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### Original Citation

Bordogna, Claudia (2014) Investigating Sino-British Partnership Development through the Practices of Faculty. In: HEA Annual Conference 2014, 2nd - 3rd July 2014, Aston University, Birmingham, UK. (Unpublished)

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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.*

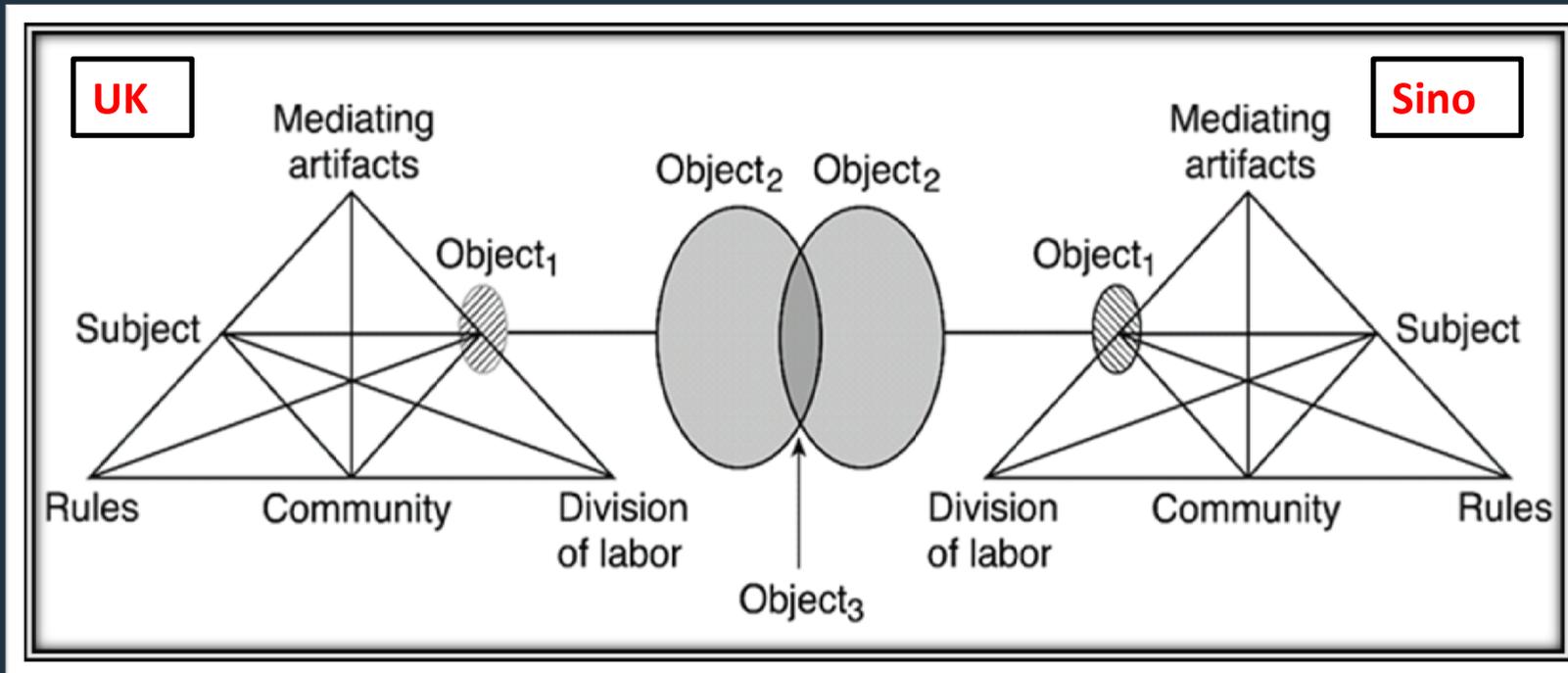


# Contribution to Knowledge

- 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?
- Social Action Theory (Weber, 1978).



# Methodology

## Multiple-Case Design

Holistic (single-unit of analysis)



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?



# Sino Partner *Hannah*

- **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.



# Partnership D: Sino Partner

## 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.”



# Sino Partner *Hannah*

- **Conclusions**

- Faculty need access to information to complete even basic 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?



# Partnership D: Sino Partner

## 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.



# Sino Partner *Hannah*

- **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)

UK Partner (Internal)	Sino Partner (Internal)	Output
Poor S.C	Good S.C	Unequal relational development- potential failure.
Good S.C	Poor S.C	Unequal relational development-but has potential to survive.
Poor S.C	Poor S.C	No relationship- failure.
Good S.C	Good S.C	Across team collective sharing: Partnership institutionalisation Partnership capital (Eddy, 2010)



# 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.



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# 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**.