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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.
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

Multiple-Case Design

Holistic (single-unit of analysis)

- Partnership Case A: 2 UK 2 Sino
- Partnership Case B: 2 UK 2 Sino
- Partnership Case C: 2 UK 2 Sino
- Partnership Case D: 2 UK 2 Sino

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.”
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.
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.