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Partnerships can be described as having four levels based on a philosophical analysis of trust. The analysis of two major partnership projects in this article leads to rules and principles of procedure as ways of building coherent partnerships.

Levels of Partnership

This article explores the concept of partnerships through examination of different levels of trust and complexity. A level of partnership is described in terms of the range and depth of the agreements and relationships established by partners to a given enterprise. Two projects will be examined in this study. First, the *Manassas Park Educational Partnership* is a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Education Partnership grants from 1990-1994, and the project was located in a small, predominantly white, blue-collar school district in Northern Virginia. Second, the George Mason University Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) grant of 1995-1997 will be reviewed. This GMU project was located in a poor urban district of Arlington, Virginia, and called *The Urban Alternative.*

Initially, four levels of partnership are examined, from which four rules are outlined that are suggestive as important to creating and sustaining effective partnership. Two practical problems and opportunities are discussed: (a) those where partners are of widely different power and resources, and (b) those where the social and political agenda is transformative. Other major issues, such as how to address sustainability and the complexity of educational and training outcomes needed, are not tackled here. The stance taken towards these issues is moral and philosophical rather than empirical. The analysis is therefore normative, and for the purposes of this article the convention of linking the work to existing literature on collaboration and partnership is neglected.

Levels of Partnership and the Importance of Trust

These types of partnership refer to interinstitutional relationships. However, it should not be assumed that every institution is organizationally bureaucratic like a school system or a university. Within these levels institutions may be full-grown and powerful, fledgling and unformed, even inchoate and lacking direction. Certainly they may be for profit or nonprofit. Partnership can assist in the development of any institution in the same way that organizations committed to quality work with customers and suppliers grow through benchmarking themselves with similar organizations. Partnership can be regarded as of four salient types:

- *Service* relationships, where an individual or unit volunteers support for a school-related function;
- *Exchange* relationships, where the parties exchange resources for their mutual benefit;
- *Cooperative* relationships, where the parties plan together and share responsibilities; and
- *Systemic and Transformative* relationships, where the parties share responsibility for planning, decision making, funding, operations, and evaluation of activities, *and* where each institution is transformed through the relationship.

Articulating these four levels of partnership, which are presented schematically in Table 1, can assist (a) in understanding the foundations of particular partnerships; (b) in providing indications of ways in which partnership growth, contracts, and other benefits might arise; and (c) in assisting all institutions to make their partnerships more effective.

This analysis presupposes that partnerships are valuable in social, educational, or political causes. This moral claim can be justified by general value commitments, e.g., "the whole is better than the sum of its parts"; by empirical beliefs, e.g., that institutions have become atomized; and by more specific moral claims, e.g., that the development of a sense of community is critical for universities, which ought to commit themselves to an agenda of social justice. The purpose of the analysis of levels is therefore rooted in moral, social, and political beliefs that underpin the commitment to partnership, not by empirical surveys about what people actually do. The phraseology describing levels is not pseudotechnical; rather, it attempts to use concepts that describe moral and political relationships. This implies that partnerships, at any level, have to be seen first and foremost as moral frames within which individuals meet, work, and establish common purposes, not as pragmatic political treaties between institutions.

This typology is not a hierarchy. That is, it is not necessary that any particular partnership begin in a service relationship and work its way upward. However, analyzing and understanding an existing partnership can be helped by asking where, in this typology, does this particular partnership stand?

Table 1:
A Typology of Partnerships

Types of Partnership	*Examples*
Service relationships, where an individual or unit volunteers/sells support for a institution–related function.	Faculty or students serving as judges for school science fairs Bilingual outreach programs Faculty speaking at PTA/community event University students performing in a community/ school or volunteering physical labor and skill, e.g. building
Exchange relationships, where the parties exchange resources for their mutual benefit.	Promoting family courses in neighborhood schools Faculty access to organizations for research Early admission of high school students to university programs from poor communities Training neighborhood leaders
Cooperative relationships, where the parties plan together and share responsibilities.	Membership of community advisory committees School and university building a parents' curriculum Community–based research and documentation Research on problems identified by communities Grant–supported projects that end when funding is exhausted Microenterprise development School–based masters program for teachers
Systemic and Transformative relationships, where the parties share responsibility for planning, decision-making, funding, operations, and evaluation of activities, and where each institution is transformed through the relationship.	Peer mediation projects Small grants programs for neighborhoods Early identification programs The Urban Alternative

The Role of Trust

Partnership is rooted in trust. Surprisingly, there is little attention to the philosophical ramifications of the concept of trust in most literature on collaboration and partnership, except the sense that it is a "good thing." Morally speaking, understanding what counts as trust is the critical ingredient to understanding what is being done

when partnerships are being created. Far from this analysis being a general statement, its implications for social practices are far-reaching. First, trust is a relational state between individuals and/or institutions. It can have an "inside" and an "outside." For example, Fred (a parent) may trust Sue (the teacher) because they get along well, like each other, and Fred Jr. (a student) benefits. The "outside" is that parents trust School X and Principal Y because the private collection of trusting relationships (e.g., between Fred and Sue), together with principled, open institutional actions, has created that relationship. Thus, university faculty working in COPC grants are both generating individual relationships of trust and thereby fostering institutional trust.

Second, this relational state has two primary conditions. For a relationship of trust to exist, there must logically be (a) predictability of behavior and (b) agreement on ends. Trust cannot develop where people seeking to establish trust behave unpredictably through lack of punctuality, constant changing of minds, and so on. Nor can it be established where individuals disagree about the ends they are trying to pursue, or where a conflict of ends can promote a loss of trust. Often neglected in the varieties of human intercourse where trust is needed is attention to the predictability that makes people believe others are committed to each other. Where individuals or institutions agree on ends only in rhetoric but not in reality, or where there are hidden agendas, the engendered deceit undermines trust.

Within each of these conditions, three underlying conditions are also needed. First, to create a relationship of trust, individuals must believe in the rationality and the good will of others. That is more difficult than it sounds, because when they are negotiating about ends, for example, and trying to build trust, they may be tempted to see hidden agendas, selfishness, or straightforward confusion and failure to face facts. That is, they see neither good will nor rationality from the other party. Second, individuals must be critically reflective; being a partner to any relationship demands the ability to view oneself as others do, not least because that ability becomes essential when there is misunderstanding and doubt. Finally, there must be open dialogue, and that dialogue must be honest. Bureaucratized relationships between institutions often prevent honest dialogue or they become a paper exchange, not a personal professional relationship.

These five fundamental conditions of trust are a relational state that influences every conceivable kind of partnership. They therefore influence the specific kinds of partnerships that COPC institutions create. The requirements partnerships make on the extent of trust vary from level to level. The more complex the partnership, the more important understanding the conditions of trust becomes.

Rules for Partnerships

Tentative rules emerge from these thoughts and our experience. The first rule is that of *clarification.* Clarification means careful determination of the level at which the partnership is being constructed. This framework has the potential to help institutions do that, especially as they begin to negotiate the extent of their involvement. In preparing the 1990 Education Partnership grant proposal, we were firmly under the impression that a unit within a major multinational corporation based in the

region "ABC" was with us in a relationship at the *cooperative* level. Various meetings were held with ABC's community relations manager and his deputy, who happened to be an appointed school board member in another jurisdiction. We had also met with a highly placed technologist, "Jones," from another branch of ABC, whom, we had been told, had kept in touch with the unit with which we were negotiating. Immediately prior to the proposal being submitted, the community relations manager declined to write a letter of support. Jones, the other ABC representative, continued to attend three or four initial meetings of the project five months after it had been funded, but only then discovered that the ABC unit was not a participant. He had hoped to alter various elements of the proposal, but was left without any real clout in the partnership and did not participate further. Communication mistakes abounded: "Will you write us a letter of support?" "Sure, fax us what you want us to say." And then two months later: "Hey, we didn't mean that."

This framework of levels provides the opportunity to define and clarify a specification of commitment that can be written into a contract. Federal and other funders might well insist on such contracts rather than letters of support, and, indeed, an analysis of the type of partnership it is proposed to create. The effect is obvious. The clarification rule gives a far stronger bedrock to a partnership, primarily because partners have an opportunity to distinguish between the levels at which they wish to associate. Through that discussion and more extensive dialogue, they create trust. It thereby provides clear understanding of the obligations characteristic of the levels at which the partnership is being constructed.

The second rule is the *growth* rule. Built into any kind of partnership is an intimation of growth in partnership through the partners' deliberate action toward common ends. Over and above that, development and growth in the quality and extent of partnership ought to be a part of its strategic plan. Briefly, this is the question of how a partnership might move up the levels from the "service" to the "systemic and transformative," although, as has already been indicated, it is not being argued that all partnerships start at "systemic" and work their way to "transformative." Elements of one or more levels may also be combined. For example, the promotion of family courses in neighborhood schools, where parents learn and teachers create improved relationships, leads to cooperative relationships in which school, university, and parents start to build new curricula for families or for parents only. Partnership is not static. The dynamism of its growth leads to different activities and different conceptualizations of those activities.

The third rule is the *ownership* rule. This requires institutions to realize in advance the implications of their loss of ownership and control. Partnership impinges on ownership. For universities, this is very challenging: by tradition, faculty in universities are self-governing, and faculty autonomy is thought to have an internal connection to academic freedom. Sharing the authority and power that stem from that view of self is psychologically difficult, primarily because the attainment of the status is highly prized and not to be surrendered lightly. Infringement on these principles is undertaken at one's peril. Yet too often defense of that status is in fact a complaint about resource allocation and distribution. The pragmatic and the principled are difficult to disentangle in university politics. Such issues within the university's concept of ownership are also reflected in matters of ownership in partner institutions.

The Urban Alternative Project

In the Urban Alternative, the George Mason University HUD-funded COPC project, the partners and the leadership have spent some time grappling with the status of the university. By writing a successful proposal, the university can be seen as the bearer of a wonderful cargo. By having committed experts, the university can be seen as providers of a service. By accessing students, the university can be seen as a provider of supporting labor for community ends. But who exactly owns this cargo? For either of the top levels of partnership, ownership within the institution must be spread beyond the proposal writer, and create strong internal partners, itself a tortuous and difficult growth path. Yet partnerships cannot also work at the cooperative and the systemic/transformative levels without constant negotiation of some measure of external control and ownership of the cargo the successful proposal brings.

On the other hand, partners in awe of the university's power are likely to see themselves as less competent, accepting the authority of the university perspective (even when they do not like it), and their representatives are likely to suffer from the skills of rhetoric and persuasion in which university faculty are often very adept. The problem of how to make a partnership authentic through joint ownership is as complex as getting the balance of control and ownership right in a marriage. On matters of ownership, we need "prenuptial" agreements; that is, as a partnership project begins we need to enter discussions with some general sense that the building of a team, a flattening of institutional power, and a redistribution of the resources of power is needed. This promotes growth and learning in all parties. Learning how to listen, learning how to construct team dialogues, and learning how to provide space for others to grow are critical.

Finally, the *review* rule. Partnerships have much to learn from the "quality movement," not so much in terms of the action principles, but in terms of (a) having everyone in a partnership measure its success; (b) the construction of teams; and (c) the creation of opportunities for everyone in the partnership to contribute to its continuous improvement. Too often evaluation is conceived as bureaucratic, and requests for proposals often require such an approach to satisfy the demands for public accountability. More significant for a partnership is its internal review, both in terms of program and process. To that activity, everyone involved can contribute.

In summary, four rules have been suggested:

- Define and clarify the level
- Grow through the levels
- Handle the loss of control and ownership at the higher levels
- Enable everyone to review the activity

Notice that the systemic level of partnership types is that at which institutions themselves change or are transformed through partnership. That is a recognition that all can teach and all can learn. The normative character of these rules, derived from the typology of partnership and the brief philosophical analysis of trust,

implies that individual partnerships may be able to generalize for their practice from this subjective experience. It is not to suggest that these are empirically based rules of experience of general application. Indeed, until there is much more sophisticated moral thought about the nature and conduct of partnerships, there will be no improved empirical data from which to search for such objective generalizations.

Problems and Opportunities in Practice

The GMU projects have by no means implemented all these rules. Indeed, there is an urgent need for greater reflection about the work and the moral and conceptual implications of these levels and the rules suggested. Nevertheless, some problems and opportunities have been found to be significant in the implementation of these rules.

Working with Partners of Different Power and Resources

Examination is needed of the differences in status between individuals, as much as of the different powers among institutions. The problem for governmental and other bureaucratic organizations is that socialized individuals look more to the power structure than they do to the ephemeral partnership, especially when the level of involvement has not been clearly articulated. For example, working with teachers without a strong school principal's commitment and involvement creates tensions for teachers within their own workplace, heightens the conservatism about what might be done, and may foster defensiveness in partnerships. In a partnership, powerful people (e.g., local government officials) can derail activity simply by not cooperating, by taking action that deeply affects a partnership without any consent or consultation, or by brokering private agreements with one or two other powerful institutions.

In The Urban Alternative, a vacant supermarket became a community choice for a community center. However, without consultation, the local government exercised eminent domain to get the site and then agreed privately with the school district on its use. It then designated a portion of the building "for community use." The community, not having been asked about the original usage, did not foresee the potential, but the university did. It stepped in and negotiated space for an Early Childhood Center. The speed with which the first part of the building's acquisition was conducted made it difficult for the university to avoid acting likewise, thereby ignoring the ideal need to build a political group powered by residents through the Child Care Community group. In this case, there was a ricochet effect among the big players that obliterated the less powerful partners.

There is an inevitability about this, given relative powers. The issue, especially for those who seek to build partnerships at the fourth level, is how to ensure that there is shared decision-making which respects both formal and informal, or bureaucratic and community groups.

Transformation as a Social and Political Agenda

The full force of the larger agenda is reflected in Secretary Cisneros' paper on "The University and the Urban Challenge." At the fourth level of partnership there is potential for two kinds of opportunities: First, the opportunities that the goal

of transformation provides are those that facilitate members of institutions to think "against the grain" within their ascribed roles. Second, while partnership often means talking rhetorically of the "whole as bigger than the sum of its parts," the concept needs to be understood as an opportunity.

In COPC projects and their successors, it is essential for those of us from the university world not to provide services that could be provided by others, but to work against the grain of our traditional academic roles. Partnership of a transformative character places an individual teacher in a powerful position as both a teacher and a learner. Engagement in partnership redefines the university teaching role. For example, a member of faculty teaching bilingual outreach programs to refugees from Somalia may create a family group within the school and the community. On that basis, a "parents' curriculum" can be built cooperatively that can develop models of programs and faculty roles. Such role development is transformative for the university teacher and is necessary to the articulation of new models of partnerships that work.

Second, the rhetoric of the whole and its parts is only true if it is understood as transformative; that is, where the purpose of the "whole" is to change radically each of the "parts." On this account, the "whole-parts" notion is more than mere synergy. It is the creation of coalitions that represent additional resources. In The Urban Alternative, for instance, a slum fire in a large apartment house killed a small family before Christmas 1996. The owner wishes to rid himself of the troublesome property, as it has low occupancy and signs of drug and gang activity, and seeks a developer to gentrify the property by replacing the building with expensive town homes. However, the work of The Urban Alternative attracted the attention of a company specializing in low-income housing that has sought to acquire the property as partners with a not-for-profit housing corporation. Community interest in such a project has been encouraged by the university's Urban Alternative project, which drew the support of local government. Although the university faculty working in The Urban Alternative are challenged by the extent to which they should become proactive in the matter of this slum building, the involvement of the university in community development illustrates that the whole of the community is not yet more than the sum of its parts. Each group's or institution's acts are enhanced by those of its partners.

Summary

Such reflection on experience as has been attempted in this brief article seems critical to understanding the new kinds of relationships presaged by university-community partnerships. The key is careful moral analysis, conversation, and reflection. To pursue these lines of thought can refine practice and also articulate to the academic community an intellectual and moral rationale in a complex political context.

Note: The original notion of "levels of partnership" was developed by Todd Endo, Director of The Urban Alternative and the author of part of their thinking about the Manassas Park Educational Partnership.