Acknowledging the Purpose of Partnership

Stuart Macdonald

Tom Chrisp

ABSTRACT. The paper explores a case of partnership between a large pharmaceutical company and a national charity in the UK, a partnership from which the drug company sought improved public relations, and the charity money. Neither side was able to accept this reality. Managers of the partnership insisted that its only purpose was to improve the lifestyle of teenagers. They were supported by a literature on partnership that also tends to ignore the distinction between the task the partnership is set and its fundamental purpose. While much is made of the benefits of partnership, there are likely to be costs, both private and social, associated with failure to admit the purpose of partnership.

KEYWORDS: partnership, pharmaceutical industry, charity.

Stuart Macdonald is Professor of Information and Organisation at the University of Sheffield. His research interests focus on how information is acquired and used.

Tom Chrisp is Chief Executive of Arc Research and Consultancy in Sheffield. The company specialises in the implementation and evaluation of social policy.

Introduction

The literature on partnership tends to be both positive and prescriptive, focussing on the benefits of partnership and how these might be increased. It is also a practical literature, concentrating on real benefits from real partnerships. Much of its readership consists of those involved in partnerships and with little time or stomach for theoretical issues or critical appraisal (Walker, 1999; Wong, 1999). The very vocabulary of partnership is saturated with sharing, caring words, poorly suited to rigorous analysis. And yet partnership, in the UK and beyond, is now a means favoured by both corporate strategy and government policy of combining organisational assets – not least those of the private and public sectors - to perform a specific task.

> "The overarching goal of …. 'Working in Partnership' [is] to identify, involve and work cooperatively with a network of strategic partners to achieve efficiencies, build on and complement initiatives and integrate planning." (Walker, 1999, p.72)

Such enthusiasm for partnership, and such focus on goals, does not encourage investigation of implications arising from partnership, and may not reveal fundamental purpose. Whether this purpose should be disclosed is an ethical issue.

This paper investigates the partnership between a pharmaceutical company and a charity, the ostensible aim of which was to improve the diet of teenagers in the UK. Neither partner was willing to admit the partnership might have any other purpose than this, that there might be benefits for the partners that had nothing to do with youthful eating habits. Because the fundamental purpose went unacknowledged, neither partner was prepared for the problems the partnership encountered, or concerned about possible socials costs. The empirical evidence for the paper is based on a single case study and suffers from all the disadvantages of a sample of one, though there are advantages in terms of depth and detail. Even so, the empirical information provided here is intended to be illustrative rather than conclusive. That the partners must be anonymous is an indication of just how vested interests in partnership can be.

Partnership in Theory

The logic of partnership is plain. All organisations have strengths, but no organisation has all the strengths required to do everything. For some tasks, the organisation must acquire new strengths, through either organic development or the acquisition of external assets. The latter course is likely to be much faster than organic development, but is more costly and much less certain. There is a host of ways by which the organisation can acquire the assets of other organisations (Hitt *et al*., 2000). Here we are concerned with formal, institutional links, though the informal information exchange of employees seems to be an excellent means by which the most valued resource of all can be acquired (Macdonald, 1992). Institutional links vary greatly in flexibility, from the rigidity of acquisitions and mergers, through the legal precision of collaboration and joint ventures, to such lesser forms of co-operation as alliances and networking.

> "Within the library and information sector there is a growing awareness that organisations must work together to optimise the use of resources." (Pilling, 2000)

Among the least costly, least uncertain and least enduring methods of acquiring external assets is partnership. Partnership is an arrangement whereby two or more organisations join some of their forces to accomplish a specific task. The arrangement falls well short of a joint venture, but the principle of complementary assets is the same. At least in theory, the organisations in a partnership possess all the assets required to accomplish the task for which the partnership was formed. Having established that partnership allows the pooling of organisational resources to accomplish a specific task, the literature on partnership seems ill prepared to accept that the partnership might have a different purpose altogether.

It is notable how often the literature on partnership transforms what other literature would regard as the transactions costs of coordination into the benefits of coordination.

> "Cooperative goals serve as a glue in the relationship between the supply chain partners. They give a vision of common fate to the partners which generates trust between partners and commitment to the relationship, such as in the form of investment in resources, technical support or advice for the other partner. The partners will have an open-minded discussion whenever there are problems to be solved. Because both sides can have open discussions, it is easier for the parties to handle their conflicts and maintain a harmonious relationship." (Wong, 1999, p.S791)

Discussion of partnership is dominated by a thin, prescriptive literature (e.g., Dent, 1999; Chiesa and Manzini, 1998; Cheng, Li and Love, 2000; Cavusgil, 1998) as undemanding as it is unrewarding (Hallett and Birchall, 1992; Brinkerhoff, 2002). Follow the instructions and benefits are guaranteed.

> "Successful partnership working is built on organisations moving together to address common goals; on developing in their staff the skills necessary to work in an entirely new way – across boundaries, in multi-disciplinary teams, and in a culture in which learning and good practice are shared." (UK Department of Health, 1999, para 10.13)

The problem is exacerbated by the language of management, which may serve partnership managers better than those who comment on their activities (Walsh, Lowndes, Riley and Woollam, 1996). While this language certainly has meaning in an organisational context, the meaning does not necessarily depend on logic (Jackall, 1988; Sturdy, 1997; Clark and Greatbatch, 2002). The language of management is emotive, intended to rally the troops in unquestioning, testosterone-laden loyalty, to confirm membership of an exclusive society. It is the language of command and control, not of debate. Understanding of partnership has not been promoted by discussion in the language of ritual and battle.

> "*The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong)*: Local strategic partnerships will provide a single, overarching local co-ordination framework, which will enable local stakeholders to address issues that really matter to local people …. As cross sector, cross-agency umbrella partnerships, LSPs offer real opportunities to streamline existing partnership arrangements and to make them more effective, by making better connections between individual initiatives."
>
> *Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire)*: Could the right hon. Lady put her first answer into plain English?" (*Hansard*, 2001, col.145; see also Carr, 2001**)**

Because so much discussion of partnership is not bound by logic, it may assume, rather than argue, that partnerships exist to perform specific tasks. The very existence of partnership becomes evidence that resources have been accumulated to address these tasks. Thus, much of the literature on partnership is task-oriented, prescriptive and heavily mechanistic, desperately anxious that the tasks be accomplished. Such enthusiasm carries a cost.

> "The cited studies are almost never controlled, which means they are probably biased towards the subject studied, positive effects automatically being more often observed than neutral or negative effects." (Westrin, 1987, p.46)

In such a positive environment, it is possible for the costs of partnership to be ignored.

> "…. there may well be costs as well as benefits in engaging in coordination and …. these customarily receive less consideration in a literature which exhibits a bias in favour of coordination." (Hallett and Birchall, 1992, p.75)

It does not help that evaluations are often carried out by those with a vested interest in partnership.

> "Several studies report positive outcomes for users, although it should be noted that these conclusions are usually reached by the researchers and/or the professionals involved rather than by directly seeking user views." (Hallett and Birchall, 1992, p.78)

While the benefits of partnership are widely asserted, calculation is made only occasionally; when it is, the results can be sobering.

> "Without carrying out a full evaluation, it is possible to make some assessment of the cost effectiveness of joint working. For example with Early Year Development and Childcare Partnerships, the average cost of providing a childcare is place [sic] £650, which compares with the average cost of £640 for providing an out of school childcare place under the previous arrangements." (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2001, p.7)

There seems to be little interest in any implications partnership might have, in any indirect or long-term consequences. In these circumstances, that the real purpose of partnership may be quite different from the stated task can easily be overlooked.

The Reality of Partnership

So, then, much of the literature on partnership assumes its merits and focuses on its procedures. And yet, where the results of partnership are investigated, they often seem to fall far short of promises (e.g., Park and Russo, 1996, Medcof, 1997; Madhok and Tallman, 1998; Campbell and Cooper, 1999). What might be going wrong? While the literature of partnership might assume, and sometimes even assert, that partners share an interest in the task of the partnership, it is not clear that each partner is equally interested in the task, or in achieving it in the same way. Partnership may assemble the complementary assets required to take on a task, but it may also disguise the diverse interests of the partners.

> "Some advocate coordination that operates to the benefit of clients, making it easier for them to get the help they deserve. Others advocate coordination that operates to the advantage of the professional providers, making it easier for them to do their jobs as they see fit. Still others advocate coordination that works to please administrators and funding authorities by cutting costs, eliminating waste and increasing efficiency and financial accountability. While all these are worthy goals, they are by no means the same thing …. When a coordination program is launched, the vague sense that coordination will be effective often camouflages the multiple, conflicting hopes that clients, politicians, administrators, professional service providers, and interest groups each cherish independently." (Weiss, 1981, p.25)

Even where all the partners actually want to accomplish the same task, their interests in partnership may be very different indeed. And even if the partners are as one when the partnership begins, the consensus may not endure. Circumstances change within organisations and certainly in the external environment, pulling individuals and organisations that were once in harmony in very different directions. For some partners – as will become apparent from the case to be presented here – the main value of the partnership lies in its existence, and the task of the partnership is of secondary importance.

Whatever the advantages of partnership, they are unlikely to include efficiency (Weiss, 1981). It is probably no coincidence that it was the construction industry, an industry in which companies generally have to work together on complex projects, that first trumpeted the merits of partnership. By reducing the number of organisations involved, partnership would bring order to the chaos of the building site (Domberger, Farago and Fernandez, 1997; Bennett and Jayes, 1995). The burden of transactions costs means that the single organisation will nearly always be more efficient than the partnership (Beecham and Cordey-Hayes, 1998). This is why we have organisations. The inefficiency of partnership can be particularly frustrating for those from organisational cultures in which efficiency is esteemed, and where there is little tradition of pondering and mulling (T. Ling 2001; Huxham 1996). Conversely, the inter-personal trust that is essential if the partnership is to function effectively, and that takes so much time and effort to establish (Lowndes, Nanton, McCabe and Skelcher, 1997), may be little valued - perhaps even unrecognised - by those accustomed to a command and control environment (Himmelman A.T. 1996). While the partnering literature appreciates how critical is trust, it has less to say on whence trust comes (Lazar, 2000). People rather than organisations trust, and then by inclination rather than managerial diktat (Blois, 1999). This reality has not escaped the engineers on their building sites:

> "…. as partnering encourages people to work together, they become significantly more efficient at understanding each other and so, for example, fewer words are needed to explain an idea fully." (Bennett and Jayes, 1995, p.13)

The critical role of inter-personal trust and the inability of a temporary partnership to develop the infrastructure of a permanent organisation make the partnership vulnerable to changes in personnel. Because the demands of the partner organisations have priority over those of the partnership, and because working in the partnership may be arduous and less than career-enhancing (Teisman and Klijn, 2002), staff mobility can be high. Managers often find working in partnership frustrating in that some sacrifice of the command and control authority of the organisation is likely to be required (Latham, 1994). When individuals leave the partnership, learning, the beginnings of trust, and access to their personal networks disappear with them (Lister, 2000).

Nor is partnership necessarily of equals. The assets of partners may be complementary, but this does not mean that they are of equal value, and certainly not that the partners are in any way equal. In as much as similar organisations are likely to possess similar assets, organisations tend to seek dissimilar partners to acquire the assets they lack internally. All organisations have their own ways of working and new employees generally take some time to adapt. The temporary nature of partnership does not encourage individuals to drop the old ways of the organisation to which they must one day return. When the partners are very different sorts of organisations with very different ways of working, finding some sort of middle ground in partnership may not be easy.

Charities in Partnership

Charities have had little option but to forge links, including partnership, with the rich and the powerful. While charitable donations have been rising, certainly in the UK, the number of charities has been rising even faster with the result that income per charity has fallen (Lowndes, 1994). Rather than compensate for this deficit, the UK government - strong on the rhetoric of all forms of co-operation (Stewart, 1994) - has expected charities to look to the private sector (Lowndes, Nanton, McCabe and Skelcher, 1997), certainly for money, but also because the ways of the private sector, and sometimes the private sector itself, have penetrated deep into the charitable sector (Butcher, 1996; Ryan, 1999). For example, many charities now contract out many of their activities, and especially fundraising, to the private sector, a business-like approach that confounds the old bumbling image of charities and is utterly compatible with being in partnership with commercial organisations. Corporate fundraising dominates the means employed by charities to raise money, suggesting the hypothesis that charities may be less than discriminating in their thirst for funds. In the social services, government has encouraged partnership to satisfy policy goals (e.g., Patten, 1991; Comptroller and Auditor General, 2001), undeterred by evidence of failure.

> "…. It is something of a paradox that while commentators on the effects of collaboration are almost uniformly pessimistic, such collaboration continues to be promoted as a means of injecting greater rationality into service delivery." (Hudson, 1989, p.83)

Where UK charities have sought to tap other public funds - in the European Union, for instance - partnership has been forced upon them as a condition of application (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998), with the inevitable consequence that much of this compulsory partnership has been nominal partnership (Lasker, Weiss and Miller, 2001), sometimes little more than one organisation being represented on a committee in another organisation (Glendinning, Abbott and Coleman, 2001).

Widespread acceptance that companies have a social responsibility has meant that they are now less resistant than they have been to approaches from charities. Much more important to many companies than simply satisfying the requirements of corporate social responsibility, however, is the public relations value of funding a charity. The advantage was most famously reaped by American Express in the United States (Andreasen, 1996). The American Express case made clear that, when organisations enter into partnership with charities to improve their image, this is not quite the corporate equivalent of the Lady of the Manor patronising the village fete. This is business. In a world in which the presentation industry is bigger than any other, in which a company’s brand can easily be its most valuable asset, and in which politicians legislate and regulate in rapid response to public perception, image is crucial (Klemperer, 1998). Partnership with charity, whatever its ostensible aims, is intended to enhance the corporate image. But in partnership, this most precious of corporate property is exposed to forces beyond corporate control, and the company may well put pressure on the partnership to protect its property (see Chollet, 1992). Understandably, then, companies are very careful indeed to associate with only the biggest and best of charities (Sargeant and Kahler, 1999). Charities seem to have been less circumspect (Milmo, 2003). The charity may find that what had been a simple corporate benefactor becomes something rather more menacing in partnership (Mackintosh, 1992).

The Case

Early in 2001, the authors were part of a consortium hired to evaluate a programme – let it be called Eatup here – that was to encourage teenagers in the UK to lead healthier lives. Eatup was a three-year programme, funded to the tune of £3 million, and launched in September 1998 with much fanfare. Eatup, chorused chief executives and government ministers, addressed the national need to wean youth from fast food and cigarettes, and partnership between a large pharmaceutical company and a children's charity was the means by which this need would be satisfied. The Eatup programme had been initiated by the drug company, one of its senior executives determining that a corporate health care initiative was required. Research, consultation and a survey narrowed the focus to children's health care. During the first two years of the programme, 115 projects were funded. There were ultimately 175 Eatup projects.

Press coverage of the Eatup launch was considerable. In the month of September 1998 alone, some 59 regional newspapers in the UK, with a combined circulation of nearly 5 million, carried the story, always linking the drug company with the charity, and usually mentioning government support for the programme. Eatup also received 49 minutes of radio time that month. During January and February of 1999, 58 UK newspapers published stories about Eatup, often with pictures of grant recipients clutching giant cardboard replicas of the cheques they had received. Again, all stories associated the charity with the drug company, although by 1999 the latter had been re-branded as a 'healthcare' company in nearly all media coverage of Eatup.

The first 115 projects involved 130,000 children at a cost to Eatup of £1.1 million, an average of about £9,500 per project or £8.50 per child. Funding many projects gave maximum publicity, but little money for each project. Put another way, a small expenditure in this area bought an awful lot of publicity. Social policy in the UK favours covering the basic costs of providers (for salaries and offices) rather than operating costs. So, there are many bodies funded to exist, but with no money to do anything. It was no surprise that Eatup attracted many desperate applications:

> "We jumped for joy when we got the letter from [the charity] to say yes, we had got the money [£1,300]. We are so often turned down." (Leader of Eatup project)

This was not simply a case of big business giving to charity and then leaving the charity to get on with its work, what is sometimes called 'donorship' (Ahmad, 2001).

Here the funder was in fully-fledged partnership with the charity and both ran the Eatup operation. Two managers, one from each partner organisation, comprised the core management team, the charity manager taking charge of the day-to-day running of Eatup, and the manager from the pharmaceutical company being particularly, but not wholly, responsible for key decisions. But other managers from both organisations were also involved, forming a project management group, essentially of four individuals, but frequently involving yet other managers from the two partner organisations. The partnership developed its own mechanisms to assess bids for project funding (using an advisory group composed of prominent individuals from the external community), to monitor and evaluate projects, and to arrange such related activities as conferences and consultancies.

Events that would cause no problems of moment within an organisation can be totally disruptive in a partnership. In this case, uncertainty in the charity over management restructuring and location contributed substantially to worsening personal relations between the charity manager in Eatup and the drug company manager. Project management group meetings came to be dreaded, and consequently became infrequent. The performance of Eatup suffered, prompting the intervention of senior managers from the partner organisations, intervention that prevented Eatup's resident managers carving out niches for themselves. In short, the charity expected total charge of daily issues, but the drug company was unwilling to permit such unfettered independence. Managers from the drug company insisted on making their contribution to day-to-day operations. In part, this was to ensure that Eatup achieved the objectives not just of the partnership, but of the drug company. The latter were objectives that were implicit rather than explicit, and to which neither the charity nor the partnership necessarily subscribed.

But the re-shuffling in the charity was as nothing compared with the merger and acquisition activity of the drug company. This turmoil rapidly dissipated the interest of its managers in Eatup. The pharmaceutical industry, worried that the flow of blockbuster drugs from its innovation pipeline is drying up, has frantically merged and acquired in order to cut costs. The strategy has been more successful in increasing industry concentration than in decreasing industry costs (Heracleous and Murray, 2001).

> "They've made a right real cock-up of the negotiations. Megalomania seems to be the driving force of these mergers. Egos are taking precedence over future strategies" (*Fortune*, 1998).

Organisations permitting such crudity at the macro level are perhaps unlikely to show sophistication in micro level partnership.

Staff mobility on both sides was almost total: no managers at all lasted the entire length of the programme. Such mobility undermined the growth of trust, and of personal information networks. Forced to rely on formal communications channels, Eatup managers often complained that they did not know what was going on. Procedures in the partner organisations were radically different and hard to integrate. The charity required meetings galore: the drug company favoured direct and immediate communication. Eatup managers from the charity had what they regarded as proper procedures; they expected to report and take instructions through hierarchical channels, and were mystified by the system familiar to the drug company managers.

> "[There are] good reasons for procedures and structures, like for child protection. It is sometimes difficult to see where [the drug company project manager] fits within her organisation. She doesn't seem to have a boss." (Interview with Eatup manager from the charity)

Task and Purpose

The resources the partners brought to the partnership were certainly dissimilar, but were they complementary? Yes, indeed they were: in short, the drug company had money, pots of it, and the charity had an outstanding reputation for caring for children. The charity – no more and no less than other charities – needed the cash, and the drug company – at least as much as other global pharmaceutical companies – needed to improve its reputation (Nevarez, 2000). The reputations of global pharmaceutical companies have taken something of a battering in recent years, despite the vast sums these companies spend marketing both their products and themselves (*Economist*, 2003). So powerful is the promotional activity of the pharmaceutical industry that even the medical fraternity is much concerned about the damage it does to medical research, teaching and patient care (Lexchin, Bero, Djulbegovic and Clark, 2003; Moynihan, 2003).

In theory, this was a partnership made in heaven. In practice, it was shaped in hell, largely because neither side was willing to admit that the partnership had any purpose other than helping children to lead healthier lives (see Eden and Huxham, 2001). Let us consider in a little more detail what each side expected from this partnership. The charity obviously wanted money to carry on with its good work, but it also benefited from association with a commercial organisation, especially one as massive and prominent as the pharmaceutical company. Close relations with big business are indicative of a business-like approach, far removed from the bumbling, wasteful amateurism of the stereotype charity. And lastly, partnership showed the charity to be empathising with government thinking; and government could not possibly miss empathy involving such a prominent partner. On the other side, the drug company wanted to enhance its reputation. The partnership provided the opportunity to exhibit the caring side of the pharmaceutical industry, and to bask in the charity’s excellent social reputation. For neither partner was helping children to lead healthy lives the main purpose of partnership. Yet, Eatup was managed, and was to be evaluated, as if the partnership had no other purpose.

This partnership was never a union of equals: the pharmaceutical company is huge and powerful, the charity miniscule in comparison. Moreover, what each brought to the partnership was unequal. The drug company brought money, a lot of money in absolute terms, but a tax-deductible sum that would make no appreciable impact on its balance sheet. Charities in partnership face a whole range of potential problems: they must, for example, assess the impact of the partnership on other donors, consider any restrictions imposed on relations with other organisations, and avoid dependence on the partner’s funding (Andreasen, 1996). The charity brought to the partnership its most precious asset, without which it would have had no credibility and would consequently have been unable to function. The charity was putting its reputation at stake when it entered into partnership with a pharmaceutical company (see Schminke and Wells, 1999). And yet, the charity’s managers did not seem to consider that the enhancement of the drug company’s reputation might be at the expense of the charity's reputation. In a very real sense, the drug company risked a little of its money in the partnership, while the charity risked everything (see MacDonald, McDonald and Norman, 2002).

The business styles of the people assigned to the Eatup management team from the two organisations were radically different. Those from the drug company were forceful folk, inured in the ways of the pharmaceutical industry, managers who knew exactly what was wanted and were used to getting it. Managers from the charity were more accustomed to negotiation; aware how weak was their position, they were reluctant to annoy those holding the purse strings. When disagreement arose in the management team – and it often arose – managers from the charity could do little more than register their objection. There was little evidence of the trust that is required in partnership, not so much between organisations as among individuals from those organisations (Blois, 1999).

The terms of the partnership required its evaluation and consultants were hired. Evaluation was to be of whether the partnership had achieved its objectives.
The consultants were directed away from the relationship between the drug company and the charity towards the projects funded by Eatup. Here would be found examples of partnership that could be assessed. Yet, the Eatup application form was less than explicit about the need for partnership. Project leaders were consequently baffled when the evaluation took a very specific interest in their partnerships:

> "They are partners, but they don't know they are."

Eatup managers even imagined Eatup projects being in partnership with each other, though it was never clear that there were ever any such partnerships, nor why there ever should have been. It was evident to all – though never admitted – that the only partnership of any significance was that between the charity and the drug company.

Part of the explanation for ignoring the obvious might be that a relationship between the charity and the drug company had, in fact, been in place for some years, well before Eatup was conceived, and before partnership had become fashionable. The *Healthier Nation* White Paper, released by the UK Department of Health in 1999, showed that the government had discovered partnership, and politically-sensitive organisations were stimulated to present whatever relationships they could as partnerships. Eatup managers may well have asked their consultants to evaluate partnership in the Eatup programme, but they seemed to have in mind some abstract concept of partnership whose ideals would be reflected in the performance of Eatup. They definitely did not want the purpose of their own partnership investigated.

> "It seems [the Eatup management team] were upset by the prospect that we may consider some of the themes emerging from the literature. Particular concern to them is the theme on reputation….. It also seems that they would like reassurance that we will not publish articles on areas they feel would generally be damaging to them (reputation in particular)." (E-mail from consultancy leader, June 2001)

The consultants spent many hours in meetings discussing the purpose of the Eatup partnership; reputation was never mentioned.

The literature of partnership is largely oblivious of such circumstances, and using it to provide themes relevant to the Eatup situation proved challenging. The few papers that consider the partnership between charities and commercial organisations seemed promising, but Eatup managers would countenance no proposition that partnership could have any purpose beyond its stated aims. If a 'healthcare company' was in partnership with a children's charity, it was obviously to do good, and that was an end to it.

> "…. It would be difficult to accept [the consultant's] output if it was as critical and hostile as the Themes document had been. It was felt that [the consultant's] ideology may not fit the new requirements of the new [Eatup] team." (Minutes of Eatup partnership meeting, July 2001)

Inevitably, the evaluation of Eatup became increasingly surreal. For instance, while the literature might use the term 'big business', this was not acceptable to Eatup managers, presumably because it was considered derogatory. The literature might discuss how complex and risky partnerships between charities and commercial organisations are likely to be, but it was not acceptable to suggest that this was relevant to Eatup. There could be no discussion of implications arising from the Eatup partnership because it was not permissible to admit that there were any. So, for example, Eatup managers were uninterested in the marginal funding problem that besets social work in the UK and to which Eatup was contributing. Nor were they interested in why the distribution of funded projects was skewed towards the North of England, though one project leader did hazard a guess:

> “[The drug company] must have figured that us up North are all very unhealthy and in need of money.”

The only permissible arguments were ones that were completely uncontroversial, the prescriptive, mechanistic approach to partnership. The rather nice notion that partnerships should be aborted before they fall apart (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998) was quite repellent. It was actually very relevant indeed: the drug company had become the charity’s biggest private sector funder and was in increasing need of good publicity. Neither partner could afford to withdraw. In fact, Eatup managers did not expect the partnership to be prolonged, but did not want to be blamed for its demise. Abandoning the sinking ship was wise: scuttling it was not.

And yet, the managers of Eatup wanted its evaluation to appear as a series of articles published in the open literature. It never crossed their minds that evaluation should not enhance the reputation of the partners in the same way as the partnership itself. The output they had in mind was six articles that described the Eatup experience as an example for other partnerships to follow. Indeed, tenders for the consultancy were to identify journals with which arrangements had been made to publish these articles. In other words, the purpose of publication was to be no more acknowledged than the purpose of the partnership: there was to be no admission that public relations was masquerading as academic appraisal. Philanthropy was not to be taken for cause-related marketing (see Andreasen, 1996). In the event, Eatup managers refused to cede copyright to journals so that articles could be published. Consequently, none was.

Concluding Thoughts

One of the problems of generalising from a single case study, at least in the context of partnership, is that cases tend to be of successes rather than of failures (Hallett and Birchall, 1992). At least this case is not in that mould. It is not unlikely that there are always ulterior motives for partnership. No amount of partnering will make competitive organisations share everything, especially when they are very different organisations.

Little of value to the drug company was risked in the partnership as long as the fundamental purpose of partnership remained unacknowledged. It would not have done to admit that the company had entered into partnership less to help children than to improve its reputation through very public association with the children's charity. The admission would have made the charity look naïve and the drug company calculating and hypocritical. The reputation the partnership was meant to enhance would instead have been damaged. The Eatup programme was deliberately high profile – both the drug company's chief executive and the UK Minister of Health had joined in the launch – but this prominence would turn against the company if its interest in exploiting the charity to boost its reputation were revealed. Unable to acknowledge the realpolitik of the partnership, Eatup managers became dysfunctional, directing their attention to effects rather than causes, re-arranging deckchairs and generally fiddling. The world of the drug company was in turmoil and the interests of its managers were much less in Eatup than in personal survival. Amidst this chaos, Eatup pottered on in splendid, isolated innocence, its managers ostensibly concerned only with encouraging children to lead healthier lives.

This case cannot be unique. There must be other partnerships whose purpose is unacknowledged; logic suggests many others. And yet, the literature of partnership scarcely considers the possibility. It is overwhelmingly concerned with solving the problems that partnership throws up in order to maximise the benefits of partnership. Presumably this is in large part because there is little demand for any other sort of literature. The ethical challenge for academics is obvious, but that for managers more intriguing. The task of management is always difficult, even within a single organisation. It becomes more challenging still in partnership; that much is known (Wildeman, 1998). How much of this increased difficulty might be associated with failure to acknowledge the fundamental purpose of relations with other organisations? And if there is private cost in this failure, there is also social cost in that organisations may be tempted to exploit such acceptable relations as partnership to do, and to hide, the unacceptable. None of the managers on this case perceived an ethical quandary, and that, perhaps, is the nub of the problem. As long as the attitude to partnership is so unquestioning, and the literature so anodyne, no ethical issue is evident, and there is no pressure to admit the real purpose of partnership.

References

Ahmad, M.: 2001, *Unequal Friends: The Partnership between International NGOs and Local NGOs in Bangladesh* (International Centre for Development Studies, National University of Ireland, Galway).

Andreasen, A.: 1996, 'Profits for Nonprofits: Find a Corporate Partner', *Harvard Business Review* **74**(6), 47-59.

Beecham, M. and M. Cordey-Hayes: 1998, 'Partnering and Knowledge Transfer in the UK Motor Industry', *Technovation* **18**(3), 191-205.

Bennett, J. and S. Jayes: 1995, *Trusting the Team. The Best Practice Guide to Partnering in Construction* (Centre for Strategic Studies in Construction, University of Reading).

Blois, K.: 1999, 'Trust in Business to Business Relationships: An Evaluation of its Status', *Journal of Management Studies* **36**(2),197-215.

Brinkerhoff, J.: 2002, 'Government - Nonprofit Partnership: A Defining Framework', *Public Administration and Development* **22**, 19-30.

Butcher, T.: 1996, review of J. Lewis: 1995, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain*, *Public Administration* **74**, 336-7.

Campbell, A. and R. Cooper: 1999, 'Do Customer Partnerships Improve New Product Success Rates?', *Industrial Marketing Management* **28**, 507-19.

Carr, S.: 2001, 'Out of the Frying Pan into a Gruelling Bout of Question and Armstrong', *Independent*, 14 February, 8.

Cavusgil, S.: 1998, 'International Partnering - A Systematic Framework for Collaborating with Foreign Business Partners', *Journal of International Marketing* **6**(1), 91-107.

Cheng, E., H. Li, and P. Love: 2000, 'Establishment of Critical Success Factors for Construction Partnering', *Journal of Management in Engineering* **16**(2), 84-92.

Chiesa, V. and R. Manzini: 1998, ‘Organizing for Technological Collaborations: A Managerial Perspective’, *R&D Management* **28**(3), 199-212.

Chollet, D.: 1992, ‘Building a Private-Public Partnership that Works’, *Inquiry* **29**, 116-19.

Clark, T. and D. Greatbatch: 2002, ‘Knowledge Legitimation and Audience Affiliation through Storytelling: The Example of Management Gurus’ in T. Clark and R. Fincham (eds), *Critical Consulting* (Blackwell, Oxford), pp.152-71.

Comptroller and Auditor General: 2001, *Joining Up to Improve Public Service* (HMSO, London).

Dent, S.: 1999, *Partnering Intelligence: Creating Value for your Business by Building Strong Alliances* (Davies-Black, Palo Alto CA.).

Domberger, S., S. Farago and P. Fernandez: 1997, ‘Public and Private Sector Partnering: A Re-appraisal’, *Public Administration* **75**, 777-87.

Economist: 2003, ‘Where the Money Is’, 26 April, 63-4.

Eden, C. and C. Huxham: 2001, ‘The Negotiation of Purpose in Multi-organisational Collaborative Groups’, *Journal of Management Studies* **38**(3), 373-91.

Fortune: 1998, ‘How Glaxo and SmithKline Tripped on Egos’, 30 March, 32.

Glendinning, C., S. Abbott and A. Coleman: 2001, ‘’Bridging the Gap’: New Relationships between Primary Care Groups and Local Authorities’, *Social Policy and Administration* **35**(4), 411-25.

Hallett, C. and E. Birchall: 1992, *Coordination and Child Protection. A Review of the Literature* (HMSO, Edinburgh).

Hansard, House of Commons: 2001, 13 February.

Heracleous, L. and J. Murray: 2001, ‘The Urge to Merge in the Pharmaceutical Industry’, *European Management Journal* **19**(4), 430-7.

Himmelman, A.: 1996, ‘On the Theory and Practice of Transformational Collaboration: From Social Service to Social Justice,’ in C. Huxham (ed.), *Creating Collaborative Advantage* (Sage, London), pp.19-43.

Hitt, M. *et al*.: 2000, ‘Partner Selection in Emerging and Developed Market Contexts: Resource-based and Organizational Learning Perspectives’, *Academy of Management Journal* **43**(3), 449-67.

Hudson, B.: 1989, ‘Collaboration: The Elusive Chimera’, *Health Service Journal* 19 January, 82-3.

Huxham, C. (ed.): 1996, *Creating Collaborative Advantage* (Sage, London).

Jackall, R.: 1988, *Moral Mazes. The World of Corporate Managers* (Oxford University Press, New York).

Klemperer, P.: 1998, 'Auctions with Almost Common Values: The 'Wallet Game' and its Applications', *European Economic Review* **42**(3/5), 757-69.

Lasker, R., E. Weiss and R. Miller: 2001, 'Partnership Synergy: A Practical Framework for Studying and Strengthening the Collaborative Advantage', *Milbank Quarterly* **79**(2), 179-205.

Latham, M.: 1994, *Constructing the Team, Final Report of the Government/Industry Review of Procurement and Contractual Arrangements in the UK Construction Industry* (HMSO, London).

Lazar, F.: 2000, 'Project Partnering: Improving the Likelihood of Win/Win Outcomes', *Journal of Management in Engineering* **16**(2), 71-83.

Lexchin, J., L. Bero, B. Djulbegovic and O. Clark: 2003, 'Pharmaceutical Industry Sponsorship and Research Outcome and Quality|: Systematic Review', *British Medical Journal* **326**,1167-70.

Ling, T.: 2001, *Joined Up Government in the UK: Dimensions, Issues and Problems* (National Audit Office Working Paper, London).

Lister, S.: 2000, 'Power in Partnership? An Analysis of an NGO's Relationship with its Partners', *Journal of International Development* **12**, 227-39.

Lowndes, V.: 1994, review of S. Saxon-Harold and J. Kendall (eds): 1993, *Researching the Voluntary Sector*, *Public Administration* **72**, 140-1.

Lowndes, V. and C. Skelcher: 1998, 'The Dynamics of Multi-organizational Partnerships: An Analysis of Changing Modes of Governance', *Public Administration* **76**, 313-33.

Lowndes, V., P. Nanton, A. McCabe and C. Skelcher: 1997, 'Networks, Partnerships and Urban Regeneration', *Local Economy* **11**(4), 333-42.

MacDonald, C., M. McDonald and W. Norman: 2002, 'Charitable Conflicts of Interest', *Journal of Business Ethics* **39**, 67-74.

Macdonald, S.: 1992, 'Information Networks and the Exchange of Information', in C. Antonelli (ed.), *The Economics of Information Networks* (North-Holland, Amsterdam), pp.51-69.

Mackintosh, M.: 1992, 'Partnership: Issues of Policy and Negotiation', *Local Economy* **7**(3), 210-24.

Madhok A. and S. Tallman: 1998, 'Resources, Transactions and Risks: Managing Value through Interfirm Collaborative Relationships', *Organization Science* **9**, 326-39.

Medcof, J.: 1997, 'Why Too Many Alliances End in Divorce', *Long Range Planning*, **30**(5), 718-32.

Milmo, C.: 2003, 'Toilet Tissue Firm Accused over Children's Books 'Ploy'', *Independent*, 17 June, 7.

Moynihan, R.: 2003, 'Who Pays for the Pizza? Redefining the Relationships between Doctors and Drug Companies', *British Medical Journal* **326**,1189-96.

Nevarez, L.: 2000, 'Corporate Philanthropy in the New Urban Economy', *Urban Affairs Review* **36**(2), 197-227.

Park, S. and M. Russo: 1996, 'When Competition Eclipses Cooperation: An Event History Analysis of Joint Venture Failure', *Management Science* **42**, 875-90.

Patten, J.: 1991, 'Government, Business and the Voluntary Sector: A Developing Partnership', *Policy Studies* **12**(3), 4-10.

Pilling, S.: 2000, 'The British Library's Co-operation and Partnership Programme', *Interlending and Document Supply* **28**(1), 38-9.

Ryan, W.: 1999, 'The New Landscape for Nonprofits', *Harvard Business Review* **77**(1), 127-36.

Sargeant, A. and J. Kahler: 1999, 'Returns on Fundraising Expenditures in the Voluntary Sector', *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* **10**(1), 5-19.

Schminke, M. and D. Wells: 1999, 'Group Processes and Performance and their Effects on Individuals' Ethical Frameworks', *Journal of Business Ethics* **18**, 367-81.

Stewart, M.: 1994, 'Between Whitehall and Town Hall', *Policy and Politics* **22**(2), 133-45.

Sturdy A.: 1997, 'The Dialectics of Consultancy', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* **8**, 511-35.

Teisman, G. and E-H. Klijn: 2002, 'Partnership Arrangements: Governmental Rhetoric or Governance Scheme?', *Public Administration Review* **62**(2), 197-205.

UK Department of Health: 1999, *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* (HMSO, London).

Walker, J.: 1999, ‘Partnerships to Improve Rural and Remote Health Care’, *Australian Journal of Public Administration* **58**(3), 72-5.

Walsh, K., V. Lowndes, K. Riley and J. Woollam: 1996, ‘Management in the Public Sector: A Content Analysis of Journals’, *Public Administration* **74**, 315-24.

Weiss, J.: 1981, ‘Substance vs. Symbol in Administrative Reform: The Case of Human Services Coordination’, *Policy Analysis* **7**(1), 21-45.

Westrin, C-G.: 1987, ‘Primary Health Care: Cooperation between Health and Welfare Personnel’, *Scandinavian Journal of Social Medicine*, Supplement 38, 5-73.

Wildeman, L.: 1998, ‘Alliances and Networks: The Next Generation’, *International Journal of Technology Management* **15**(1-2), 96-108.

Wong, A.: 1999, ‘Partnering Through Cooperative Goals in Supply Chain Relationships’, *Total Quality Management* **10**(4-5), S786-S792.

Stuart Macdonald
University of Sheffield
9 Mappin Street
Sheffield S1 4DT
England

E-mail: s.macdonald@sheffield.ac.uk

Tom Chrisp
ARC Research and Consultancy Ltd
15 Winsford Road
Sheffield S6 1HT
England

E-mail: arc@breakfast.solis.co.uk