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Investigating Sino-British Transnational Partnership Development through the Practices of Faculty

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Rationale for Research

• Global changes stimulated by world polity have prompted higher education institutions to reconsider their attitudes towards internationalisation (Knight, 2005, 2013).

• One method for realising international opportunities afforded by neo-liberal policies is to develop international partnerships.

• HE Institutions seek alliances in which to develop the critical mass needed to ensure their survival (Bennell & Pearce, 2002).
Rationale for Research

- Naidoo (2009) argues with student mobility likely to slump, transnational education represents a key growth area, with demand from Asia likely to grow (British Council, 2013).

- Understanding what generates sustainable and valuable partnerships is arguably of critical importance to the business of contemporary higher education.
Contribution to Knowledge

A lacuna exists in transnational discourse - how partnerships, once initiated by the strategic level are operated by faculty members in order to create sustainable and valuable partnerships (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, Keay et al., 2014).

Study aims to facilitate understanding of: how activities, undertaken by faculty members at the operational stage of Sino-British transnational ‘joint programmes’, affects the development of social and partnership capital (Eddy, 2010).
Partnership Theoretical Frameworks

- 3rd Generation CHAT (Engeström 2001).
- Managerial/organisational tool to improve capacity for working across boundaries (Daniels & Edwards, 2010).
Social Capital Theoretical Frameworks

- ‘Resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive action’ (Lin 2001, p. 29).

- What resources are embedded in the partnership network?
- How do they help in generating purposive action?
- What do purposive actions generate in terms of outputs? E.g. trust, commitment, defensiveness, frustration? (Field, 2008)
- Can access to embedded resources be restricted, or blocked?
- Can embedded resources be developed and enhanced through action?
Methodology

Adapted from Yin (2014, p.50).
Partnership D: Sino Partner

1. Conflicting Systems

– *British* system operating in China- “it’s not British you know.”

– British education but not a British experience.

– Same timetabled system as UK- “completely help communication” “continuity of communication.”

– Multiple TNE programmes in operation at delivery partner- “I felt lost…nightmare” “I didn’t feel I belonged to anyone.”

Example:

– Activity: Teaching (on multiple TNE arrangements).

– Multiple responsibilities, growing ‘to do lists.’

– Multiple expectations from multiple stakeholders.

– Prioritisation of tasks?
Conclusions

- Multiple stakeholders – purposes not clear. Prioritise one activity over another? Could be seen as procrastination, passiveness, inertia by other stakeholder groups.
- Cannot find the time to develop the connections they need to build partner relationships, due to high level demands imposed by multiple stakeholders.
- Sino faculty feel they do not have the time to learn and reflect about their practice, often *taking/extracting* UK knowledge and support embedded in the partnership structure, but do not have the time to reciprocate in its development.
2. Training & Support

- Share UK knowledge- “bring this knowledge to us” “very good training…details…too general sometimes the information.”
- Training needs to be detailed- “no one taught us what to do…discovering by ourselves” “not enough support…feeling lost a little bit.”

Example:

- Activity: Online marking of student assignments.
- Not sure how to use Grademark “lot of time-wasting really.”
- Internet in China “challenging” “poor capacity for student numbers.”
- UK recognised limitations of technology and negotiated a different approach- “very glad” “very well received.”
• Conclusions
  – Faculty need access to information to complete even basis tasks (online marking). No knowledge? activities loses appeal, demotivates.
  – Negotiation throughout the activity process and empathy creates positive outputs.
  – If activities start to demotivate individuals then individuals shut down- “I would quit.”
  – They no longer interested in engaging- almost mechanical completion of tasks.
  – Should we consider the output? In this case delivering student grades- and not the process- not the how, but the what.
  – Can we negotiate processes better, which consider the limitations of our partners activity system?
3. Communication

– Lack of communication with UK- “waiting for two or three days for an answer” “I felt lost” “looking for an answer…we couldn’t find.”
– Interpreting regulations alone- “interpreting in different ways the regulations” “my colleague understood one thing, I understood another.”
– Cannot answer student questions- “students were asking questions no one could answer” “we were in the middle between students and the UK.”

Example:

– Activities: 1. Marking the late submission of student coursework.
  2. Emailing.
– Unsure of what UK regulations to apply.
– Assistance from UK not always timely.
– Emailing too formal and can be too emotional- “bothering” “pollute their inbox”
– Emails can be misinterpreted.
• **Conclusions**
  
  – Delayed access to knowledge and support embedded in the partnership network creates *blockages* in the partnership system.
  
  – It slows down activities (purposive action).
  
  – Outputs generated- “lack of trust” “missing guidance.”
  
  – Activities such as emailing can make faculty feel they are annoying or too dependent on their partner. Can we try *too hard* to access knowledge and support in which to validate our choices and subsequent actions?
  
  – Can constant communications actually *erode* social capital? Can we ask for too much help? Is there a *tipping point* in relational development?
### Social Capital (S.C)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK Partner (Internal)</th>
<th>Sino Partner (Internal)</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor S.C</td>
<td>Good S.C</td>
<td>Unequal relational development- potential failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good S.C</td>
<td>Poor S.C</td>
<td>Unequal relational development-but has potential to survive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor S.C</td>
<td>Poor S.C</td>
<td>No relationship- failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good S.C</td>
<td>Good S.C</td>
<td>Across team collective sharing: Partnership institutionalisation Partnership capital (Eddy, 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final Thoughts

• The student experience of TNE.
• Trade in TNE.
• Quality assurance in TNE.
• But ultimately they are all affected by the **quality** and **success** of the partnership (relationship) that underpins them.

• Improved efficiency, reputation and quality arises from relationships where we understand **how** to improve working relations.

• Cost opportunity = retention, time, attrition, revenue.
References

Partnership D: Sino Partner

1. Timings

- Conflicting working calendars (UK / China) impacts on activities.
- No access to UK - “lost” “big issue” “broken relationship” “there is no-one.”
- Fear of making decisions- repercussions “would it be correct?”

Example:

- Activity: Marking late student submission of work (Dec 2012).
- No UK contact - “new situations…you don’t know exactly what to do in specific cases.”
- Regulations can be interpreted differently.
Sino Partner Hannah

Conclusions

- Lack of access to resources such as knowledge, embedded in the partnership network, means activities lose direction – not sure how to engage with the activity.

- Generated output: “frustration…no information? Frustration.”

- Unable to access UK knowledge and support – she fears possible repercussions, activities may not meet partner expectations.

- Frustration is not mentioned as a critical success factor in partnership literature.

- We need to consider how we minimise frustration.