of interference) and greater legitimacy. In addition, mutuality can help to ensure acceptance of the partnership's policy and procedures, and ease their implementation, when each actor has agreed to them and feels a sense of ownership.

Mutuality's added value is closely related to the advantages of informal coordination (see Chisholm, 1989). The partnership's policy and procedures and their ease of implementation typically derive from the incremental and informal nature with which these procedures are developed. Even more significant, mutuality implies trust and autonomy, which in turn implies the informal coordination advantages of adaptation, flexibility, innovation and pragmatic response to needs and challenges by those most suited to address them.

Mutuality is demonstrated in INMED's *Healthy Children, Healthy Futures* programme by the varying nature of its government partnerships. While INMED keeps the local units of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education informed in all its project locations, more intensive partnerships develop specific to the needs and actors in each location. Sometimes this occurs at the initiative of INMED (as is often the case with the free fecal examinations); sometimes it is because the government agency will recognize a need that INMED can fill, such as the training of home visitors.

FROM DEFINITIONS TO APPLICATION

Because of partnership's popularity, overuse and—as some claim—abuse, it is important to refine its meaning to ensure some common understanding. Because of the loftiness of its ideals and its normative and instrumental emphases (which sometimes conflict), it is impossible to design and implement a partnership in the ideal sense. Recognizing the ideal-type's practical limitations can help to thwart cynicism and assist actors in accepting the practical limitations specific to their context, potential partners or even their own objectives. Using the partnership model, actors can assess their relative tolerance for mutuality and their willingness to invest in protecting the organization identity of their potential partners. This may lead actors to rule out the partnership option in favour of more acceptable alternatives, such as contracting or absorption. Too often actors engage 'partners' without considering the changes necessary in their own behaviour in order to make partnerships effective.

As with partnership more generally, the dimensions of mutuality and organization identity are subjective. However, their identification and description can inform the development of indicators to reduce this subjectivity. The articulation of these dimensions also creates the foundation for a common language among potential partners. Partnership is a negotiated outcome among partners. One way of addressing the subjectivity of these defining dimensions, as well as promoting better understanding and trust among partners, is for partners to mutually define what mutuality and organization identity mean to their specific organizations and within the context of a particular partnership. Once actors decide on a partnership approach, the partnership framework provides a common language of negotiation and advocacy within the relationship, and suggests points of departure for evaluating

²¹This contribution is not guaranteed. As the discussion of gradual absorption and Lister's (2000) work on power relations in partnership work imply, mutuality could also afford opportunities to influence needs, perceptions and ultimately behaviour, which may compromise organization identity in the longer run.

the effectiveness and sustainability of the partnership relationship itself (as opposed to its programmes exclusively).

Linking these defining dimensions more explicitly to partnership's value-added can buttress such advocacy and evaluation efforts. It enables traditionally weaker partners to advocate their interests within the partnership, justifying them as a means to effectiveness. Thus, partners who embrace the normative dimensions of partnership can promote their perspectives in the instrumental language that may be more effective with their stronger partners. Recognizing this instrumentality can shape actors' preferences, leading to a greater willingness to adapt and share decision-making power in order to fully exploit comparative advantages, maximizing all resources available in the short and longer term.

Application of the partnership framework does not eliminate the potential for actors to engage in partnership rhetoric without partnership-like behaviour (whether intentional or not), either because it is popular and assists with public relations, or because the actual intent is co-optation. Nor does it prevent actors from strategically using the rhetoric (in the absence of its practice) to create opportunities to promote more partnership-like practice. It does, however, provide a tool and language for operationalizing partnership practice for those who wish to move beyond hidden agendas and empty rhetoric.

Partnership remains an evolving concept and practice. The partnership model and inter-organizational relationship matrix can inform continuing theory building and practical experimentation both to refine defining dimensions and indicators of partnership practice, and to enhance responsiveness to partners' expectations of partnership. Better linking these defining dimensions with partnership's value-added can inform the development of partnership design and implementation frameworks.

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