the case study toolbook

partnership case studies as tools for change

Supporters and Partners

PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES AS TOOLS FOR CHANGE

An increasing number of individuals are becoming involved in commissioning, researching, writing or disseminating partnership case studies. There is, of course, no definitive case study format so for this reason we don't include case studies per se in this publication. Rather, the Case Study Toolbook is designed to help such individuals to create their own case studies more successfully.

It is aimed at partnership practitioners worldwide, irrespective of their sector or their partnering role(s) or whether they are working on partnerships at an operational or a strategic level. Such individuals may be 'internal' or 'external' to the partnership being studied – we hope that this publication will be useful to both.

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THE CASE FOR CASE STUDIES: AN INTRODUCTION

Case studies have real potential to fill gaps in our knowledge about how partnerships function and to ensure that information about what works, and what does not is disseminated more widely. Opportunities for genuine learning to date have been minimal as most partnership case studies are, at best, too sector-focussed and, at worst, inadequate in coverage and style.[1]

Cross sector partnership as a sustainable development paradigm is at something of a crossroads. The idea itself has reached a considerable level of acceptability and endorsement and there are a growing number of examples of effective partnerships achieving sustainable development goals. But is this enough?

Small successes are a start, but the needs are huge. If we cannot understand and communicate what makes a partnership an efficient, effective and sustainable delivery mechanism, this approach will never achieve the reach and scale needed. Equally, if we do not get better at analysing when a cross-sector partnership is an inefficient, ineffective and unsustainable delivery mechanism we will waste valuable resources and the partnership paradigm itself will quickly become discredited.

One way of understanding and communicating is to re-think how we capture and disseminate partnership stories. This can be done through dynamic, tailored and user-friendly case studies that inspire, challenge and support the many practitioners struggling to build and maintain partnerships.

Case studies are not simply about promoting the replication of existing models or setting unilateral standards of partnership 'best practice'. Far from it, they are about encouraging and empowering practitioners to find appropriate solutions to the specific challenges they face by building on the insights and experiences of others. This is what we believe to be the real value and purpose of partnership case studies and this view has underpinned our decision to establish the one-year Case Study Project.

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1. L. Stott, (2005) *Partnership Case Studies in Context*

The Case Study Project was designed to:

- Provide insights into the process of successful cross-sector partnering
- Create better case study collection and dissemination methods
- Build professional competencies and skills in this area
- Establish a benchmark for good practice in case study work
- Deepen understanding of how case studies may be used more effectively as tools for change

Financially supported by Alcan, as part of their Sustainability Prize, with further support from the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry, International Business Leaders Forum, Rio Tinto, Supporting Entrepreneurs for Environment and Development (SEED) and United Nations Development Programme, the Case Study Project was launched at a practitioners workshop held at the University of Cambridge in February 2005.

Since that workshop, twelve individuals from Africa, Europe and Latin America have been active contributors to the project and it is upon their hard work that this publication builds. Without their original and insightful inputs the Case Study Toolbook could not have been compiled and we welcome this opportunity to thank these pioneering colleagues for their commitment to, and enthusiasm for, this work.

The starting point for the project was to address the apparent discrepancy between the **idea** of case studies as valuable sources of information and inspiration and the **reality** that most case studies are either too academic or too superficial to add real value to the day-to-day work of practitioners and policy makers. This is echoed in the views of two of the Case Study Project contributors:

> *Whilst academic case studies have important learning implications for a variety of audiences, their perspectives are rooted in distinct academic disciplinary areas and typically published in specialised journals. As a result their accessibility to a wider audience, in terms of both style and circulation, is limited.*[2]

> *Most of the so-called case studies I have seen in my partnering work till now are little more than public relations exercises or 'spin'. As such, they neither inform nor enlighten and, in my view, they do little more than advertise a partnership's (or, more accurately, one partner's) intentions and contribution. Perhaps I am being cynical here, but I imagine that these kinds of case studies undermine rather than enhance the cause of cross-sector partnering.*
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> **Extract from researcher/writer's logbook Case Study Project**

The first challenge for the project, therefore, was to explore new forms of case study that are neither too academic nor too superficial

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2. ibid

but which, nevertheless, combine a level of depth with practical relevance and clear lessons for practitioners and policy makers. This work is on-going and the case studies emerging from this project are being placed on the website as they are completed. Meanwhile, it is clear from our many conversations with practitioners from all sectors that the demand for these new types of case study is increasing.

When asked why they would like more robust and versatile case studies of their partnering work, replies included:			
"As a basis for building skills among the staff involved so we are better partners" **(Corporate)** *"To profile work we are proud of, since so many of our peers disapprove of NGOs working with business"* **(NGO)**	*"Enabling our partnership managers to learn what could be done better by exploring what went wrong"* **(Government)** *"As a real alternative to a site visit – where the project is almost inaccessible"* **(Corporate)**	*"To learn from partnership projects those lessons that could and should impact policy"* **(International Agency)** *"To enable our colleagues in communities to feel part of the bigger picture"* **(NGO)**	*"Helping us to leverage more non-cash (in kind) resources and even to find new partners"* **(International Agency)** *"To help us to share achievements much better with our community stakeholders – especially if the case studies are lively and even verbal not written"* **(Donor)**

A second challenge was to test out our working hypothesis that well-researched and presented case studies are not only capable of contributing considerably to the strengthening of the partnerships being studied, but also to bringing about significant change in terms of the attitude, behaviour, systems and policies of individuals and / or organisations engaged in partnering worldwide.

A final challenge was to consider case study dissemination and explore how case studies can be adapted and delivered to suit a range of audiences and fulfil different purposes.

Throughout the project we have used the term 'learning case studies'. This is not intended to push practitioners back into the classroom, but to imply that partnerships themselves will only achieve their potential if:
i) Partnering is undertaken in a spirit of adventure and open-mindedness
ii) Opportunities are created for those involved to learn from past experiences and to revise their partnerships in the light of this
iii) Partners themselves are encouraged to build 'learning cultures' in their respective organisations and sectors to ensure that outcomes from partnering activities are sustainable, contribute to system change and are capable of reaching scale

The material for this publication is drawn largely from the work of the Case Study Project contributors (see Appendix 1). Their collective contribution comprises:

- A series of specially commissioned and original papers (see Appendix 2)
- Researching, writing-up and re-working 'fit for purpose' partnership case studies (see project website at www.thepartneringinitiative.org/casestudyproject)
- Sharing personal logbooks that reflect on what they have learnt as case study researchers / writers during their involvement in the project

We fully acknowledge the wealth of ideas and experiences that their work is bringing into the public domain through this project and urge all readers to access the papers and case studies that underpin this publication on the project website. By doing so, they will benefit from a depth of thinking and insight that we have only been able to touch on here.

Whilst giving our colleagues whole-hearted credit for their invaluable contributions, we ourselves must accept full responsibility for this publication. It is the three of us who have made the decisions about what to include and what to exclude, who have created the connecting narrative and designed and developed the accompanying tools. We also take responsibility for any general conclusions we have drawn here about the value of partnership case studies in helping cross-sector partnering as a sustainable development paradigm to reach its potential.

As one of our Case Study Project contributors so eloquently says:

> *Deeper investigation offers the opportunity for generating richer and more dynamic pictures of partnering that can also serve as effective tools for learning and for change.*[3]

We share this view, and hope that by the time you have read this publication and put into practice some of its suggested approaches to case study work, you will too.

Sasha Hurrell
Sehr Hussain-Khaliq
Ros Tennyson

on behalf of
The Partnering Initiative

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3. ibid

1 THE STARTING POINT

Defining a case study

If one is aiming to acquire a more subtle and nuanced understanding of processes, events and situations, a case study approach is particularly helpful.[4]

Case studies are essentially summaries or syntheses of real-life stories and / or situations based on a combination of primary research and secondary data. Their purpose is to make information and experience available to those outside the immediate situation; whether for specific audiences (such as donors or policy makers) or for more general purposes (to raise greater awareness for those involved in similar activities elsewhere or for the general public). Sometimes case studies are produced primarily as skills training or teaching tools because they provide more dynamic and 'real life' learning experiences.

We use the term 'case study' here to mean something more substantial than a publicity-seeking 'profile' but less detailed than conventional academic 'research'. We assume, however, that a good case study has elements of both, combining the **vigour** associated with professional practice and the **rigour** associated with academia.

Although case studies are typically produced in written form, new dissemination tools and techniques are increasingly being used to communicate their findings to a wide range of different audiences. These include: verbal storytelling; radio / TV or film documentary; static or inter-active web-based materials and even dramatic reconstructions or role-plays. How a case study is structured and delivered can vary considerably with the intention of 'tailoring' the case study as appropriately as possible for its intended audience(s). Therefore, a key issue for anyone involved in case study work is to consider who the actual or potential audiences are and how the case study as a product will best reach them.

Considering how much value is placed on them by policy makers, donors and practitioners, it is surprising (and disappointing) how so few case studies match their expectations.

What is a cross-sector partnership?

Perhaps we need to briefly digress here to discuss what we understand by 'cross-sector partnership'. We use this term to mean a collaboration between two or more 'sectors' (whether business,

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4.   Rein (2005) *Case Study Research: Understanding Relationships*

civil society, government or international agencies) for sustainable development outcomes. Whenever we use the term 'partnership' or 'partnering' in the text that follows we always mean a collaboration that is across sectors.

An increasing number of definitions for partnership are in use, many of which cite 'mutuality' or 'shared risks and benefits' as a fundamental characteristic. There are, however, many partnerships where mutuality is hard to find and / or where it is abundantly clear that risks and benefits are not shared.

There are also many instances where there is no formal definition of partnership agreed by the partners. In other words, either a common understanding of the term is (rashly) assumed or it is (mistakenly) regarded as unimportant. On occasions the word 'partnership' is even used quite cynically to imply far more collaboration and even-handedness than actually exists or is intended by those in the driving seat. This is of particular concern since it risks de-stabilising the partnership paradigm itself.

In any event, it is worth asking whose responsibility it is to determine the precise meaning of the word or to judge activity by a notion of what is, and what is not, a 'true' partnership. In fact, some are arriving at a surprisingly broad definition, for example this, based on evidence from more than 40 partnerships worldwide…

> *Experience suggests that a cross-sector or multi-sector working collaboration for sustainable development can be called a partnership whenever those involved define themselves and each other as partners.*[5]

Having said that, more than one case study researcher / writer in this project discovered that some interviewees, whilst accepting their working relationship with other organisations was a partnership and defining themselves as partners, actually felt the partnership was falling far short of their expectations of what it should be.

> *We can't really call this a partnership, even though we do. It really isn't an equal one. They tell us what they expect us to do and how we need to change if we are not to lose their financial support. We don't dare speak out because without their funding we could not function. But all they are doing is trying to mould us into their own model of partnership, not one we build together.*
> **Quote from a case study interviewee**

Certainly this is not the whole story, there were many more examples in the Case Study Project where interviewees reported that whilst they had entered a partnership as an unequal partner, their position in the partnership had strengthened over time, leading to greater

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5. Business Partners for Development Knowledge Resources Group in Tennyson, R (2003) *Institutionalising Partnerships: Lessons from the Front Line*

equity during the partnership's lifecycle to the extent that they now felt they were in a 'real' partnership.

And, of course, nothing stands still. A partnership with definition problems today, may throw up a leader who encourages the development of a clearer and shared definition of that partnership tomorrow. In fact, a good case study that demonstrates why this matters, may be just what such leaders need to build a convincing argument for defining their own partnership more precisely.

In spite of the fact that the term 'partnership' may be misused, over-used and almost always loosely-used, it is an acknowledged and growing mechanism for delivering sustainable development outcomes at local, national and global levels. As such, it is a paradigm worthy of greater exploration and analysis.

Creating a partnership case study

A partnership case study suggests an approach that:

> *Facilitates an examination of the **processes** involved in a partnership's development, what works effectively and what does not, as well as an investigation of partnership outputs **and** outcomes, some of which may be unexpected.*[6]

How does a partnership case study differ from a partnership **research project** or a **review** of a partnership? Indeed the boundaries may be quite blurred, especially as all case studies require some level of research and many lead partners to review their relationship and / or their work as a result of the case study process. We believe – and the findings from the project confirm – that in some ways they are very similar. As with research and reviews, an effective case study:

- Always reveals more than would be evident to a casual observer
- Is able to provide a thoughtful and penetrating description, perhaps with many layers of information
- May well explore complex issues and even raise challenging questions

However, by not involving either critique or recommendations, case studies actually differ quite significantly from other forms of investigation and write-up.

It is important to make this distinction quite clear, since it is not uncommon for those being 'studied' to feel self-conscious and anxious about how they or their organisation or their partnership will be 'judged'. A case study can be seen as a less threatening intervention whilst still having serious value within and beyond the partnership.

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6. Stott (2005)

The definition agreed by the contributors to the Case Study Project attempts to capture the notion of a partnership case study that is designed to enhance the reader or audience's own creative and critical thinking, rather than draw conclusions about a specific partnership or partnering in general.

Partnership case studies are processes and products that enhance creative and critical thinking about the value, performance and impact of a partnership.[7]

A partnership case study aims to capture the story of a partnership over time with the intention of communicating its character, challenges and achievements. When asked how they perceived partnership case studies, one of our contributors replied:

> *I see partnerships for sustainable development as being – potentially – of radical importance in changing the way we live in our world and therefore what I look for when researching and writing a partnership case study are those 'transformational' ideas or moments when real change suddenly seems possible.*[8]

Fit for purpose case studies

There is little point in accumulating case studies that simply sit on a shelf or remain buried and unread on a website. Too many case studies are developed in a flurry of enthusiasm and are then hardly used.

To know specifically **why** a case study is being undertaken or, better still, the **range of reasons** for it, is the first step in ensuring that the case study is designed, developed and delivered in ways that are 'fit for purpose'. By this phrase, we mean case studies that are able to reach and be acceptable to their target audience(s) in terms of style, length, format and clarity.

Case studies may have a number of broad objectives including:
- Achieving internal and external learning that may contribute to constructive change
- Reaching and influencing a range of external stakeholders
- Contributing to the theory and practice of partnering as a mechanism for sustainable development

Because case studies may be created for a number of different 'audiences', thought needs to be given at an early stage to:
- Who the audiences are
- What their diverse needs, interests and expectations might be
- How to customise the material to fit different audiences / purposes
- How to prioritise between possibly competing interests

See TOOL 1: PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDY: CHECKLIST

A tool designed for researchers and commissioners of partnering case studies, outlining the process for case study development.

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7. Definition developed by participants at the Case Study Project workshop, Cambridge University, February 2005
8. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman, (2005) *Approaching the Task: A Socratean Dialogue*

When the case study objectives and the different audiences / purposes are identified and agreed, the partnership case study, or, more accurately, the different outputs from a case study process, are likely to be 'fit for purpose'.

In addition to helping the case study researcher / writer think more deeply about what they are doing, why and who for, thinking about objectives and audiences may also be a useful prompt for a detailed conversation with partners. Indeed, a case study undertaken for one reason may turn out to have a multiplicity of uses and be suitable for adaptation to quite different purposes and needs.

Increasingly we see briefs for case study researchers / writers that ask for a wide-ranging study that will produce enough substance for several different kinds of output. A case study prompted by a request from an external donor, for example, might furnish valuable material for:
• New information for a website or marketing material
• A further funding proposal
• Attracting new partners into the project
• An article for a specialist journal
• A press release
• An internal partnering skills training tool

It is helpful to distinguish between 'internal' and 'external' audiences. The former includes partnership beneficiaries and partner representatives as well as other staff from partner organisations. The latter includes any non-partner donors, policy makers, partners and brokers from other partnerships, the media and members of the general public.

Each of these groups will have widely different preferences for the format and content of a case study: an external donor may expect something along the lines of a report; policy makers often require statistics; the general public might welcome a story with a personal dimension while potential partners will want to know how current partners have benefited from their partnership involvement. Added to which, people in each sector have different levels of tolerance for detail and widely divergent attention spans, or, put more politely, varied amounts of time available for reading!

All of these factors need to be taken into account when creating case studies and case study outputs that are 'fit for purpose'.

2 GETTING INSIDE THE PROCESS

Approaching the task

The researcher needs to be knowledgeable in three distinct areas: first, in the theory and practice of partnerships; second, in the complex relationship between the partnership's dynamics and its intended outcomes; and third, in the relevant methods of data collection.[9]

It is not just the products of case study work that need to be 'fit for purpose' but also the case study researchers / writers themselves! They are well advised to test this by checking out their relative strengths and weaknesses in this field and giving themselves opportunities to reflect on the range of skills, knowledge and experiences they have and how well or not these 'fit' the case study research task.

Such self-assessments might take account of:
- Educational background: academic discipline, specialist training
- Previous partnership case study or related research and writing experience
- Understanding and knowledge of partnering as a sustainable development paradigm
- Reflections on assumptions, pre-conceptions and prejudices in relation to the case study work they are about to undertake
- Being honest about their level of confidence in relation to the case study work ahead

Done well, this self-assessment should be able to confirm those areas where they are naturally competent and expose those areas where they are less so.

As the dialogue between case study researchers / writers from different disciplines reveals,[10] there are many ways to approach the case study research and writing challenge and there may even be particular value in working, if possible, in pairs or small teams to ensure a complementary mix of skills and approaches. Failing this, case study researchers / writers simply have to work with their own skills and do their best to be as prepared as possible for the job.

Most important of all, case study researchers / writers can always work to build their capacities as 'reflective practitioners' by adopting

See: TOOL 3: SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This tool is designed as a self-assessment exercise for the case study researcher / writer to help them identify their skills and reflect on any preconceptions and expectations they may bring to the role.

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9. Rein (2005)
10. Keatman (2005)

a number of good professional practices. These might include:

- Ensuring they have enough time, silence and space to properly reflect on their work
- Keeping a logbook as a way of tracking what they are doing and recording unanswered questions
- Developing a network of 'critical friends' outside the sphere of work they are engaged in, and perhaps from different disciplines, to help them to challenge thinking and assumptions
- Doing their best to 'triangulate' the data by seeking further corroboration of the information they are marshalling about the partnership being studied

There are many images or metaphors that can be used to describe the role of a case study researcher / writer. Perhaps just three will suffice here[11]:

i) The case study researcher / writer as a **miner** whose task is to 'drill down' beneath the surface and search for both the nuggets of hidden gold (as well as the iron ore, since that is also extremely useful!)

ii) The case study researcher / writer as an **explorer** travelling by different routes and modes of transport to an unknown destination

iii) The case study researcher / writer as an **artist** who starts with an empty canvas and uses a range of techniques and types of tool to create an image that will communicate vividly to those who see it.

How do we know what we know?

The table below[12] attempts to present in a simple format the various different ways of 'knowing' that case study researchers / writers may employ to assimilate and understand data, whether consciously or unconsciously:

TYPE OF 'KNOWING'				
INTELLECT	MEMORY	SENSES	INTUITION	IMAGINATION
BASED ON...				
Concepts Logic Theory	History Facts Previous experience	Sight Touch Hearing	Instinct Feelings 'Sixth sense'	Vision Empathy Insight
UNDERLYING QUESTION				
Does this evidence correspond with the prevailing hypothesis?	How do I understand and interpret the situation from my knowledge of the subject and previous experience?	What do I actually observe / hear / sense / in this situation?	Am I convinced that this is 'true'?	Can I grasp the wider picture / significance of what I am seeing / being told?

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11. Adapted from, Stott, (2005) *Partnership Case Studies in Context*
12. Adapted from training materials developed for The Partnering Initiative by Ros Tennyson

Invariably, case study researchers / writers use a mixture of these different ways of knowing. Though some will gravitate naturally to those on the left of the table and may be suspicious of colleagues who are more comfortable with those on the right of the table and vice versa. Ways of gathering and interpreting data are rarely simple or one-dimensional and it is likely that researchers will use a combination of the above without necessarily analysing which they are using and when.

A good case study researcher / writer will both respect and build on different ways of knowing. Ideally, they will also endeavour to widen and deepen their own skills, in order to benefit from different ways of understanding data, as well as to compensate for tending too strongly in one direction or the other.

Who knows best?

The actors involved in partnership groups are the experts on their partnerships.[13]

Whilst it is a good starting point to accept that the partners themselves know most about their own partnership, something which is often forgotten by external researchers, it is also important to recognise that they may not always be aware of just how much they actually know. One of the roles of a case study researcher / writer can be to encourage reflection and to facilitate partners, either separately or as a group, to: articulate memories; explore any 'burning issues' and recount their experiences of the partnership in action.

Partners, for a variety of reasons explored elsewhere, may not always want to contribute to the case study process. Indeed some can develop their avoidance techniques to a fine art by simply 'going through the motions' with case study researchers / writers:

> *Staff in the organisation are used to showing visitors round the centre and the projects so the organisation of such visits is very professional. However, the site visits proved frustrating because although I could see that they were interesting, even inspiring, I felt that the visits were ritualised. I had hoped they would provide deeper insights into the project and the partner relationships but I felt that I got little more than a standard 'package'.*
>
> **Extract from researcher / writer's logbook**
> **Case Study Project**

Some partners may actually be resistant to revealing any issues they feel reflect negatively on them or on the partnership:

> *I found that there was real resistance from the staff team to telling me anything that could be interpreted as negative about themselves,*

13. Hemmati (2005) *Case Study Entry Points: Drivers and Implications*

the other partners or the partnership itself. I asked if I could see some of their own research into impacts and then I was told that their findings were 'disappointing'. When I suggested that it might be useful to take these findings into account in order to learn what could work better next time, I was told that they would do this themselves at a future date. I was not allowed to see these findings even though they could have enhanced the case study we were working on together.

Extract from researcher / writer's logbook
Case Study Project

In some situations, it is virtually impossible to find things out because case study researchers / writers are not given access to certain partners or other stakeholders:

Having only been able to have an in-depth interview with representatives from one of the three key partner organisations, I recognise that this case study presents a one-sided view of the partnership. Therefore, whilst it fails to reflect other partner perspectives it actually reveals a considerable amount about one partner's need to control access to information.

Extract from researcher / writer's logbook
Case Study Project

The researcher / writer may often be unaware that this is happening, but even when s/he is, there may be little s/he can do about it except to find a tactful way of explaining why the information presented in the case study is incomplete.

Whilst it may not always be clear who 'knows best', case study researchers / writers have to try to strike a balance between the many different levels and quality of inputs, including their own.

It may not always be a question of simply who knows best, but also whether what is known should, or should not, be included. There may be situations in which the researcher / writer knows things about the partnership that may be relevant or interesting but decides not to include these in their case study either because they have been asked not to by one or more partners or because they themselves judge that including such material would have a serious impact on the partnership itself.

We decided that we had to leave out some particularly sensitive issues since, after much reflection, we came to believe that including them in a case study intended for a wider audience might be harmful to some of the partners or to the partnership itself.

Extract from researcher / writer's logbook
Case Study Project

The issue of what to include/exclude is also related to the challenge of synthesising and analysing the data collected.

Finding an appropriate language

At worst, language can obscure and provide fodder for misunderstanding; at best, it can convey something to as many people as need to hear it. In addition, whilst we may be able to translate words into different spoken and sectoral languages, can we truly translate the underlying concepts and cultural nuances?[14]

Language, whether understood as different tongues or as the jargon developed by different sectors and / or professional disciplines, is a significant factor in case study work. In data collection, as well as in dissemination, language that is clear and accessible is of paramount importance. Those involved in case study work need to pay particular attention to this. As one of our colleagues in the Case Study Project said:

I recognise that I have to make provision to overcome barriers… it is essential to discuss basic words or concepts and to agree on a common language between all of us involved in the process.[15]

Sometimes case study work can be particularly challenging because it involves working with more than one spoken language and may require the services of a professional translator. Or there may be situations where there are partners or partnerships from different countries or language groups involved. This, as has been revealed by recent work comparing a number of partnerships in Southern Africa[16], raises a further dimension as none of the five different spoken languages involved in the study had a word for 'partnership'. The phrase used when translated was 'working together' which was not necessarily what the researcher, or potential case study audiences from other countries, understood by the term 'partnership'.

How does a case study researcher / writer deal with this? Some may choose to write in a simplified, plain language with a greater focus on the accessibility of the partnership's story to the largest number of potential audiences. Others, such as the case study researcher / writer below, may choose a more complex approach with a greater focus on using the case study itself to promote deeper understanding of cross-sectoral and cross-cultural challenges in partnering.

I invite partners simply to speak in their own sectoral / organisational 'language' (asking for clarification if I don't understand something). Where possible, I write the case study in the different 'languages' they have used, thereby using the case study itself as a way of promoting insight and understanding in the cross-sectoral and cross-cultural diversity typical of many partnerships. In other words, I go out of my way not to homogenise the language.[17]

14. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman, (2005)
15. ibid
16. Rein, Stott *et al* (2005) *Working Together: A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa*
17. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman (2005)

In any event, choices in the use of language as well as communication styles are important. What may or may not be appropriate needs to be discussed with those involved so that clear and agreed decisions can be made about possible options.

3 THE RESEARCHER / WRITER

Making the choice

A key tenet for all case study researchers is that they are open and prepared to learn from the people they are working with. Such a stance encourages the development of a reciprocal learning process between 'the researcher' and 'the researched'.[18]

There are many issues to consider in identifying an appropriate case study researcher / writer and there are many views that may influence the choice. Three views are highlighted below:

i) *Any case study researcher will be: driven by certain interests and hypotheses; constrained with regard to the methodologies s/he can use due to a number of factors and also constrained in terms of the time and resources available for undertaking the case study.*[19]

ii) *Sustainable development partnerships are relatively new and extensive research into them has been limited so there may not yet be many people available with the appropriate experience of partnering case study research. Added to which, it is probable that partnership case study work may be particularly daunting since those acting as case study researchers / writers are inevitably confronted by an array of sectoral and organisational relationships as well as different levels of accountability to partners, beneficiaries and donors.*[20]

iii) *How a case study researcher / writer perceives and undertakes their role is influenced by three predominant factors: firstly, the relationship s/he has with the partnership being studied; secondly, the specifications of the contract or commission; and thirdly, the expectations of all those involved, which may be different from the contract specifications. Indeed, because of the complexities involved in undertaking this form of research with a partnership, there is more likelihood that there will be a number of conflicting expectations.*[21]

Does a partnership case study researcher / writer need direct experience of working in a partnership? Do they require wide ranging knowledge of partnering as a sustainable development paradigm? Must they be completely external to the partnership being studied for

18. Stott (2005)
19. Hemmati (2005)
20. Stott (2005)
21. Rein (2005)

the case study to be regarded as 'objective'? What particular 'added value' does someone familiar with the partnership bring to the case study work? Will one researcher / writer be able to complete all aspects of the task or would a small team be better? To whom should they be accountable? Will they 'own' the case study when it is completed?

Some of these important questions are explored below. Others will need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis in each new situation.

Whoever appoints a case study researcher / writer needs to think carefully about what they are looking for and, where possible, choose between:
• Appointing one person to the task or a small team / working group
• Professionals with more academic or more practice-based credentials
• Individuals who know the partnership well or someone who knows nothing about the partnership
• Those who know a lot about the partnering process or those who know a lot about the specialist focus of the partnership's activities

And of course, a key question is what resources are available for the case study work: financial (for fees, travel, site visits, publications etc); time; administrative / technical support and partner availability.

The 'invisible' researcher

Whether intentional or not, a case study researcher affects the system s/he is researching purely by entering into the situation.[22]

It is clear that unless the case study is compiled entirely from records, any case study research process will be more or less visible to those being 'researched' and for this reason will be intrusive. As well as being impossible, invisibility may also be undesirable since the partners and other stakeholders should have an active engagement and sense of shared ownership of the case study itself. They therefore need to know about it and participate in the research process.

Of course, this is a relative issue as we explore below.

A case study research process that encourages reflection on the partnership by those involved; that articulates achievements on their behalf or that surfaces underlying issues that are important to the well-being of the partnership, may all be legitimate and welcome outcomes of the case study 'intervention'.

22. ibid

However, a case study research process that puts people into difficult positions, publicises unexpected discrepancies or undermines confidence in the partnership in any way would be rightly regarded as unethical practice.

> *You cannot look at and explore something without changing its very nature. All we can strive for is to leave fewer and smaller footprints.*[23]

It may not always be possible for case study researchers / writers to foresee what may happen within a partnership as a result of the research itself, but it is always their responsibility to be aware of the potential dangers and, wherever possible, to anticipate and seek to minimise any unwelcome and / or detrimental effects of their case study work.

Objectivity: Subjectivity

Through the explicit acknowledgement of subjectivity, a dialogue is encouraged concerning those aspects of the research that 'belong' to the researcher (i.e. his / her own projections and assumptions) and those that 'belong' to the research.[24]

In reading the logbooks compiled by some of those involved in the Case Study Project, it is clear that it is virtually impossible to separate the case study research from the case study researcher / writer. Some level of subjectivity in the form of preconceptions, assumptions and attitudes to partnering is inevitable. Therefore, the issue of whether or not case study researchers / writers are subjective in how they approach their work is perhaps of less importance than how strongly their subjectivity intrudes upon it. In other words: how fully do they recognise their subjectivity and how do they deal with this?

This issue may be of particular importance for the case study researcher / writer who works within, or is closely connected to, the partnership. Alternatively, if s/he has, for example, been acting on behalf of the partnership as a 'broker', s/he may be ideally placed to create a case study that is full of detail and insight that is simply impossible for an outsider to access or understand. However, we should not assume that external case study researchers / writers are any less subjective since they will bring to the task their own assumptions and values. They are simply subjective in different ways.

In spite of our best of aspirations, experience suggests that objectivity in case study work is a myth. Thus, rather than struggling or, worse still, pretending, to achieve the unachievable, it may be

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23. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman (2005)
24. Rein (2005)

better for case study researchers / writers to focus their attention on strategies for managing subjectivity. After all, a case study comes alive because it is a human interpretation of a human story and otherwise offers little 'added value'.

One strategy for managing subjectivity in the case study data collection and dissemination process is to simply acknowledge it as an issue:

> *Sometimes it was difficult to manage the process to meet my research objectives – especially when the people I interviewed wanted to have my opinion on some aspect of the partnership. It was simply not possible for them to see me as a neutral person with no opinions. I told them that I was looking for the procedures the partnership had established and how these had influenced the development of the partnership over time. But by trying to help them to feel comfortable and safe enough to express their own views, I inevitably had to engage at a more personal level than I had originally intended. In this way, they were increasingly open and honest with me.*
>
> **Extract from researcher / writer's logbook**
> **Case Study Project**

Other strategies for managing subjectivity that have emerged during the Case Study project include:

i) Developing greater professional discipline:

> *As a discipline in conducting face-to-face case study research, I try to still my mind and to simply see what emerges, looking for patterns, balance and imbalance in whatever ways they show themselves. In other words, I assume that the story will tell itself and that my role as a case study researcher is simply to give the process my total attention.*[25]

i) Choosing to work in small teams rather than alone:

> *When members of a research team are working together on a case study, developing relationships in which personal honesty and supportive critical analysis becomes part of the research practice, it not only provides a learning experience for the researchers but ultimately it generates a clearer and more analytic or detailed case study.*[26]

iii) And, in one instance, choosing subjectivity as a specific case study methodology:

> *Rather than being neutral, you can take an individual's personal journey in a partnership and tell their story. Taking a snapshot of someone's experience. This gets to the same end point but the*

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25. ibid
26. ibid

journey is far more interesting. Then the audience takes what they want to learn rather than turning the learning into a pseudo-science.[27]

Whatever approach is used, it is a useful guiding principle that case study researchers / writers should aim to be as open and honest as possible about what experiences and attitudes they are bringing to their task.

Minu Hemmati, in common with many others, takes the position that 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' are impossible aspirations for human beings, describes this process of transparency as;

Replacing the goal of 'objectivity' with the goal of minimising uncontrolled, implicit subjectivity. For the partnership researcher / case study writer, this means explaining assumptions, theories and hypotheses used and methodologies chosen. S/he should be aware of, and able to communicate, her / his own interests, hopes and concerns regarding partnerships in general, the specific case in question, and the case study research process itself.[28]

27. Case study researcher /writer quoted in Keatman (2005)
28. Hemmati (2005)

4 CREATING THE BRIEF

What is the task?

When it is done effectively, the case study research process itself can be a catalyst for change and it may provide a learning and knowledge-generating experience: done badly, case study research becomes a flat narrative that neither illumines nor explains, and more often than not is never referred to again.[29]

In any written brief, a partnership case study researcher / writer needs to be given a clear task and set of 'deliverables' within an agreed timeframe. In defining the task, they need to be encouraged / instructed to give due attention to the following issues[30]:

• Fitting all aspects of the case study work to the **agreed objectives and audiences** and not getting side-tracked into peripheral issues

• Drawing on a **wide range of data collection methods** that can be supplemented with wider sources of information such as literature, partnership documentation and statistical reviews

• Studying the partnership's **context and operating environment** on the basis that this will help to reveal how the partnership 'intervention' makes a difference to a situation rather than simply answering the question: Does it work?

• Reflecting **multiple approaches and perspectives** so that the varied views and opinions of different partners and stakeholders are fully explored and reported

• Using an **'interactive' rather than a 'detached'** form of research at all stages of the process, including the design phase, with active engagement between 'the researcher' and 'the researched' in a cycle linking experience, reflection, learning and action

• Considering how the **entry point for the case study research** will condition much of the partnership's history / story to be researched and studied and what kinds of information and experience are available upon which the case study can be built

• Accepting that the **amount of time allocated to process** will strongly condition the breadth and depth of their case study, with

29. Rein (2005)
30. Adapted from Stott (2005) *Partnerships in Context*

all parties being clear about what is realistic with the resources available

- Acknowledging the **intended and potential target audiences** for the case study outputs are an important influencing factor in the way the case study is researched and written

In effect, a case study researcher / writer is being asked to compile and,

…present a panorama of the partnership landscape that is at once coherent and all-inclusive, as well as just and fair to all concerned.[31]

Their brief needs to reflect this as clearly as possible.

Building agreement

In any partnership, individuals representing partner organisations may have divergent views on whether or not they want to be involved in a case study and / or even whether or not the partnership should be the subject of a case study at all. There are at least three scenarios around the issue of agreement:

SCENARIO	EXAMPLES CITED BY CASE STUDY WRITERS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES FOR A CASE STUDY WRITER
1 **Coercion** Where those involved feel that they have no choice but to participate in case study research because refusal carries a greater potential risk than participating.	• One partner dominates the partnership and controls such decisions • One individual or partner organisation that provides significant resources seeks to publicise their own contribution without regard for the opinions of other partners • External donor(s) require a case study as part of the funding agreement	• Refusing to undertake the case study work and explaining why not • Offering to act as a neutral intermediary on behalf of those feeling coerced to assist better understanding of some of the underlying issues • Writing a fictionalised account of this situation to highlight the underlying problem for the benefit of partners and / or donors elsewhere
2 **Reluctant engagement** Where the rationale for a case study is understood and valued but there is nervousness about the process and / or the potential findings and / or the uses to which the findings may be put.	• A partner organisation is willing to be involved but is uncomfortable with the specific research approach being proposed • Anxiety about any findings that might appear 'negative' • One partner is seen as having a 'hidden agenda' with regard to how the case study will be used	Provide: • Explanations and reassurance • Pre-agreed rules of engagement • Examples of where the case study process has added value to a partnership's effectiveness

31. Rein (2005)

SCENARIO	EXAMPLES CITED BY CASE STUDY WRITERS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES FOR A CASE STUDY WRITER
3 **Willing engagement** Where there is genuine enthusiasm for the potential value of the case study within and / or beyond the partnership itself.	The partners view the case study process as providing: • Internal learning that enables the partnership to review and revise its working arrangements and operational impacts • Grounds for leveraging / mobilising further resources into the partnership • Relevant information for potential new partners	Build on their enthusiasm by enabling them to: • Provide useful insights and information to key others e.g. external donors / policy makers / supporters • Have greater strategic or policy impacts • Share the experience of effectiveness in partnering more widely

It should be noted that there can be aspects of each of these three scenarios within the same partnership.

It is important for a case study researcher / writer to clarify the level of willingness within the partnership for the case study work and, where possible, build greater genuine engagement prior to starting the case study process. This may mean arranging a number of one-to-one meetings or other forms of contact and involve much listening and explanation prior to finalising the process design and starting the data collection work. Such preliminary work may add considerably to the time and costs involved.

Agreeing the rules

It is a good idea to discuss and agree in advance some 'rules of engagement' with partners and / or those funding the case study research. This may include general principles of good practice such as clarifying the terms of reference for the case study researcher / writer, as well as some specific agreements between the researcher and the researched about sensitive issues including what is and what is not regarded as out of bounds for the case study.

The case study may well be aiming to explore:
• **Processes** as well as projects;
• **Outcomes** as well as outputs, and / or
• **Unexpected impacts** as well as those that are expected

It is, therefore, important to ask questions such as: Is it clear to partners and others involved that this is the intention? Do they understand why such a wide-ranging exploration is desirable? Do they agree that it is necessary or useful? What would they prefer?

All those involved will welcome clarity about the aims of the case study work and may become much more engaged if they are invited to discuss the potential uses of the case study in advance and to help set parameters and objectives for the whole process.

The rules of engagement will vary according to each situation, but broadly they should attempt to ensure that the:

i)   Parameters of the case study are clearly defined and agreed by all those involved

ii) Case study research / writer has an agreed 'licence to operate' with clear understanding about access to information and confidentiality as well as decision-making and 'sign off' procedures

iii) Ownership of the outputs and intellectual property is clarified

The process of negotiating appropriate rules of engagement should help to build the working relationship and to provide reassurance with regard to the process and its purpose(s).

Focus and entry points

There are many possible 'prompts' for a case study. These will lead to significant differences in focus and will require key decisions about what should be the 'entry point' for the researcher in undertaking the case study work. Such prompts can come from external donors, policy makers, the media or the partners themselves, be they individual partner organisations or the partners as a group.

Minu Hemmati,[32] in her exploration of the possible different entry points for case study work, cites the SEED Initiative, where the intention is to study the inherent success and failure factors from the earliest stages of a partnership in order to deduce what conditions are most likely to lead to an effective partnership. To this end, it is essential that the case study process be established at virtually the same moment as the partnership itself starts and that it continues over a reasonable portion of the partnership's life cycle. This approach may also be appropriate for a case study that specifically seeks to explore the *process* of partnership-building over time.

A key issue in these circumstances is that by being present from the beginning of the partnership's life cycle, even if intermittently, the researchers will inevitably have an impact on the partnership's development, for example, by making partners more self-conscious about being observed.

Case studies that seek to examine the costs and benefits of a partnership, perhaps as compared with non-partnership alternatives, may best be able to do this once the partnership has completed its work. In this situation a central concern is whether a retrospective data collection process will ever be able to accumulate enough of the 'right' material to provide the kind of comprehensive information required to make useful deductions.

32. Hemmati (2005)

In addition, as Melanie Rein[33] explores in some depth, it is clear that the nature of the organisational structure and inter-organisational relationships of the partnership being studied can have significant implications for the case study researcher / writer. This calls for a clear understanding of the organisational relationships by the case study researcher / writer, together with an analysis of their own entry point in advance of the case study work commencing.[34]

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33. Rein (2005)
34. ibid

5 MAKING SENSE OF THE DATA

Data collection

Deciding which data collection and review methodologies are best suited to particular groups is important, as is an assurance of confidentiality for those who may have controversial or critical views and be afraid to speak out. This is linked to the need for an awareness of perspectives that may be marginalised, or even excluded, due to power imbalances within the partnership.[35]

It is very important to choose an appropriate case study methodology that suits the capacities and 'comfort zones' of different groups and individuals as well as the time and resources available. Particular attention may need to be given to those whose views are usually marginalised as one way to ensure better representation and balance in the case study as a whole. As part of this process, it is vital to check out that the methods selected are appropriate.

> *I made the assumption that the community group would prefer an unstructured discussion as a group but I was wrong. They were bewildered by it, and did not understand why I was there or what was expected of them. I quickly changed track and set up a series of one-to-one semi-structured interviews – using precise questions as a starting point to a more general discussion. The interviewees quickly relaxed, seemed more confident about what was expected and felt able to share their views quite fully and openly.*
>
> **Extract from researcher / writer's logbook**
> **Case Study Project**

Whatever approach is used, we should remember that the 'marginal' voices are just one end of a spectrum at the other end of which are the 'dominant' voices. A case study researcher / writer will need equal sensitivity and skill in containing and giving proper perspective to those who insist on saying a lot and, more worryingly, to those who insist on controlling who else speaks.

To deal with both ends of the 'marginal' / 'dominant' spectrum, several of the case study researchers / writers in the Case Study Project decided to use a combination of data collection methods. In effect they 'mixed and matched' several of the following **primary** data collection options:

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35. Stott (2005)

- **Semi-structured or free ranging one-to-one interviews** with representatives of partner organisations, the community or other key stakeholders
- **Facilitated discussion** in small groups either from the same partner organisation or community or representatives from different partner organisations and / or the community together
- **Observation** of project activities or partner meetings
- **Casual remarks** made in informal / social situations (often the most revealing source of information!)

Put together with data collected from **secondary** sources such as partnering agreements, minutes of meetings, project proposals and statistics collected by others, the case studies were developed into more vivid and comprehensive pieces of work with greater possibilities for accuracy and usefulness for several purposes.

In mentioning 'casual remarks' above, we suggest that a case study researcher / writer may often learn most, or at least get an important new cue or prompt, from ad hoc encounters with partners or stakeholders, whether in the form of an incidental remark during a coffee break or in a post-interview phone conversation or email. It is important for researchers to remember that this is also a legitimate source of material although it may need to be 'checked out' for its validity before featuring too prominently in the case study itself.

In line with this, researchers also need to consider that,

> *… information that is often excluded from people's 'official' accounts is as important as the information that is included e.g. little everyday details, that interviewees or writers might take for granted, are precisely the nuggets of information you might be after!* [36]

A case study must also be contextualised if it is to be understood by those outside the situation. Partnerships are always the products of the specific context in which they have been created and in which they operate.

> *My academic discipline (history) has deeply influenced my approach. It has taught me to believe that you can only understand the present and make decisions about the future, if you understand the past. As a case study researcher / writer I am extremely rigorous about situating the partnership firmly within its empirical context.* [37]

A good case study researcher / writer will build their case study iteratively by ensuring that different perspectives are captured and layers of knowledge and experience are conveyed.

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36. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman (2005)
37. ibid

In part, the case study process allows for the construction of data that represents the mutual interpretation of the interviewer and of the interviewee as the interview proceeds. Data is constructed with interacting interpretations made by the different interviewees.

Extract from researcher / writer's logbook
Case Study Project

Just as a good case study researcher / writer will work hard not to colour their case study with their own opinions, they will also work hard not to impose coherence where it may not exist.

When accounts seem to be completely irreconcilable this can be the beginning of a deeper and richer study that explores why such differences have emerged and what has impacted these. Sometimes this is where the real story begins![38]

Indeed, the most interesting thing about cross-sector partnerships may well be that different partners have quite different expectations, drivers and perceptions of 'value' and it may be this very diversity that provides the basis of the partnership's strength and creativity.
If this is true, or at least partially so, then a 'homogenised' case study may be doing a serious disservice not only to the specific partnership it is describing, but also to the partnership movement in general.

Before we leave consideration of the issue of data collection and synthesis it may be useful to remind ourselves that we are dealing with knowledge and experiences that are both fluid and transient.
A view expressed one day may not be entirely the same a day later.

Whenever we interact with people to learn about their partnership, they will – within limits and not unbiased – tell us what they have observed, done and learned so far. People naturally reflect on their experiences – they make sense of them, though that sense will change over time, through further reflection and new experiences. Neither the early nor the later learnings are more or less 'true' – they are different but both valuable.[39]

As people's views change constantly, so whole partnerships are in a constant state of change and movement – often in several directions at once!

Because partnerships are not static entities, the information gathering process needs to be flexible enough to capture elements of the partnership that have changed and will change over time as well as those that remain constant.[40]

Even the most comprehensive of data collection processes will, therefore, only be capturing a collection of moments in time. It is

See TOOL 5: DATA COLLECTION: METHODS AND SOURCES

This tool provides an overview of different methodologies for collecting the data, listing some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with each method. It also suggests potential sources of data for information on a partnership.

38. ibid
39. Hemmati (2005)
40. Stott (2005)

therefore as important for those who read the case studies as it is for those who commission or participate in compiling them, to understand their limits and not to see them as a definitive or final statements about the partnerships themselves.

Understanding the findings

It is beholden on any case study researcher / writer to ensure, to the best of their ability, that the data they have amalgamated is accurate. If not, their material may be exposed as misrepresentation and the case study will not be considered reliable, valid or useful.

Researchers need to check their findings in as many ways as possible and, of course, where there are contradictions in the findings and / or divergent views they will need to find ways of presenting and explaining these as part of the picture of the partnership. Above all, the findings should be based as closely as possible on what they have actually read, seen and been told, rather than on their opinions or interpretations of these.

Researchers may sometimes find themselves mediating between what appear to be contradictory perspectives that come to light inadvertently during the case study process. The following examples from two case study researchers / writers usefully illustrate this point.

Example 1: **Critique as an expression of confidence**

The case study involved two focus groups from each of two partner organisations meeting with the researcher at different times. Both focus groups talked differently but equally warmly about the value of the partnership; their satisfaction in what it had achieved and their views of its considerable potential for new activities in the future. However, whilst one group could think of no way in which the partnership could be improved, the other group came up with a long list of issues that they felt should be addressed to further improve the partnership's effectiveness.

When the two groups met together with the case study researcher / writer to compare and confirm findings, this discrepancy caused some consternation. Only after considerable discussion facilitated by the researcher did the partners understand that they were both, in fact, expressing confidence in the partnership: the first by seeing any outstanding issues as being too unimportant to mention and the second by feeling that the partnership was so good it was worth making it better still by addressing even the smallest details.

Example 2: **Understanding 'success' and 'failure'**

The case study involved a partnership between a large national NGO and a small community-based organisation (CBO). The CBO had become increasingly effective in its organisation and outreach, largely as a result of its capacity being built by their NGO partner. The head of the

community organisation was now a confident leader and had recently persuaded the CBO to cut its link with the partnership. In the view of the NGO this was because s/he was possibly over concerned with pursuing personal rather than community interests.

Therefore, whilst achieving one of its core objectives of building the capacity of indigenous groups, the partnership itself had irretrievably broken down. This partnership was reported to the researcher as a 'failure' by the NGO and as a 'success' by the CBO. During discussion with the researcher, the NGO began to consider the possibility that whilst the partnership had not ended up as they had expected, the community organisation might well be on its way to providing an invaluable role model for others attempting to develop self-help organisations in a way that was locally appropriate.

At this stage in the case study process, it is likely to prove a subtle and challenging task to identify which findings are more important and which less so; what to include and what to set aside. Ultimately, it requires good judgement on the part of the researcher / writer and may be what distinguishes an adequate case study from an excellent one.

Of course, 'good judgement' is a relative term and there is, perhaps, a rather fine line between exercising 'good judgement' and being 'judgemental'. In this regard, we should briefly explore the tendency any researcher may have to make judgements on events / activities / behaviour which may be neither accurate nor appropriate. We have already addressed the need for the researcher to be as scrupulous as possible in understanding their own assumptions and subjectivity. We have also urged the development of professional skills that will encourage the researcher to be open-minded and to collect their information by active listening, open questioning and minimal intrusion. We encourage all case study researchers / writers to find colleagues or 'critical friends' outside of the immediate situation with whom they can check out their assumptions and obtain feedback on their work.

But, of course, it is not only the researcher who risks compromising the case study by imposing their judgement on the partnership. Partners themselves can, and very often do, censor their own material because they have already judged it as 'negative' and do not want to broadcast 'failure'.

In reality it is likely that most, if not all, partnerships face challenges at some time in their life cycle, whether from partner behaviour, changes in external circumstances or from unfulfilled expectations. Despite the fact that this is a universal experience, many resist dwelling on the challenges faced, preferring instead to focus entirely on 'positive' elements, even if this is misleading.

An interesting question that may emerge from a case study is not whether the partnership had, or has, problems as this can almost be

assumed as a 'given', but rather how the partners have addressed these problems. An emerging finding from the Case Study Project is that where partners are not able to face up to challenges in a collaborative and systematic way they are actually involved in rather vulnerable partnerships.

If those involved in partnerships see convincing evidence that case studies which constructively explore partnering difficulties, contribute to strengthening rather than destabilising partner relationships, they are more likely to be open to sharing their partnering challenges. This may prove to be the single most valuable use of well-researched and well-compiled case studies.

Extracting the lessons

The Case Study Project aimed to explore both the challenges and the value of a more penetrating and disciplined approach to partnership case study work. Such an approach can develop case studies that are tools for change, both within and beyond the partnership itself. So, in addition to simply understanding and communicating the findings, a further task for the case study researcher / writer is helping partners and / or audiences to extract valuable 'lessons' from the case study.

Our work so far clearly indicates that each partnership case study will yield very different lessons, based on the specifics of each partnership and the particular context in which the partnership is operating. This is as it should be, since every partnership is unique and it is this very uniqueness that makes it an interesting topic for research.

However, drawing on both the case studies completed as part of this project and the wider experience of the project's contributors, it is clear that there are a number of **core partnering issues** that do occur quite regularly in otherwise diverse partnership stories which seem to have a significant, and often challenging, impact on effective partnering.

It is our view that, written up accurately and / or researched further, the material relating to these issues could have considerable learning value. It may not just be useful to individual partnerships but also, and more importantly, to the 'enabling environment' in which partnerships are currently operating, whether at local, national or international levels.

The partnering issues that seem to surface quite regularly in case study work include:
• Terminology and language
• Context and culture
• Equity, power and leadership
• Transparency and trust
• Partnering and the public sector
• Exits and exit strategies

- The controlling hand of donors
- (Not) learning from 'mistakes'
- 'Playing' the partnering game
- Focusing on impacts as opposed to value

So interesting is some of this material that we have written it up elsewhere (see separate paper on the project website) as a prompt for both ourselves and others to do more formal practice-based or applied research work in these areas.

In relation to this, two points should be made:

i) The issues listed above are not insurmountable. When they are articulated and understood within the partnership, for example during the case study process, they can be 'internalised' so that behaviour, systems and procedures can be changed for the better

ii) By researching and acknowledging these issues beyond the partnership itself, there may be a better chance of exploring and addressing them for the benefit of cross-sector partnering as a sustainable development paradigm worldwide

To be really valuable, case study work needs to be designed to help those involved in working with, supporting and promoting partnering to address those issues that may be contributing repeatedly to the failure of partnerships to maximise their potential.

Creating outputs

Case studies can take many forms and be adapted for many purposes. To stimulate creativity in the final phase of the case study process, we have explored a number of different types of output. Case study researchers / writers are encouraged to think as widely as possible about the range of possible 'products' the material they have collected can take, always, of course, in close consultation with those with whom they have worked.

See TOOL 6:
ADAPTING CASE STUDIES

A tool designed to help the researcher / writer tailor case studies into different delivery options to meet their objectives.

We believe there is increasing value in writing up a full and multi-levelled basic case study which may never be used as a single document but might provide material for a multiplicity of products that can be tailored and adapted as and when required.

A case study may have been compiled to publicise the partnership and therefore the story needs to be entirely recognisable. However, there may be situations where case studies are better 'fictionalised' in order for generic lessons to be drawn out without compromising those involved and / or to avoid the audiences becoming too specific in their responses. Such uses include:
- Raising general awareness about the value or challenges of partnering
- Developing partnering or brokering skills training programmes
- Organising conference speeches / presentations
- Producing media articles / documentaries

As a trainer, I use fictional scenarios and role-plays that are based on real life partnership situations. This has proved both popular and effective: the case study becomes a tool for creative thinking and for professional development by inspiring confidence, building skills and supporting creativity. Participants recognise the 'truth' of the issues raised without the partnership on which the scenario is based being recognisable.[41]

One final point about creating outputs from the case study process is that, unless it is in fictionalised form, case study material should never be put into the public domain without the agreement of those whose story it is.

Dissemination strategies

Whatever the audience, for information of any sort to have impact it must be accessible, relevant and understandable. This is where a well-thought-through dissemination strategy is vital: choosing the right (accessible) channels to get into people's hands (or on their screens, or in their ears), and choosing the right (relevant and understandable) product to get the message across.[42]

If the (often considerable) investment in case study work is not to be wasted, it is vital that a dynamic and comprehensive dissemination strategy is put in place and systematically executed. This will require consideration of the:
- Influence or impact sought (defined at the start of the process)
- Specific audiences targeted
- Communication channels available
- Options in terms of style of product

The first two have been dealt with elsewhere, but it is equally important to explore the range of channels available: small or large scale presentations; publications; audio; video; DVD; CD-Rom; website; email; media articles; mail shots as well as the style of the presentation.

To reach those who might most appreciate understanding the partnership – namely the beneficiaries themselves – case studies need to be very graphic and include a clear description of the main issues. Ideally the method chosen for dissemination would be highly visual with direct and relevant information.

Case study writer: Extract from logbook
Case Study Project

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41. Case study researcher / writer in Keatman (2005)
42. Stibbe (2005) *Hitting the Mark: Dissemination Strategies*

In our enthusiasm for the latest technology or for giving the case study work suitable 'gravitas', we must never forget the beneficiaries at whom these sustainable development partnership efforts are aimed. We need to ensure that our dissemination choices are always appropriate and, wherever possible, fresh and imaginative in order to provide an alternative to 'spin' and to communications saturation.

Creative presentation approaches can involve a wide range of options including:
- First person narrative with someone's actual story in their own words
- Inter-active / 'stop-start' presentations where questions are raised and explored before solutions are presented
- Contextual illustrations such as photographs, and newspaper stories
- Copies of original documents such as emails, agreements and letters
- Original work arising from the project such as paintings, poems, cartoons, drawings and posters

All these can make the story and / or the key messages more vivid and memorable, both of which are vital to making impact and inspiring change.

> *I feel that the partnership fraternity should shed their pretensions and use more quotes, be more journalistic, present opportunities for the audience to follow up with the author or the subjects. I want to avoid case studies that are written and published and then sit on a shelf. I would rather find out more so that I, the partners as well as others can keep on learning.*[43]

See TOOL 7: DISSEMINATION OPTIONS

This tool offers case study researchers/writers and/or commissioners advice on how to develop a dissemination strategy that meets the case study objectives and reaches the target audience.

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43. ibid

6 CASE STUDIES AS TOOLS FOR CHANGE

Case studies as change agents

This publication attempts to do more than explore partnership case studies as a way of capturing and disseminating a partnering story. It has a different aim: namely to promote the idea that partnership case studies can have a useful impact on others in helping to challenge and change their own attitudes, approaches and operations. Partnership case studies are important sources of knowledge, insight, information and significant tools for learning.

Learning case studies are those that present issues, problems and challenges based on real life situations: encouraging learners to explore ideas and options as well as driving them towards effective and appropriate problem solving.[44]
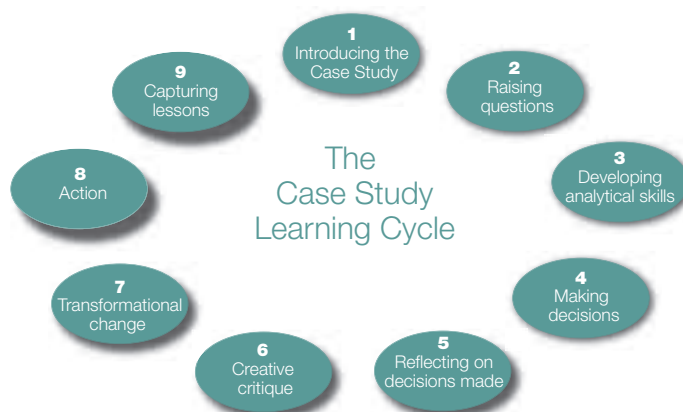
In our view, it is 'learning' case studies that can become change agents by being:
• **Engaging** – inviting active participation and debate
• **Questioning** – using questions to challenge underlying assumptions and provoke a more penetrating analysis
• **Open-ended** – inviting learners to arrive at their own conclusions
• **Complex** – mirroring real life situations and encouraging learners to become more effective decision-makers

In addition, they will:
• **Encourage collaboration** – and build learning from all those involved in an iterative manner
• **Promote reflective practice** – by inviting learners to reflect on the relevance of the case study to their own situation
• **Build imaginative responses** – by stimulating creative and innovative thinking

The diagram below[45] illustrates how 'fit for purpose' learning case studies can lead to change in behaviour and thinking.

The
Case Study
Learning Cycle

1 Introducing the Case Study
2 Raising questions
3 Developing analytical skills
4 Making decisions
5 Reflecting on decisions made
6 Creative critique
7 Transformational change
8 Action
9 Capturing lessons

44. Hussain-Khaliq, (2005) *Learning Case Studies: Definitions and Applications*
45. ibid.

This learning cycle can apply within the partnership itself, since quite often the case study process will also be a 'tool for change' within the partnership,

> *The case study process can be an invaluable tool for learning and change within the partnership itself. It can invite genuine exploration… about various skills, mechanisms, tools and procedures employed to deal with the range of issues or concerns that emerge during a partnership's life cycle.*[46]

A learning cycle may also take place beyond the partnership as case study outputs offer many types of learning possibilities and operate as direct or indirect change agents. We give one illustration of this below:

> *I have used partnering case studies presented verbally in many different settings. People (even quite senior people!) seem to really enjoy listening to these stories and view them as a welcome relief from reading or from looking at PowerPoint presentations! It is perhaps to do with engaging their imagination.*[47]

If partnership case studies are to be useful tools for change, those seeking to use them in this way need to consider **how** lessons can be internalised and, where desirable, encourage **positive change** within individuals, partner organisations, the partnership or external institutions. This involves helping partners and others to create a learning culture within both organisations and societies where new ideas and ways of thinking and operating are welcomed rather than resisted.

Navigating change

Most change needs to be in some way managed or facilitated – it does not happen by magic. So even if a case study is designed as a vehicle for change, its journey may still need to be navigated to ensure that it reaches its destination. Such navigation may be either formal or informal in style and the case study researcher / writer may or may not be involved.

Formal 'navigation' might include:
- Briefing a speaker or presenter on issues to highlight from the case study for a particular audience
- Preparing an introduction to a publication, press release or story
- Managing the process of a meeting between partners to help internalise the lessons from the case study

Informal 'navigation' might include:
- Networking or sharing findings with partners, partnership champions or other stakeholders on a one-to-one basis
- Introducing key players from outside the partnership to partners

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46. Stott (2005)
47. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman (2005)

or beneficiaries so they find out more about areas that specially interest them

• Sharing enthusiasm for the case study with professional colleagues and others involved in partnering

Such processes may not necessarily involve the case study researcher / writer. In fact this is an area where it might be the right moment to hand over responsibility from the person who has compiled the case study to others, particularly those from the partnership or those who have commissioned the research.

> *One of the unexpected outcomes I found from compiling the case study was that many of the partners and beneficiaries got increasingly excited about the partnership and far more confident about telling others about it. It was as if my work had ignited their enthusiasm and they themselves became more pro-active in communicating the messages of the partnership beyond the limitations of the case study.*
>
> **Extract from researcher / writer's logbook**
> **Case Study Project**

In any event, we must never forget that whilst some people enjoy change almost for its own sake, whether or not it is necessary, there are many who feel change is threatening and who experience it as a risky and uncomfortable process. This may be another area of case study work where some form of navigation or facilitation will be invaluable. If change is the aspiration, it is important that it is promoted sensitively and systematically, otherwise it may simply be chaotic and counter-productive.

What change(s) can we expect?

Case studies, when carefully crafted, may contribute to significant change at levels of both policy and practice. Their impact may be both vertical (moving between individual, organisation and policy levels) and horizontal (moving within, between and across organisations).[48]

Effective case studies designed as tools for change may be able to influence many aspects of individual behaviour, organisational systems, inter-organisational collaboration and policy. So what kinds of changes might we expect to see from the impacts of case study work?

The following table speculates on some possible changes by drawing on early indications from case study work undertaken as part of the Case Study Project:

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48. Stott (2005)

LEVEL	EXAMPLES OF CHANGE
INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR	Better listening and observation skills Development of empathy / insight Improved interpersonal skills Genuine engagement with other partners' priorities
PROFESSIONAL SKILLS	Improved decision-making ability Greater skills in evaluation and critical thinking Better problem solving abilities More project / process design capabilities
ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEMS	More effective internal communications Better ideas generation / innovation Improved management practices
INTER-ORGANISATIONAL COOPERATION	More efficient / appropriate processes and procedures Better understanding of 'value added' More focus on sustaining outcomes Greater efficiency and effectiveness Wider and deeper influence
POLICY IMPACTS	New or revised legislation Innovation in strategies and planning Greater political engagement and support Higher incentives, standards and expectations

Defining success

Ultimately our aim (as case study researchers and writers) is to generate interest and assist learning so that issues about partnering are better understood. Case studies – if they are researched and recounted well – can provide lessons that enable deeper understanding and the motivation to improve, change and build stronger partnerships.[49]

Much of the exploration, endorsement or change we seek as a result of case study work is ephemeral and not easily measured. However, we should try to 'benchmark' whether or not our case study work is

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49. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman (2005)

successful in achieving its aims. One approach might be to work with partners and / or those commissioning the case study to agree some tangible success indicators at the start of the project against which its effectiveness will be assessed over time.

Such indicators might range from recording reach: How many case studies were sent out to particular audiences? Who came to a case study presentation event? What number of case study website hits have there been?

Other indicators might emerge from assessing outcomes: How many new partners joined us? What further resources were leveraged? How far was change in legislation due to us?

For each of the objectives identified and agreed at the beginning of the case study work, those involved should be encouraged to set specific indicators of what evidence of 'success' would actually be. Case study researchers / writers may not be wholly responsible for achieving such success, but they can play a crucial part in helping to define it.

7 CONCLUSIONS

I realise that as a case study researcher / writer I need to challenge myself constantly; to remain alert to how and why I am writing the case study; to ensure that I am aware of the complexity of the partnership, the partners, their culture, their language, their priorities and their needs; to revise and review what I have written with assistance from others including the partners themselves; to ensure the case study is truly fit for its purpose.[50]

This publication aims to do three things: first, to make the case for more penetrating and useful partnership case studies; second, to prompt reflection on the challenges faced by a case study researcher / writer and third, to provide some useful tools for those involved in partnership case study work. It is an output from a one-year project, and should be regarded as a 'work in progress'; a modest staging post along a journey of discovery.

Evidence suggests, that done well, partnership case studies can provide invaluable tools for change, whether that change occurs at individual / community / organisational / sectoral / operational or policy levels.

Readers may profoundly disagree with some of the perspectives presented here, but we reassure ourselves that disagreement can be a useful prompt to new thinking. We have tried, to the best of our ability, to present a range of views and to raise some pertinent questions that we hope will stimulate and encourage new ideas as well as build confidence in the potential of case studies to change attitudes, practice and policy.

Of course, the conclusions reached here are not final but since they incorporate a considerable range of experiences and opinions from a diverse group of individuals they are, in our view, worthy of serious consideration. There are, ultimately, few 'absolutes' in partnership case study work, except possibly the basic good practice requirements for case study researchers / writers to:
i) Regularly reflect and 'check out' their behaviour, assumptions and impact
ii) Continuously work to build their own research, writing and people skills
iii) Respect the time, effort and commitment that those they are researching have put into their partnership as well as into the case study research process itself

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50. Case study researcher / writer quoted in Keatman (2005)

Those who have been involved in the Case Study Project come from different sectors, cultures, nationalities, professions and academic disciplines. What they have in common however, is a dedication to exploring, as rigorously and thoughtfully as possible, whether cross-sector partnerships are beginning to deliver the kind of integrated development outcomes, outputs and impacts our world needs.

Based on our work together over the past year, we believe that the evidence that will help to position partnerships as an important mechanism in reaching sustainable development goals exists, but needs to be captured, challenged and transmitted more effectively. Case studies are a powerful vehicle for doing just that.

We hope this publication is a small contribution to helping partnership practitioners make an increasingly rigorous and compelling case that cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development can make a serious difference to the multiple global challenges we all face.

THE CASE STUDY TOOLBOOK
PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES
AS TOOLS FOR CHANGE

Appendices

Appendix 1: CONTRIBUTORS

Contributors listed here committed themselves to be part of the Case Study Project for a year starting with a 3-day practice-based workshop in February 2005 at the University of Cambridge where the topics for Tools, Essays and Case Studies were identified and where tasks and roles were agreed and allocated.

SEPTI BUKULA is the Chief Executive Officer of Upstart Business Strategies, an economic development research and advisory firm specialising in enterprise development and programme evaluation. Based in Johannesburg, South Africa, the firm has a wide range of government, business and developmental organisation clients.

AMANDA GARDINER is Research & Information Manager at IBLF, where she regularly authors, edits and contributes to publications on the role of business in international development. Prior to joining IBLF, Amanda consulted for organisations including the European Cultural Foundation and the City Literary Institute, managing project development as well as conducting research on cultural aspects of development. She previously worked for UNESCO's Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity, a programme that aims to sustain cultural diversity in developing countries through local capacity building and partnership initiatives.

CYNTHIA GOYTIA is an Urban Economist. She has rich experience in building public-private partnerships that are designed to influence local processes of governance. She promotes cross sector partnerships as a way to address local economic and urban development needs. She is a consultant for the World Bank and other international agencies. As the Associate Director of the Master Program on Urban Economics at the Torcuato Di Tella University in Buenos Aires, Argentina, she is currently working on impact evaluation of cross sector partnerships for local development in Latin America.

MINU HEMMATI is a psychologist by training and started her career in academia. Since 1998, she has been an independent advisor working with NGOs; corporations; international agencies; and governments. Areas of work include participation of stakeholders in decision-making; designing and facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships; capacity building and training; gender issues. Minu is a Special Advisor to The Seed Initiative 'Supporting Entrepreneurs for Environment and Development' (IUCN, UNEP, UNDP) and was closely involved in the World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002. Her book, *Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability – Beyond Deadlock and Conflict* was published by Earthscan, London, in 2002.

SASHA HURRELL is Manager of the Partnership and Learning Programmes at IBLF, Sasha's primary focus has been on cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development. She has worked on partnership reviews, and researching and capturing partnering case studies. Her interests include the evaluation and review of partnerships, capturing the process for successful partnering and how partnership can contribute towards the Millennium Development Goals. She manages the Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme, and has worked on a number of publications relating to partnerships including *Partnership Matters: Current Issues in Cross-sector Partnership* (2004 assistant editor), *The Brokering Guidebook: Navigating Partnerships for Sustainable Development*, (2005 editor).

SEHR HUSSAIN-KHALIQ is currently working for The Partnering Initiative – developing learning case studies for the Initiative's commissioned work- and with the ENGAGE Campaign to capture and support the development of business-led employee engagement activities around the world. Previously, Sehr worked primarily for capacity building programmes and focused on researching and writing teaching case studies on cross-sector partnerships. She has been invited to present her research at conferences in Europe, Asia and America and has published her work in related academic journals and books.

TRACEY KEATMAN is the Communications and Programme Co-ordinator at Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation, an informal network promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships to improve access to safe water and effective sanitation for the poor. Tracey is also currently undertaking an MSc in Development Management. She has previously worked in the communications industry, at a UK public university and in the non-profit sector. She originally trained as a linguist and has a BA in Hispanic Studies.

MELANIE REIN, Phd is Senior Associate at The Partnering Initiative. As a social scientist she has extensive experience in brokering and working with partnerships, both nationally and internationally. She has been involved in reviewing and monitoring partnership and learning activities as well as designing models and methodologies for the evaluation of partnerships which support ongoing learning and development. Dr. Rein has lectured, tutored and acted as internal examiner on the Postgraduate Certificate in Cross-Sector Partnership at the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry and has co-authored the report *Working Together: A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa*, published by the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry.

DARIAN STIBBE Phd is a director of the Centre for the Advancement of Sustainable Development Partnerships in Oxford, UK. In 2004/5, he set up and managed the secretariat for the Seed Initiative – an IUCN, UNDP and UNEP international programme to support entrepreneurial partnership activity – and continues to support and mentor the five local-level partnership winners of the Seed Awards 2005. Darian is an accredited partnership broker, graduating in the first cohort of the IBLF/ODI Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme. He is co-author of a

publication on partnership evaluation for the OECD and been a judge on the Bremen Awards for sustainable development partnerships.

JULIA STEETS is a project manager responsible for the Research & Learning Channel of the Seed Initiative with the Global Public Policy Institute, Berlin. Currently based in Oslo, Norway, she is also a PhD candidate at the University of Erfurt. Julia studied political science at the University of Munich and received Masters Degrees from the London School of Economics and Political Science and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. She has been teaching at the Universities of Bonn, Greifswald and Berlin and has worked for Transparency International and the Körber Foundation.

LEDA STOTT is an independent consultant specialising in cross-sector partnerships and development issues. Over the last ten years she has designed, developed and evaluated partnership programmes in Africa, Europe and Latin America. She is a Senior Associate of The Partnering Initiative, tutor on the Postgraduate Certificate in Cross-Sector Partnership at Cambridge University and editor of the journal Partnership Matters. She has recently co-authored *Working Together, A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa* (2005) and the European Commission's *EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships* (2004).

ROS TENNYSON Co-Director, The Partnering Initiative and Senior Advisor, International Business Leaders Forum with whom she has worked since 1991, pioneering the organisation's cross-sector partnership work. She has experience of developing partnerships for sustainable development in more than twenty five countries working with international corporations, the United Nations, governments and a wide range of civil society organisations. Ros has published several books on partnership issues including *Managing Partnerships* (1998); *Institutionalising Partnerships* (2003); *The Partnering Toolbook* (2003) available in 15 languages, and *The Brokering Guidebook* (2005).

Appendix 2:
THE PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDY CHALLENGE

A series of papers available at
www.thepartneringinitiative.org/casestudyproject

Partnership Case Studies in Context

Author: Leda Stott

ABSTRACT: Demand is growing for case studies that can be used constructively by different audiences – practitioners, planners and policy makers – to highlight the lessons that emerge from cross-sector partnering. This essay provides an overview of some of the methodologies that have been adopted in partnership case study research to date. In examining different approaches it seeks to highlight the issues and challenges that arise when exploring complex relationships that operate within and between different contexts, disciplines, sectors and organisations. It also aims to identify the salient factors necessary for the production of case studies that contribute to a deeper analysis and understanding of partnering processes.

Learning Case Studies: Definitions and Applications

Author: Sehr Hussain-Khaliq

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the potential of partnership case studies as learning tools. It explores the ways in which partnership practitioners acquire and develop partnering skills and emphasises the need for building learning case studies which offer these practitioners a chance to practice and enhance their partnering abilities. It outlines different forms of learning case studies, explores the learning purposes appropriate for each type and the learning intervention required to implement each one.

Different Researcher Perspectives: A Socratean Dialogue

Author: Tracey Keatman

ABSTRACT: Through information gleaned from a tailored questionnaire and a dialogue amongst eight case study researchers, this paper explores how different 'disciplinary' and professional languages and perspectives impact the construction of case studies for partnerships. It considers how authors understand the different languages 'spoken' by case study contributors and how they themselves utilise, present and disseminate such information dependent on research objectives and purpose. The information is presented as a dialogue between case study authors from different academic and professional backgrounds and a novice.

Emerging 'Good Practice' in Case Study Work

Author: Sehr Hussain-Khaliq

ABSTRACT: Informed by the experiences of a network of case study practitioners brought together by The Partnering Initiative's Case Study Project, this paper explores the responsibility of the case study

researcher, emphasises the need for managing participative approaches to case study research and discusses the challenges of cross-cultural research. It outlines options for validating the credibility and objectivity of the data collected and presented in the case study and offers guidelines on what information to disguise or exclude from publication.

Case Study Research Relationships

Author: Melanie Rein

ABSTRACT: The case study researcher's responsibility to: the 'research subjects', the funding agency; the researcher's own organisation; and to themselves as researchers, are the same as those who undertake research in any discipline. This paper explores the possible roles of the case study researcher, in particular identifying how these different and varying roles may impact on the case study research. It emphasises how, if research subjects and funders are able to use the case studies to understand and further their own work, then the case study research and the role the researcher has taken, has been a valuable learning process.

Case Study Entry Points: Drivers and Implications

Author: Minu Hemmati

ABSTRACT: The decision about when in the partnering cycle the researcher(s) get engaged – in the beginning, somewhere in the middle, or at the end of the partnering process – significantly affects what can be achieved and how. Entry points encompass both when and how the case study research is embarked upon. This paper discusses the different entry points, and aspects of case studies that are impacted by these entry points. It gives examples and ideas of what to keep in mind when determining entry points for case studies, or assessing the impacts of entry points when reading case studies.

Data Collection Challenges

Author: Sasha Hurrell

ABSTRACT: When writing a case study it is important that the case study writer, whether they are internal or external to the partnership, has adequate tools for collecting the data they require. Tools for data collection provide the case study writer with a mechanism for ensuring all the relevant information on the partnership is accurately captured and key stakeholders are given an opportunity to input. This paper examines the challenges and advantages associated with collecting data at different stages of partnering and outlines tools for data collection.

Hitting the Mark: Dissemination Strategies

Author: Darian Stibbe

ABSTRACT: How can you make your case studies accessible and relevant to your target audience? This paper outlines a framework designed to help case study researchers/writers develop an effective dissemination strategy. It distinguishes different audiences, outlines their particular needs and expectations, and discusses a range of strategies effective in reaching these audiences. It also offers case study researchers/writers a range of indicators to measure the effectiveness of the dissemination strategy adopted, and drawing on practical examples highlights some factors to consider when developing and disseminating case studies.

Getting Real: Research Findings from the Case Study Project

Author: Sasha Hurrell

ABSTRACT: The Case Study Project revealed a number of lessons on researching the partnering process. These lessons have been extracted from writer's logs that were kept by those researching and writing case studies as part of the one- year project. The lessons that emerged from these logs can be clustered into four areas: understanding the partnership context; the role of the researcher; the challenges around data collection and dissemination and power imbalances within partnerships. This paper explores each of these issues in more detail.

TOOLS

1

Partnering Case Study Check List

2

Objectives and Audiences Matrix

3

Self Assessment Questionnaire

4

Building the Brief

5

Data Collection:Methods and Sources

6

Adapting Case Studies

7

Dissemination Options

TOOL 1
Partnering Case Study Checklist

This tool is designed as a checklist for researchers and commissioners of partnering case studies and it outlines the process for case study development. Not all tasks identified in this list will apply in every instance.

No.	TASKS (not necessarily in order)	C*	R*	Other*
1	Discuss and clarify the purpose and audience for the case study in advance of final decision to proceed			
2	Consider: • Case study objective(s) • Audience(s) / potential use(s) for the case study materials • A preliminary plan for dissemination • Indicators of case study effectiveness			
3	Identify any specific issue(s) that might provide an appropriate focus for the case study work			
4	Build engagement from all key players who will be involved in advance of the project commencing			
5	Confirm budget / resource issues / availability of key players / delivery timetable			
6	List the key characteristics / qualifications / experience required from the case study researcher / writer (or team, if appropriate)			
7	Identify a suitable case study researcher / writer having given due consideration to whether they are internal or external to the partnership as well as whether the project should be undertaken by one person or a small team			
8	Appoint the case study researcher / writer; provide a brief for the work and introduce them to the key players who will be involved in the work			
9	Provide access to other forms of data (especially documentary and contextual information)			
10	Design, refine and agree the research methodology and explain it to the key players involved			
11	Seek endorsement and approval from all those involved and adapt the design as necessary			
12	Collect the data from secondary and primary sources			
13	Confirm the data and adjust in the light of further information			
14	Organise the data into a suitable structure			
15	Develop a draft case study indicating how it might be adapted for different uses			
16	Allow all key players involved to review the draft and make recommendations for changes and further material			
17	Revise the draft and get the final version 'signed off' by those authorised to do so			
18	Implement a dissemination strategy within and beyond the partnership			
19	Evaluate the effectiveness of the case study against the original objectives			
20	Discuss other possible uses for the case study materials and produce further products as agreed			

*
C: The person commissioning the case study work – may be one of the partners, partnership broker, manager or an external donor
R: The person undertaking the case study work or the team leader(s) / project manager(s)
Other: Anyone other than the two named above – perhaps a chair of a committee or a nominated partner authorised to 'sign off' on a specific aspect of the work

TOOL 2
Objectives and Audiences Matrix

The matrix below is designed to assist the case study writer, partners and other stakeholders to identify potential audiences and objectives in order to make the case study 'fit for purpose'.

Objectives / Audiences	Review the Partnership	Report the Achievements	Learn	Inspire	Promote / Fundraise	Capture / Build Institutional Memory	Illustrate Value	Convince / Counter 'Spin'	Others
INTERNAL (within the partnership)									
Clients/ Beneficiaries									
Employees									
Partner organisations									
Stakeholders									
Others									
EXTERNAL (outside the partnership)									
Academia									
Donors									
Financial Institutions									
Media									
Policy Makers									
Potential Partners									
Pressure Groups									
Sceptics									
Others									

TOOL 3
Self-Assessment Questionnaire

For those researching / writing partnership case studies, it is recommended that you take some time to assess the strengths, weaknesses, assumptions and strategies underlying your approach prior to starting the work. The purpose of this is to:

I. Clarify what you bring to the task and where you might need additional help

II. Encourage more rigour in understanding preconceptions / expectations and prejudices that may influence the way you undertake the role

III. Build a more reflective approach to all aspects of your case study work

This is designed for self-assessment only, though it may also be helpful in aiding your discussions with those commissioning the case study work and / or those you interview.

RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

How familiar are you with cross-sector partnering as a sustainable development paradigm? Where are your gaps?

Theoretical level:	From literature?	From case studies?	Other?
Strategic level:	As a policy maker?	As a planner?	Other?
Operational level:	As a partner?	As a partnership broker?	Other?
Other:	As a beneficiary?	As a donor?	Other?

In what ways has your professional experience equipped you for the task? Where are the gaps?

Qualifications:	**Experience:**	**Gaps:**
Secondary research		
Primary research		
Record keeping & analysis		
Dissemination		

What are your own views on partnering as a sustainable development paradigm?
Can you describe them? How far are these helpful / unhelpful?

SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Although not exhaustive, the table below lists a number of core skills that are useful in case study work. No one has all these skills but it is possible to work on those that are weaker in order to improve your professional practice.

Core Skill	Self-Assessment [1 Is low / 5 Is high]	Strategy For Improvement
Action research	1 2 3 4 5	
Active listening	1 2 3 4 5	
Dissemination	1 2 3 4 5	
Document analysis	1 2 3 4 5	
Illustration	1 2 3 4 5	
Observation	1 2 3 4 5	
Persistence	1 2 3 4 5	
Record keeping	1 2 3 4 5	
Research design	1 2 3 4 5	
Synthesis	1 2 3 4 5	
Writing	1 2 3 4 5	
Other:	1 2 3 4 5	
Other:	1 2 3 4 5	

QUESTIONING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Can you articulate what you feel about the case study work you are about to undertake? What do you expect or anticipate? Which aspects will you find most difficult? Where do you think you will be most intolerant or biased? Are you willing and able to suspend your own judgements?

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

How do you propose to build time and space for reflection as you undertake the case study work? What tangible structures and activities can you build in to your professional practice?

Time for reflection:	What opportunities will there be (daily? weekly?) to pause and take stock of the work so far?
Keeping a journal or logbook:	How can you systematically capture any ideas / frustrations / unanswered questions emerging from the research process?
Find a 'critical friend':	Can you identify someone outside the situation who will be able to constructively critique your work in confidence?
Professional support:	Are there others who you can turn to or bring in to the case study work whose competencies complement your own?
Review procedures:	Can you regularly review the case study work with a small internal group to ensure you are 'on track'?

TOOL 4
Building the Brief

The researcher / writer's brief should outline the roles and responsibilities of the case study researcher / writer and lay down the ground rules for the relationship between the researcher / writer, the commissioner(s) of the case study and the partnership(s) being researched.

In building the researcher / writer's brief there are a number of issues that should be taken into account. This tool is designed to help facilitate the conversation between the researcher / writer and the commissioners of the case study:

Purpose of Case Study

What is the rationale for commissioning this case study? Who is the case study being developed for? What is/will be the significance of this case study to the partnership(s) profiled, to the commissioner of the case study and to the broader partnering community? How will this be communicated to encourage fuller participation in the case study process?

Principles and Guidelines

What are the roles and responsibilities of the researcher to the commissioner of the case study, to the research subjects and to him/herself? Are there any general principles and guidelines that the researcher must abide by when conducting their research? How will these be agreed by the commissioner of the case study, the researcher and the partnership(s) being researched?

Research Methodology

Who will define the research methodology employed? Will this be agreed by the commissioner of the case study, the researcher and the partnership(s) profiled? To what degree will this be dictated by the time and resources available? How will the methodology be designed to capture the history and context of the partnership(s), the partnering process, the outputs and outcomes of the partnership(s) profiled? What steps will be taken to ensure that the research methodology is participative and allows a range of stakeholders to contribute to the research? What steps will be taken to validate the information collected? How will the research approach protect the privacy, confidentiality and, where necessary, anonymity of the partnerships and stakeholders profiled?

Research Procedures

Who will be the final decision maker with regard to the research/writing process? What decisions will need to be signed off by the commissioner of the case study, the researcher, the partnership(s) profiled and/or a combination of these three parties? Who will be responsible for the co-ordination of the case study process?

Resources

How will the case study be funded and over what period of time? Aside from financial support what other resources do the parties bring to the table to support the development of this case study e.g. access to information, expertise, translation, editing etc.?

Disclosure and Copyright

How will the findings of the research be shared and with whom? Who decides what information will be censored, disguised or excluded from publication? Who holds the copyright for the case study developed? Will the researcher / writer be expected to submit all their field notes, interview transcripts, questionnaires and other sources of information along with the case study?

Caveats

What aspects of any agreement are binding to the researcher / writer and commissioner of the case study? What are they not liable and/or accountable for?

Signed

Researcher(s)/ Writer(s) and Commissioner(s) of the case study should sign the agreed brief.

TOOL 5
Data Collection: Methods and Sources

METHOD	PURPOSE	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Questionnaires, Surveys and Checklists	■ Usually devised and administered to obtain statistical data for a particular question or set of questions. ■ Often associated with quantitative research. ■ Used when you need to get information quickly and/or easily from people in a non-threatening way.	■ Can be completed anonymously ■ Inexpensive to administer ■ Easy to compare and analyse responses ■ Can be sent to a large number of people	■ Might not get a detailed response ■ The wording can cause bias ■ Impersonal nature ■ May not include all information ■ Might have a low response rate
Structured, Semi-structured and unstructured interviews	■ Useful to obtain a fuller understanding of someone's impressions or experiences of the partnership or to delve into more details about questionnaire responses. ■ Structured interviews tend to be used for quantitative research; semi-structured and unstructured interviews tend to be used in qualitative research.	■ Collects a full range and depth of information ■ Can be flexible with interviewees	■ Time consuming ■ Can be hard to analyse and compare ■ Interviewer can bias responses ■ Can be costly if involves face-to-face interviews
Review of Documentation	■ Conveys information about how the partnership operates. ■ Documents can include: MOUs, web literature, meeting minutes, films, partnership agreements, etc.	■ Collects comprehensive and historical information ■ Is not disruptive to the partnership ■ Information already exists ■ Less rooms for biases in interpreting the information	■ Can take time ■ Information can be incomplete or out of date ■ Need to be clear about what you are looking for ■ Not a flexible approach
Participant and Direct Observation	■ To gather accurate information about how a partnership operates. ■ Participant observation requires the partnership researcher to become a participant in the culture or context being observed. ■ Direct observation involves the researcher observing actual situations or interactions rather than being told about them.	■ View operations of a partnership as they are occurring ■ Can adapt the case study in accordance with the events as they happen	■ Can be difficult to interpret observed behaviours ■ Can be complex to categorise observations ■ Observer can influence behaviour of partnership participants ■ Difficult to remain impartial if participating ■ Can be expensive
Focus Groups / Workshops	■ Involve organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences about a topic. ■ Usually involves exploring a range of views or a topic in depth through discussion.	■ Reliable sources of impressions that are shared by all ■ Can be an efficient way to get a broad range and depth of information in a short time ■ Can convey key information about the partnership	■ Can be difficult to analyse responses ■ Needs a good facilitator for safety and closure ■ Can be difficult to schedule people together
Reviews	■ Provides an opportunity for partners to reflect on the value of the partnership, determine whether the partnership is meeting its desired objectives. ■ Offers a chance to agree as a group to any revisions to the partnership agreement.	■ Allows opportunity to collect information from all partners ■ Can allow for a deep analysis of the partnership ■ If skilfully done can be a significant catalyst for improving the partnering process and relations.	■ Can be time consuming (especially if reviewer is meeting with different partners) ■ Most effective after the partnership has been operating for some time ■ An external reviewer could potentially be destructive to the partnership

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES

SOURCE	EXAMPLES OF INFORMATION	CHECKLIST
1. Contextual Data	**Census**	☐
	Films	☐
	Newspapers	☐
	Photographs	☐
	Policy documents	☐
	Others	☐
2. Understanding the Partnership (Secondary Sources)	Legal Materials	☐
	Meeting Minutes	☐
	Memorandum of Understanding	☐
	Other Case Studies	☐
	Partnering Agreements	☐
	Reviews	☐
	Web Literature	☐
	Other	☐
3. Understanding the Partnership (Primary Sources)	Beneficiaries of the Partnership	☐
	Partners	☐
	Partnership Broker	☐
	Other Partnership Practitioners	☐
	Policy Makers	☐
	Staff of Partner Organisations	☐
	Stakeholders (local community, suppliers, etc)	☐
	Other	☐

TOOL 6
Adapting Case Studies

Once developed case studies can be adapted for a number of purposes depending on the desired impact and the intended audience. This tool allows you to choose how you might tailor your case study in order to meet your objectives by outlining different case study delivery options in written form; face-to-face or electronically.

PURPOSE:	CASE STUDY ADAPTED AS:	COULD INVOLVE:
To impact policy	**Advocacy Materials:** Flyers, magazine articles, journals, posters etc.	• Building a range of imaginative dissemination options • Creating opportunities for 'external selling'
To raise public awareness about partnering	**Press / Media Releases:** May include material for different kinds of publications; newspapers, magazines, websites, e-bulletins etc.	• Working with communications teams / journalists • Researching media options
To offer support and mentoring to partnering practitioners	**Learning Partnerships:** Partnerships specifically established as vehicles for learning	• Creating tasks • Defining a timetable for delivery • Agreeing ground rules
To demonstrate the benefits and challenges of partnering	**Direct Experience:** May include site visits, managed dialogues	• Organising facilitated learning events • Building opportunities for creative engagement
To imaginatively capture/convey a partnering issue or the account of a partnership.	**Story Telling:** A case study which describes an experience first hand	• Creating a narrative thread • Offering instructions / task

To build understanding across cultures, sectors and partners	**Role Plays:** Paint a scenario presenting a challenge, offer a list of characters involved in the situation and allows readers to act out the scene	• Writing briefs for
		  – Each role
		  – The facilitator

To build partnering practitioner's decision making and strategic skills	**Stop-Start Scenarios:** Present the story in episodes, allowing readers to stop between sections to make suggestions and predict the consequences before proceeding	• Supplying teaching note or/ learning facilitators brief • Offering options

To enhance practitioner's abilities to address a range of partnering challenges	**Games:** Offer a number of options for the challenge(s) presented with different consequences for each choice	• Providing:
		  – Instructions
		  – Rules
		  – Levels

TOOL 7
Dissemination Options

This tool is designed to help case study researchers/writers and/or commissioners develop a dissemination strategy that meets the case study objectives and reaches target audiences. It outlines the process for developing and implementing a viable dissemination strategy and lists a number of dissemination options to choose from.

Developing a Dissemination Strategy: Points to Consider

• Begin by identifying the target audiences (refer to Tool 2 for a list of potential audiences internal and external to the partnership)
• Consider what impact you want to have on these audiences (use Tool 2 to match objectives against audiences)
• Think about what kind of case study your target audience is most likely to respond to (see Tool 6)
• Ensure the case study format is suitable (in terms of length, style and presentation) for the audience
• Take into account the time and resources available
• Select appropriate dissemination option(s) (See below)

DISSEMINATION OPTIONS	OVERVIEW
Conferences / Events	Conferences can enable a case study to reach and influence a wide audience so long as there is a 'fit' with the case study focus and the conference theme. It can offer a useful platform and may be a valuable introduction to the partnership that can be followed up by other means. It may also be tailored for learning purposes. Other types of event can be more tailored to meet the wider goals of the partnership and may involve a range of communications opportunities (e.g. site visits, stories, small workshops).
Direct Contact	The essential element is that the case study is brought to life by personal enthusiasm and insight – tends to be more dynamic and engaging as a communications tool and has the potential to be more responsive (e.g. through questions and discussion). Direct contact may include: • One-to-one meetings • Workshops • Small group meetings • Training • Site visits • Presentations
Electronic Newsgroups	Many such internet-based groups are being established – their value is their inter-active nature and the fact that they can be very topical and responsive to new inputs.
Media	Effective access to the general public requires media engagement – it is notoriously hard to interest the media in 'good news' stories but the best route is probably to build connections with specialist journalists who are interested in the subject and will use your case study products to inform a considered journalistic piece.
Publications	Well designed and illustrated publications can be a useful way to give a case study a sense of longer term value – the challenge is to get the balance right between something overly academic and something more accessible without becoming superficial.
Specialist Literature / Academic Journals	Publishing in peer-reviewed academic journals /specialist literature certainly provides a measure of seriousness and respectability to a case study. However, the readership tends to be low and highly selective.
Through Third Parties	This term includes any individuals who know the partnership and are able to endorse the case study products from their own independent perspective and experience. Such individuals may become the partnership's 'ambassadors' or 'champions' and are likely to have influence because of their a) independence from the partnership and b) their own reputation.
Websites	An increasingly popular way of information sharing with many benefits in terms of accessibility and possibilities of up-dating etc. However, with such a deluge of web-based information, sometimes case studies can get 'lost'. Also, some key audiences do not have website access or do not give time to web-based communications.

Supporters and Partners