

PARTNERING WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS–IFFY (IFI) BUSINESS

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We've heard a remarkable range of interesting experience reported here today—and a fascinating convergence (seems to me) on some common themes which demand much further reflection

Key point seems to be that institutional cultures and goals vary greatly, and those differences matter greatly (especially for collaboration, partnerships and inter-organizational cooperation)

As always, we need a balancing act, a reconciliation of conflicting goals and rules, all of which have some rationale and some legitimacy

We're meeting at interesting times—World Bank 3rd Report on Poverty just released--offers an interesting illustration of an institutional context changing dramatically over last decade

Remarkable drafting process, from early Internet groups to NGO debate

Ravi Kanbur resigns, Nick Stern joins up

from Empowerment/Security/Opportunity to Opp/Emp/Sec

focus still on “making markets work better for the poor”?

Or perhaps “making institutions work better...”? But not on fundamental institutional change (“Fifty Years is Enough”)?

Can democratic UN create a civil social frame around technocratic IFIs?

Changing concepts of development

from ‘investment gap’ and ROI to economic growth

to sustainable development

to participation/empowerment

to governance (concern with institutions beyond the market)

from “analysis and action” to “frameworks and facilitation”

from “probity and prudence” to “solidarity and subsidiarity”

Changing process—focus on civil society and social capital?

“Grass roots”, not INGOs

Community-based research

Science shops and single windows for integrated service to citizen

Connected citizenry for new forms of governance?

Aarhus Convention—access to info, decision-making and justice

(right to know, share in decision-making, review and redress)

For example, consider the pattern of increasing participation or partnerships of civil society organizations (CSOs) with IFIs

- World Bank provisions for engaging local NGOs (‘private sector’) for involvement in lending projects (1988: <10%; 1995: >50%)
- World Bank funds (GONGO) Working Group on World Bank
- NGO slots on GEF Council
- World Bank regional meetings with NGOs
- Policy dialogues, parallel summits
- SAPRI—Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative
- Internet group on WDR; regional consultations with NGOs
- NGO links also with IMF, RDBs, WTO, UN (e.g., CSD)
- BONGOs—cooptation coming?

Increasing NGO participation in some international negotiations (but still questions about compliance regimes, info, etc; Canada seems to be falling away from “The Rio Way” that it pioneered?)

So the issue is not only internationalization, it is trans-boundary links within systems of tiered governance. It is also about interdependence, interaction and interdisciplinarity. It is about individual academics working increasingly through formal institutions, and about civil society being increasingly structured to act through formal civil society organizations.

SO: THE TALK HAS CHANGED A LOT--

THE WALK? MAYBE NOT SO MUCH?

Partnerships are about power-sharing; power-sharing is very hard

Key decision processes still largely internal—maybe have consultation, but not participation or shared decision-making

Cultural chasms still dominate inter-organizational collaboration

“Conditionality” still reigns

Count the logistical challenges in building successful teams and research partnerships in inter-cultural setting:

- competing for very scarce time, thin slice of attention—demands focus on Buzzwords and Bumper-Stickers, at expense of academic precision and elegance;
- unrealistic deadlines and timelines
- unrealistic expectations about precision in future deliverables
- an audit culture—burdensome reporting and accountability mechanisms, at odds with rhetoric of results-oriented systems, and with any emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurship, risk-taking...
- academic recognition of value of interdisciplinary or other- directed research still limited: standards of appraisal, disciplinary interpretations of rigour or quality still do not mesh with needs of community-based research (in universities we have discipline-based departments; in governments we have ‘silos’; in neither is horizontality often achieved—despite research centres or institutes)
- participatory action research builds in several critical tensions: those interested in action have little sympathy or patience for research; engagement and participation compromise the apparent objectivity of research; action by participating outsiders compromises the building of local capacity
 - Conflict of commitment, competition for intellectual property

THUS--Skewing or distortion of academic or research priorities?

CONCLUSIONS: PITS AND TIPS

Themes, topics and intellectual context are all changing; the nature, culture and composition of teams must change in response:

- less technical, not exclusively expertise, more discourse
- integration of ‘other ways of knowing’, other forms of evidence
- less instrumentation, more interpretation
- mandated science (Salter); negotiated science (Jasanoff)

All this means much more interdisciplinarity, which means:

- very risky for junior colleagues facing conflicting career criteria
- very long time (cf CORE experience) to negotiate consensus on process and on meanings—and without consensus, no commitment
- big challenge for accountability in institutions involved as partners

And can universities really serve effectively in a context where

- ‘schmoozing’ trumps ‘scholarship’?
- ‘opinions’ or ‘perceptions’ outrank ‘evidence’?
- ‘sound science’ gives way to ‘procedural imperatives’?

The path from self-directed research through team-directed, business-directed, government-directed to community-directed research is very indirect, involving the intrusion of instrumental institutions and intermediating executing agencies focussed on assuring “value for money”, not necessarily results; intrusion of dysfunctional performance measurement systems (cf Alta schools funding)

So the task is one of bridging cultural chasms, all the while reconciling scholarly purpose with community purpose-- without waiting for the slow spread of new ideas. Can we really short-circuit the path?

“Who sups with the Devil should carry a long spoon”—appealing to institutional power rather than intellectual power to move knowledge into action carries crucial risks, not to be overlooked.

And yet, and yet...

And yet—despite it all (victory of hope over history?)—the rewards do (sometimes?) outweigh the risks and the Kafkaesque burdens.

We’ve heard a lot of success stories here...

The university may not know how much community-based research it really already supports...

My own personal experience over thirty years is that if the goal is policy-relevant research, or community-relevant research, there is no alternative to collaboration, partnerships, inter-organizational cooperation, interdisciplinary scholarship. If we are to understand anything of the world, let alone change anything of the world, we truly are condemned to work together. Which means we are condemned to have to “work it out”, over and over and over.

On this, however, it seems to me there truly is no choice. The university must be relevant to its world; the resources of the university must be accessible to be mobilized for social purpose.

So we have to solve the challenges of pooling and transferring information in networks of tacit knowledge...of moving academic ideas into collective action, and subjecting that action to institutional audit—without losing their meaning.

And without losing the accountability of the university for fulfilment of its fundamental mission—which is certainly not revenue self-sufficiency or fiscal success.

In the context of a changing, complex and profoundly uncertain world, brewing inherently incompatible ingredients like *academics, action and audit in the same pot yields a strange broth*—but what wondrous outcomes, tastes and flavours when it works!

Now where did we put that long spoon?