

**HOW DO RELATIONAL DYNAMICS INFLUENCE PUBLIC SECTOR
PARTNERSHIPS? A STUDY OF THE OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY
ASSOCIATED COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP**

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Abstract

The last 20 years have seen a growth in partnership working in both the public and private sectors as organisations seek to improve efficiency and gain access to new resources to reduce costs and gain competitive advantage. Driven by government policy to widen participation in Higher Education, (HE), one area which has seen major growth is the partnership between universities and Colleges of Further Education (FE) to deliver Foundation, Bachelor and Masters degrees and increasingly degree apprenticeships. Due to the timescales involved in delivering degree programmes it is essential that these partnerships are viable in the longer term, but up to 50% of all partnerships fail. How to ensure the long term viability of education partnerships is an under researched area. While researchers have looked at both the role of Intellectual and Social Capital in facilitating educational partnerships, few have looked at the role of Relational Capital (RC) which is seen as the trust, respect and friendship that develops at individual level between partners. Studies of private sector partnerships see this as key to maintaining partnerships.

Based on my own experience this study is concerned with partnership working in the delivery of educational programmes and, in particular, the delivery of degrees by colleges of FE, in partnership with universities. Using Relational Capital as a theoretical lens through which to view partnership this qualitative research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the long term viability of partnerships. It uses an embedded case style design to explore the relationship between Oxford Brookes University and a partner college of FE. 16 key informants from OBU and the partner college involved in either managing the partnership at senior level or the day to day

operations were asked to give their views of partnership success. The focus was not on what makes a successful partnership in terms of outcomes but in developing a successful working relationship. The research seeks to answer the question; “what makes a good working relationship?” It takes a qualitative approach to research a concept which, though value laden, is often explored using quantitative techniques. While much case research is focused on theory building using grounded theory techniques this research takes a critical realist stance to elaborate on existing theory and in particular focuses on the relevance of Relational Capital and Boundary Spanning to education partnerships.

The findings of each embedded case are set out in 5 distinct chapters which provide an opportunity to examine the nuances which arose as a result of subject specific pedagogy or role before a sixth chapter compares and contrasts the findings. In general, the findings show that the role of senior management, especially in the allocation of resources and development of the quality framework, the distribution of power, development of culture, trust, commitment and personal relationships, supported and developed by boundary spanners are key to successful partnership working.

This thesis seeks to contribute to theory in 3 areas.

The first is clarifying what is meant by building a HE culture. This research identified that what is required is to create a culture which provides a safe learning environment where knowledge is contested and applied.

The second contribution examines the role of friendship in developing Relational Capital. While the research found that RC is built in education partnerships this thesis challenges the view that RC is based on personal friendship and sees

friendliness based on mutual respect being more important. This reinforces the importance of building identification based trust.

The third contribution builds on the boundary spanning literature by looking at the importance of boundary spanners in bridging and overcoming organisational differences and the need to integrate partnership learning back into the separate organisations.

The thesis then make a practitioner contribution by providing guidance on good practice in managing partnerships. The thesis ends by making recommendations on areas for future research which would give greater insight into the role of RC and boundary spanning to ensure the success of educational partnerships.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Table of Contents	
Table of Figures	
Part 1	Introduction and Context 2
Chapter 1	Introduction..... 3
1.1	The research agenda..... 3
1.1.1	The growth in partnership working 4
1.1.2	The research question 6
1.1.3	The research context 6
1.2	Structure of the thesis 7
Chapter 2	The Context: Higher Education in Further Education 11
2.1	Introduction 11
2.2	The HE in FE landscape 11
2.3	HE and FE partnerships 15
2.4	HE and FE partnership development..... 16
2.4.1	Purpose and identity 17
2.4.2	Identity 18
2.4.3	Power..... 20
2.4.4	Culture 21
2.4.5	Funding 23
2.4.6	Quality..... 25
2.4.7	Governance..... 26
2.5	Summary 26
Part 2	The Literature Review 28
Chapter 3:	Partnership..... 29
3.1	Introduction 29
3.2	Definitions of partnership 30
3.3	Types of partnership 35
3.3	Partnership development..... 40

3.4 Summary	40
Chapter 4 Relational Capital	42
4.1 Introduction	42
4.2 Relational dimension of social capital	44
4.2.1 The components of relational capital.....	46
4.3 The economic approach	50
4.4 The intellectus model.....	52
4.5 The Importance of relational capital	54
4.6 Problems of relational capital	55
4.7 Measuring relational capital	56
4.8 Summary	58
Chapter 5 The Components of Relational Capital.....	61
5.1 Introduction	61
5.2 Culture and values.....	63
5.2.1 Classifying culture	67
5.2.2 Developing an HE culture in FE	70
5.3 Trust	72
5.3.1 Definitions of trust	73
5.3.2 Interpersonal and interorganisational trust	73
5.3.3 Trust and trustworthiness	74
5.3.4 Components of trust.....	75
5.3.5 Forms of trust	77
5.3.6 Problems of trust	81
5.3.7. Distrust	81
5.3.8 Summary of the role of trust	82
5.4 Commitment	82
5.4.1 Importance of commitment.....	86
5.4.2 Problems of commitment	87
5.4.3 Trust-commitment cycle	87
5.5 Reciprocity	88
5.5.1 Importance of reciprocity	90
5.5.2. Problems of reciprocity.....	91
5.5.3 Summary.....	91

5.6 Friendship / Social interaction	91
5.6.1 Importance of friendship	93
5.6.2 Problems of friendship	93
5.6.3 Summary	94
5.7 Mutual respect	94
5.8 Power	95
5.9 Boundary spanning	97
5.9.1 Boundary spanning leadership	100
5.9.2 Boundary spanning and this research	101
5.10 Conclusion	101
Part 3 Methodology	104
Chapter 6 Methodology	105
6.1 Introduction	105
6.2 Design	106
6.2.1 Positivism	110
6.2.2 Social constructionism	110
6.2.3 Critical realism	112
6.2.3.1 Limitations of critical realism	113
6.2.3.2 Relevance of critical realism to this research	114
6.3 Abductive strategy	116
6.4 Case study	120
6.5 Research design	124
6.6 Case study and critical realism	126
6.7 Qualitative research	127
6.8 Data collection	130
6.8.1. Sampling	130
6.8.1.1 The Interviewees	131
6.8.2 Interviews	134
6.8.2.1 Limitations of interviews	136
6.8.3 Application to this study	136
6.8.3.1 Timeline of data collection	139
6.9 Data analysis	141
6.9.1 Nvivo	142
6.9.2 Application to this study	143

6.10 Ethical considerations	146
6.11 Conclusion	147
Part 4 The Findings	149
Chapter 7 The Case	150
7.1 Introduction	150
7.2 The Associated College Partnership.....	150
7.2.1 Management arrangements	153
7.2.2 Liaison managers	153
7.2.3 The partner college	154
7.2.4 OBBS	155
7.2.5 HSS.....	156
7.2.6 HLS	156
7.3 The Structure of Part 4	156
Chapter 8 Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS).....	158
8.1 Introduction	158
8.2 The interviewees.....	159
8.3 The management structure.....	160
8.4 The findings	161
8.4.1 Nature of partnership	161
8.4.2 Culture	165
8.4.3 Meaning of relational capital (RC)	168
8.4.4. Trust.....	170
8.4.5 Commitment.....	172
8.4.6. Reciprocity	173
8.4.7 Interpersonal relationships	175
8.4.8 Power balance	179
8.5 Conclusion	180
8.6 Reflection on the process	181
8.7 Implications for this study	182
Chapter 9 The Management View	184
9.1 Introduction	184
9.2 The Interviewees	185
9.3 The nature of partnership.....	186

9.4 Purpose and identity	188
9.5 Power and trust.....	192
9.6 Culture	196
9.7 Funding.....	198
9.8 Quality	199
9.9 Governance	201
9.10 Interpersonal relationships.....	202
9.11 Summary	203
9.12 Reflection.....	204
Chapter 10 The Liaison Manager.....	206
10.1 Introduction	206
10.2 The Interviewee	207
10.3 Successful partnerships.....	207
10.4 Quality	209
10.4.1 Quality systems and procedures	209
10.4.2 Quality of provision.....	211
10.5 Commitment	211
10.6 Power	214
10.7 Culture	215
10.8 Friendship.....	218
10.9 Summary	219
10.10 Reflection.....	220
Chapter 11 Early Years Education.....	222
11.1 Introduction	222
11.2 The interviewees.....	223
11.3 The nature of partnership.....	224
11.4 Culture	225
11.5 Trust	227
11.6 Commitment	228
11.7 Power	232
11.8 The role of senior management	232
11.9 Key features of a successful partnership	234
11.10 Summary	235

11.11 Reflection.....	237
Chapter 12 Healthcare	238
12.1 Introduction	238
12.2 The interviewees.....	239
12.3 Partnership development.....	239
12.4 Culture	245
12.5 Trust	249
12.6 Commitment	251
12.7 Power	254
12.8 Interpersonal relationships.....	254
12.9 Communication.....	256
12.10 The role of the liaison manager	258
12.11 The role of senior management.....	259
12.12 Features of a good partnership.....	262
12.13 Summary	264
12.14 Reflection.....	265
Chapter 13 Cross-case Comparison	267
13.1 Introduction	267
13.2 Definitions of partnership	268
13.3 The role of senior management.....	270
13.4 The role of the liaison manager	272
13.5 Culture	273
13.6 Trust and commitment	276
13.7 Power	278
13.7 Interpersonal relationships.....	280
13.8 Key issues for discussion.....	282
Chapter 14 Discussion	283
14.1 Introduction	283
14.2 Partnership	285
14.2.1 The organisational relationship	285
14.2.2 The partnership at operational level	287
14.3 Culture	287
14.3.1 HE culture in FE	291

14.4 Interpersonal relationships.....	293
14.5 Commitment and trust	297
14.5.1 Commitment.....	297
14.5.2 Trust.....	298
14.6 Power	300
14.6.1 Perception of power at operational level	302
14.7 Boundary spanning.....	304
14.7.1 Boundary spanning leadership.....	305
14.7.2 The liaison manager as boundary spanner	306
14.7.2.1 Reticulist.....	310
14.7.2.2 Entrepreneur	311
14.7.2.3 Interpreter/Communicator	312
14.7.2.4 Coordinator	312
14.7.2.5 Influences on the role of boundary spanner	312
14.7.2.6 Filling the role of liaison manager.....	313
14.7.3 Boundary spanning and relational capital.	314
14.8 Conclusion	314
Chapter 15 Conclusion	317
15.1 Introduction	317
15.2 Objective 1	318
15.3 Objective 2.....	319
15.4 Objective 3.....	323
15.4.1 Culture.....	324
15.4.2 Interpersonal relationships	326
15.4.3 Trust and commitment	327
15.4.4 Power	327
15.4.5 Boundary spanning	328
15.4.5.1 Boundary spanning leadership	329
15.4.5.2 The liaison manager as boundary spanner	329
15.5 The role of relational capital.....	330
15.6 The research question	330
15.7 Contribution to theory	332
15.7.1 Developing an HE culture.....	332
15.7.2 The role of friendship in relational capital.....	333

15.7.3 Boundary spanning in HE partnerships	334
15.8 Methodological contribution	336
15.9 Managerial implications	336
15.10 Limitations of this research	337
15.11 Areas for further research	338
15.12 Reflection on the research process	339
Part 6 References and Appendices	344
References	345
APPENDICES	383
Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet.....	384
Appendix 2 Consent Form	387
Appendix 3 First Interview Guide	388
Appendix 4 Second Interview Guide	391
Appendix 5 Liaison Manager Role Descriptor.....	392

Table of Figures

Figure 1 The structure of the thesis.....	8
Figure 2 Mission statements of OBU and 3 partner colleges	19
Figure 3: Partnerships continuum (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008, p.154)	36
Figure 4 Components of relational capital	50
Figure 5 Definitions of university culture (Canoski, 2022)	68
Figure 6 Cultural Types (adapted from Gaus <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	69
Figure 7 Stakeholder cultures (adapted from Jones et al., 2007).....	70
Figure 8 Conditions of trust	76
Figure 9 Key roles of Boundary Spanners (after Williams, 2013).....	99
Figure 10: Interrelated aspects of Relational Capital.....	103
Figure 11: Contrasts between positivism, critical realism and social constructivism (adapted from Lincoln and Guba, 1985).....	109
Figure 12: Abductive strategy in this research (adapted from Dubois and Gadde, 2002).....	118
Figure 13: Embedded case replication design (adapted from Yin, 2009).....	119
Figure 14: Four types of case study (Yin, 2014).....	122
Figure 15: Four tests of research design (Yin, 2014	125
Figure 16: Key features of qualitative research (adapted from Robson, 2011)	128
Figure 17: Profile of interviewees	133
Figure 18 Timeline for data collection.....	140
Figure 19 Initial Interview guide and coding template	144
Figure 20 Interview guide 2	145
Figure 21 Additional coding	146
Figure 22 Profile of the OBBS interviewees	159
Figure 23: The management structure	160
Figure 24 Profiles of the management interviewees.....	185
Figure 25 Profile of the liaison manager.....	207
Figure 26 Profile of the Education interviewees	224
Figure 27 Profile of the healthcare interviewees	239

Figure 28 Key phrases used to describe partnership.	268
Figure 29 Definitions of partnership	269
Figure 30 The role of senior management	270
Figure 31 Key role of senior management	271
Figure 32 Key features of the role of liaison manager	272
Figure 33 Liaison manager priorities	273
Figure 34 The nature of culture	274
Figure 35 The features of a common culture.....	275
Figure 36 Basis of trust and commitment.....	277
Figure 37 Important of trust and commitment.....	277
Figure 38 The power balance.....	279
Figure 39 Power balance	280
Figure 40 Interpersonal relationships	281
Figure 41 Nature of personal relationships.....	281
Figure 42 Liaison manager role descriptor and Williams, (2013) roles.....	310
Figure 43 BSL practices after Prysor and Henley, (2018)	329
Figure 44 Relational dimensions of partnership	331
Figure 45 Boundary spanning model.....	335

Part 1

Introduction and Context

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The research agenda

The motivation for this research developed from my involvement in partnership working at Oxford Brookes University (OBU) and other organisations. I am interested in why, with the same objectives and similar resources, some partnerships achieve their objectives more easily than others and support a more harmonious working relationship. Put simply, “what makes a good partnership?” - not in terms of outputs, but in terms of the process of partnership development and good working relationships. What exactly does it mean to have a “good working relationship”? Are there common characteristics? With this aim, the research is not concerned with the output of the partnership but with the workings of the partnership itself, an under-researched area (Langley *et al.*, 2013). Provan and Sydow (2008) would regard this as using process indicators to determine success. Fleetwood and Hesketh (2008) called this examining ‘the black box problem’, i.e., the research is not examining outputs or inputs, but the transformation process itself. This type of process research is seen as important in advancing management knowledge, as it recognises the dynamic nature of management and the influences on it (Langley *et al.*, 2013).

1.1.1 The growth in partnership working

The last 20 years have seen a growth in partnership working in both the public and private sectors as organisations seek to improve efficiency, gain access to new resources, reduce costs and gain competitive advantage. One sector which has a long tradition of partnership working is education and there are examples at all levels from pre-school to post -doctoral research and from intra departmental to major international research collaborations. Driven by government policy to widen participation in Higher Education, partnerships between universities and Colleges of Further Education (FE) to deliver Foundation degrees, BAs and increasingly, degree apprenticeships have become more important. As a strong education sector is vital for national economic and social growth, it is important that these partnerships are successful, (Marginson, 2016; Universities UK 2021).

The growth in partnership working has been accompanied by a growth in partnership research by researchers from a range of disciplines, (Cropper, *et al*, 2008; Vangen, *et al*, 2015). They are seeking to understand and explain the nature, antecedents, processes, features, management, and outcomes of partnerships. Studies, of successful partnerships in the private sector in the organisational studies and management literature, identify several common characteristics: trust, flexibility, understanding, balance of power, shared mission, compatibility, communication, and commitment, (Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Nahapiet, 1998; Cropper *et al.*, 2008). These are also true of public sector partnerships, (Shaw, 2003; Ramadas *et al.*, 2018). In line with other studies in both the public and private sectors, studies of partnerships between colleges of FE and universities to provide foundation degrees show that they are successful if they share a number of common characteristics: trust, flexibility, shared aims, compatibility, communication and commitment (Elliott,

2017; Foskett, 2005; Trim, 2001; Shaw, 2003). Kale *et al.* (2000) saw these as elements of Relational Capital (RC) and said that it is strong RC which leads to the success of a partnership. Based on studies in the private sector, Gulati *et al.* (2006), would argue that Relational Capital is a strong safeguard against failure; Moran (2005) echoed this and suggested that it is “relational embeddedness” (p.1130) which helps to ensure the success of a network. McLaughlin *et al.* (2009) built on their work and translated it to the public sector, suggesting that, in future, good public governance will rely on ‘relational capitalists’ (p.40). This helps to establish that RC is a useful concept in the study of public sector partnerships, although it does not appear to have been explored much in the education sector. If the key to success is strong RC, understanding its role in partnership development is vital.

Based on my own experience, this study is concerned with partnership working in the delivery of educational programmes and, in particular, the case of foundation and bachelor degrees delivered by universities in partnership with colleges of Further Education (FE). The increase in partnership working in the public sector is despite estimates that up to 50% of private sector partnerships fail (Ramadas *et al.*, 2018). If the effective delivery of public services and future public policy development is to be reliant on partnerships, this level of failure is both unaffordable and unacceptable.

This study seeks to use the concept of RC as a lens through which to explore the dynamics of partnership in the education sector. The study aims to make a contribution to understanding the mechanisms contributing to partnership success by using RC as an explanatory framework. It seeks to aid managers in identifying the characteristics which are required to develop a successful working relationship with others.

1.1.2 The research question

How do relational dynamics influence HE-FE partnerships?

The Research Objectives

1. To explore the context of HE-FE partnerships within the education sector;
2. To review the literature to explore the factors which contribute to partnership development and success;
3. Investigate experiences of partnership working in the HE sector and views on what contributes to partnership success from different perspectives.

1.1.3 The research context

This study will focus on the Oxford Brookes Associate College Partnership (ACP), which was developed in 2004, to take advantage of the introduction of foundation degrees and in response to the need to widen participation in HE, changes in HEFCE funding and pressure from Oxford City Council to reduce the number of students on campus. In line with the philosophy of foundation degrees, the partnership seeks to provide high quality HE through colleges of FE to those who traditionally may not have considered a university degree. Its importance to Oxford Brookes was further strengthened in 2012, with the introduction of £9,000 fees, as part of OBU's commitment to widening participation in HE. There are some 1500 students studying for Oxford Brookes degrees on 62 programmes managed by eight partner colleges of FE (Oxford Brookes University, 2023).

While the concept of RC was developed from a positivist philosophy using quantitative techniques and this approach was used by the majority of studies

exploring RC, e.g. (Kale *et al.*, 2000; Collins *et al.*, 2004; Sambasivan *et al.* 2011), Adler and Kwon (2002) saw RC as a metaphorical construct and not quantifiable. Edvinsson and Malone (1997), while seeking to value Intellectual Capital to improve financial reporting, also identified that some elements are qualitative. Building on their work, Mertins *et al.* (2009) also suggested that a quantitative approach is not appropriate. Lee (2000) suggested that a critical realist approach would better identify how and why networks develop, and that qualitative methodology would give a greater understanding of participants' perceptions of relationships. In support of this, Bueno *et al.* (2004) stressed the need for a case study approach to examine the impact of values on Relational Capital. Case study research is also being used more frequently to study interorganisational relationships, as the need to understand relationships in depth is recognised (Byrne and Ragin, 2009; Easton, 2010; Wynn and Williams, 2012; Ketokivi and Choi, 2014).

The Oxford Brookes ACP fits into Yin's (2014) definition of a case and provides an appropriate context within which to achieve the above objectives as it involves a number of organisations focused on achieving a common goal by sharing resources and expertise. The number of colleges involved, and the nature of the relationships, suggest a qualitative case-based study. A full rationale for this approach is provided in Chapter 6.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is made up of 15 chapters. After this introductory chapter, the rest of the thesis is set out in the following way:

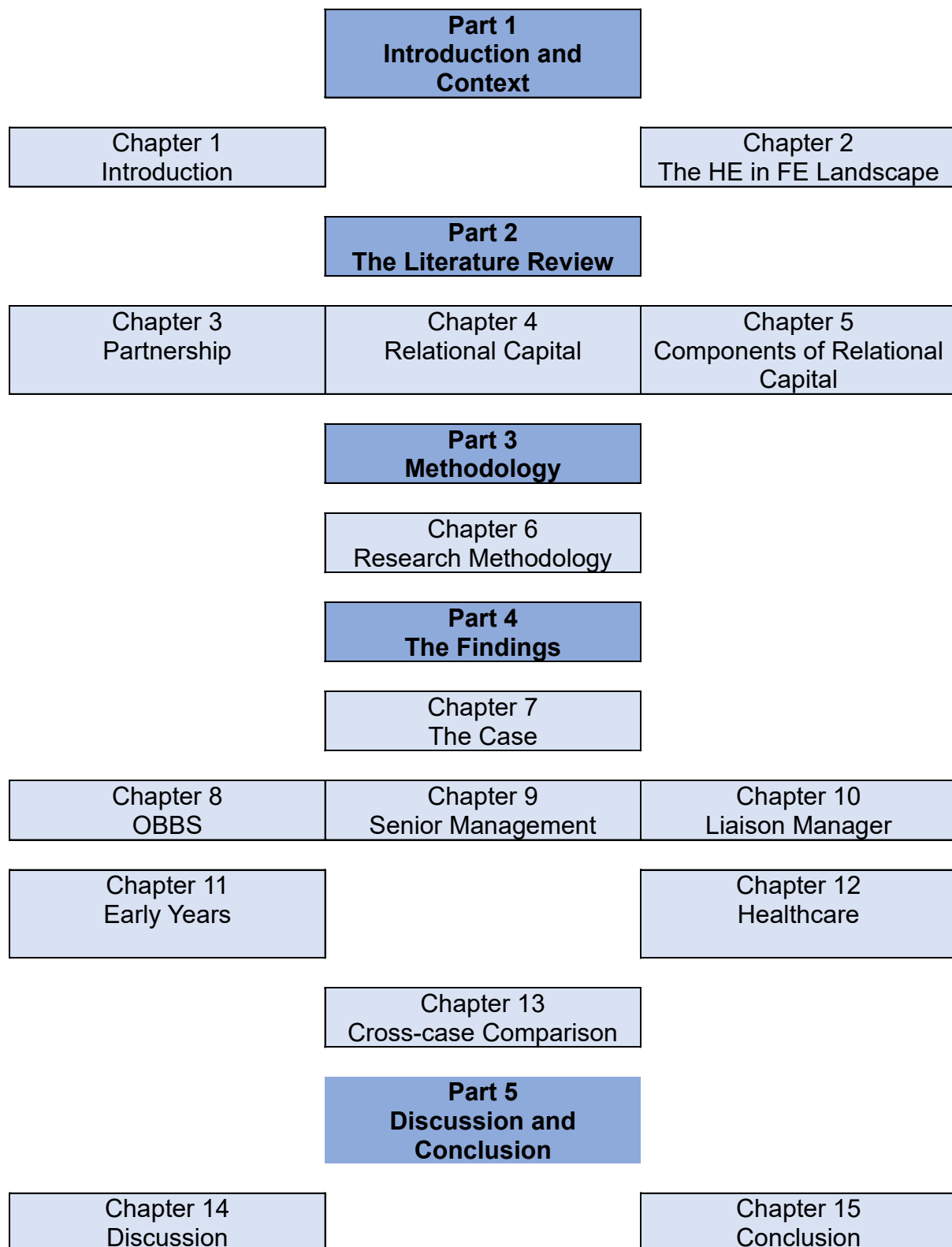


Figure 1 The structure of the thesis

In line with research objective 1, Chapter 2 explores the context of teaching Higher Education in Further Education colleges. It starts by providing an overview of the sector before examining the key features of partnerships between universities and colleges of FE. It then goes on to look at the enablers and barriers to successful HE-FE partnerships. It identifies the key issues affecting HE-FE partnerships are the nature of the partnership, the role of senior management, power balance, culture and commitment.

Chapter 3 begins the literature review. It clarifies the definition of partnership and explores the nature of the partnership under investigation which it sees as being collaborative.

Chapter 4 then moves on to review the literature on Relational Capital, (RC). It identifies 3 approaches and adopts the definition of Kale *et al*, (2000). It then goes on to identify the components and outputs of Relational Capital which are further explored in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 which also reviews the literature on Boundary Spanning which many see as crucial for successful partnerships and ends with the conceptual framework which will be used to inform the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 6 moves away from the literature to set out the research methodology. The chapter starts by outlining the critical realist approach adopted. It then provides the rationale for the single embedded case study design; the data collection method, (semi-structured interviews), the sampling strategy, (purposive) and the use of thematic analysis. The chapter examines how these approaches were applied in practice and the ethical issues faced within the research. It reflects on how the findings of the first case, that of the partnership between Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS) and the college, led to the refocusing of the research and the design

of a new data collection instrument, demonstrating the iterative nature of critical realism research.

Chapters 7 to 13 present the findings of the research. Chapter 7 provides the contextual information for the case. The following chapters provide the finding of the 5 sets of interviews, starting with the Oxford Brookes Business School, (OBBS), which acted as a pilot for the study. It then explores the senior management and a liaison manager's views before looking at the partnerships developed between OBU and the college in the fields of Early Years Education and Healthcare. This section concludes by carrying out a cross-case analysis of the findings and identifying that the main issues affecting the successful development and maintenance of a partnership in this context are: the Nature of Partnership, Interpersonal Relationships, Culture, Trust and Commitment, Boundary Spanning.

Chapter 14 moves on from the findings to discuss them in terms of the literature. In doing so it adds to existing debates in the literature as well as discussing new findings.

Chapter 15 draws conclusions in relation to the research objectives and outlines the contributions made by this research before making recommendations for future research and reflecting on the research process.

Chapter 2

The Context:

Higher Education in Further Education

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the context of teaching Higher Education (HE) in Further Education (FE) colleges and the partnerships developed between universities and colleges of FE, to identify some of the key issues affecting this relationship which will then be explored in the literature review. As such, it provides a narrative based on a range of sources, including academic articles, policy and commercial documents and websites, rather than being a critique of the literature.

The chapter starts by providing an overview of the sector before examining the key features of partnerships between universities and colleges of FE. It then goes on to examine the enablers and barriers to successful HE-FE partnerships. It concludes by summarising the key issues which must be addressed in the literature review and explored through the collection of primary data.

2.2 The HE in FE landscape

Further Education colleges (FE) in England have played an integral part in the provision of Higher Education (HE) for over 70 years, particularly through providing

vocational qualifications such as Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND). Traditionally, colleges of FE have provided access to technical and vocational qualifications, with universities providing degrees (Parry, 2016). However, this is a simplistic view, as the routes to qualifications in several vocational subjects such as law, medicine and engineering have always been through degrees at university, highlighting that the division in roles has always been blurred.

Legislation introduced Foundation degrees (Fds) to the UK in 2000, as part of the government initiative to widen participation in Higher Education (HE) to 50% (Longhurst 2010). The Fd is a 2-year Level 5 qualification, with the opportunity to progress to a final year degree award. It is this progression route which differentiated Fds from the well-established and highly successful existing HND Level 5 qualification (Stanton, 2009). Fds paved the way for FE colleges to provide degree level education. At that time, Fds were seen as a way of decreasing the skills gap by offering opportunities to participate in HE to those for whom the traditional 3-year full-time degree course was not seen as an option (Fuller *et al.*, 2009). FE colleges were seen as the ideal location for Fds due to their strong links to the local community and employers, through the provision of vocational qualifications, and their expertise in teaching and supporting non-traditional learners (Gale *et al.*, 2011). In this context, non-traditional learners are seen as those who do not progress to HE studies directly from A level. Collaboration with universities enabled colleges to access their expertise in curriculum design and delivering HE (Foskett, 2007). The provision of Fds has expanded into providing full 3-year degree courses and, in some instances, Master's and other Level 7 qualifications. 2015 saw the introduction of degree apprenticeships, Level 6 and 7 qualifications, with colleges of FE being at the

forefront in their delivery (Gov.UK 2015). Although there has been a recent decline in the number of students pursuing degree level qualifications through colleges of FE, there are currently 103 FE colleges providing degree level courses, and some 161,000 students (4% of the total student population) studying for degrees in colleges of FE (HESA, 2022; Association of Colleges, 2023).

Although legislation does make provision for colleges of FE to be granted degree awarding powers currently only 7 colleges have this power (Allen and Parry, 2022).

Foundation and higher degrees are mostly delivered through partnerships between universities and colleges, with universities franchising numbers to the college.

Students are members of both establishments and have access to the facilities of both the college and the university partner, although geographic distance often prevents students from making use of university facilities. The impact of this is beyond the scope of this research. The advantage to students of this approach is that they are able to study at HE level, often within their own locale. This is particularly important as many students studying HE in FE are non-traditional learners and have both work and family commitments (Elliott, 2017).

These partnership arrangements are seen as beneficial to all involved. They benefit staff and students of both establishments by providing an opportunity to expand opportunity, diversify the curriculum, improve progression opportunities, increase status, provide staff development opportunities and, not insignificantly, offer a form of income generation (Dhillon and Bentley, 2016; Elliott, 2017). In particular, they are seen by many universities as a way of meeting their commitment to widening participation in HE and developing community involvement, and by colleges as a means of widening their offering to the local community. This approach seems to be

effective, as HE students in FE are more likely to be mature students, studying part-time, from poorer areas, and have a more diverse qualification profile, with only 56% having Level 3 qualifications (HESA,2023)

While this type of partnership appears to be effective in widening participation, the nature of these partnerships is complex and dynamic, and can create tensions which must be overcome for success to be achieved. Complexities within partnerships can be further exacerbated for some colleges who work with several different universities, with each having different processes, requirements and ethos (Feather, 2013). It is this complexity and dynamism which is explored in this research, alongside how the resulting tensions are overcome.

There are a number of sources of these tensions. Both types of institution operate in highly competitive markets and have developed from different educational and funding traditions. These differences are often characterised by different structures and governance, approaches to pedagogy, curriculum development, assessment, quality regimes and research. All of these have an impact on culture, values and aims, and it is the sharing of these which is seen as key to successful partnership development (Colley *et al.*, 2014). These issues will be explored later in this chapter and through the literature review.

Over the last 20 years, Parry has published extensively in the education literature on the delivery of HE in FE (e.g. Parry, 2006; 2009; 2011; 2013; 2016; 2017), and although much of his writing is commentary on policy documents and secondary data, he is widely cited by other scholars. He identifies three key areas affecting partnership development: purpose and identity; funding and quality; and partnership and its dependencies (Parry, 2013). These reflect the structural, functional, process

and cultural barriers discussed by Cardini (2006) and others (e.g., Lloyd *et al.*, 2001; Feather, 2014), which summarise the issues identified above and will be explored in greater detail in the literature review and through the data collection process.

2.3 HE and FE partnerships

The introduction to this thesis highlighted the growing importance of partnership working in the field of education. The delivery of Fds in colleges of FE is, in some ways, reducing the pressure of the competitive environment on educational purpose by introducing new ways of working and expanding capacity. Many see this as empowering, for both the university and staff. However, neither colleges nor universities are homogeneous entities; each are addressing varied social and education purposes, with the secret of success lying in harnessing similarities and building on differences to improve the student experience, (Elliott, 2017). It is important to understand these similarities and differences and to identify the key components of a successful partnership. Educational partnership cannot be seen as a short-term fix, so it is essential that sustainable partnerships are developed. Those involved need to be clear about their motivation and focus, with an emphasis on recognising differences and aligning values and motivations to build an atmosphere of trust, essential for the long term viability of partnerships (Dhillon, 2013).

Robinson *et al.*, (2006), in their major review of collaborative working for HEFCE, listed five key criteria as important in promoting successful partnerships:

- staff interest and ownership of their roles;
- a culture of clear and open communication;

- clear messages from senior managers;
- recognition of the time that partnerships require;
- clarity of review of quality and standards.

These can all be seen as ways of building trust and commitment and, as such, represent the components of RC. While these still form the basis of QAA guidance on collaborative working, (QAA, 2018). Elliott, (2017) criticised the lack of specific reference to effective management and leadership which is vital for the long term stability of partnership (though the latter 3 criteria do relate to management arrangements). Both the QAA (2018) and Parry (2013) stress the importance of effective governance mechanisms. The emphasis on appropriate process and resources, including time, is echoed by Connolly *et al.* (2007), along with trust, management, history, individual experience, process, communication and purpose and resources. Butcher *et al.* (2011) also stress the need for appropriate resource allocation.

In summary, successful partnerships can overcome many of the tensions involved when they are developed by organisations and individuals with aligned aims and values, and who are prepared to commit the time and resources necessary to achieve shared objectives.

2.4 HE and FE partnership development

Based on Parry (2013), this section explores the three key areas of partnership development in the sector.

2.4.1 Purpose and identity

Partnership exists to achieve common goals and as discussed in the literature the alignment of purpose is key. Both universities and colleges of FE have some similarities in purpose, in that they exist to provide education; however, the nature of this education, the purposes of the institutions, their methods of delivery and their primary student groups result in many differences. The two types of institution have developed from different funding and regulatory regimes, with different purposes and with different identities and traditions, (Parry, 2013; Elliott, 2017). It is perhaps the philosophical debate around the purpose of education which draws out the differences in approaches and pedagogy (Wilson and Wilson, 2011) which signify the key differences between HE and FE. The purpose of universities has traditionally been to advance knowledge through teaching and research, with the emphasis being on the contestability of knowledge. Meanwhile, the purpose of colleges was to apply knowledge to develop a skilled workforce, through the provision of vocational training (Feather, 2013; Dhillon and Bentley, 2016; Parry, 2016). As discussed above this has always been an oversimplification. MacAllister (2016), while critiquing the work of Biesta (2009), highlighted that this traditional distinction is being lost with a move to more performative cultures in both organisations. He argued that the emphasis on assessment means that the subjectivity, i.e., the criticality and contestability of knowledge, is being lost. Webster (2017) supported this, suggesting that the greater emphasis on measurement means that the learning is focused on those things which can be assessed, and that greater emphasis is being placed on Biesta's (2009) other two tenets - qualification and socialisation - as these are seen to lead to economic growth. This would suggest that, in terms of teaching, the purpose of universities and colleges are converging, thus increasing the likelihood of successful partnership on

one hand but increasing competition on the other. This would also suggest that cultural differences based on attitudes to knowledge may also be decreasing, (Husband and Jeffery, 2016))

The tension in education between providing, what is seen by some as a commoditised service which operates in a competitive market, while at the same time operating for public good and providing a social utility (Mitchell and Alexandrou, 2011) also has an impact of the purpose of universities. Partnership working is seen as one way of combating this marketisation, as partnerships are endowed with the image of equality, cooperation and trust which counteract competition (Cardini, 2006; Elliott, 2017; Banwait and Hancock, 2021).

2.4.2 Identity

The origins and development of the two types of institution have resulted in universities being seen by some as having an advantageous position in their autonomous status, degree-awarding powers, national and international profiles and research agendas (Elliott, 2017; Parry, 2013). In contrast, FE colleges are responsible to external funding and accreditation bodies and tend to be located in the local community, meaning that they are often trying to serve the needs of a wide number of stakeholders, some with conflicting interests.

The similarities and differences in identity are illustrated by comparing the mission statements of some members of the Oxford Brookes University ACP as set out in the table below:

Oxford Brookes University	Solihull College	Activate Learning	Wiltshire College
"Oxford Brookes University is committed to leading the intellectual, social and economic development of the communities it serves through teaching, research and creativity that achieve the highest standards." (Oxford Brookes University, 2023)	"Solihull College will make significant contributions to the local and regional economies and beyond, by providing high quality vocational education and training for individuals, employers and the wider community." (Solihull College, 2023)	"Our mission is to transform lives through learning. We help students gain the skills and confidence they need to progress to university-level studies or employment" (Activate Learning 2023).	"Wiltshire College's mission is to be a vital player in Wiltshire's economic growth, raising skills and attainment, delivering excellence and innovation; inspiring people to achieve. We develop talent to improve business performance and support the success of businesses and the economy. (Wiltshire College, 2023)

Figure 2 Mission statements of OBU and 3 partner colleges

These statements highlight the differences in purposes and identities but with some similarities. Both OBU and Wiltshire college see themselves as leaders in their field with Activate Learning and Solihull Colleges having the more traditional FE role as providers. This is interesting as Solihull College titles itself as a University Centre, suggesting it has moved beyond the traditional role of a College of FE. However, they also show that both types of institution see themselves as contributing to economic development, showing that there are common goals and that, in line with

Webster (2017), there is some convergence of purpose. However, the emphasis on leadership by OBU and provision by the colleges suggests a power imbalance which some see in this type of education partnership (Feather, 2016) and which will be discussed further. Nonetheless, all see themselves as supporting community and economic development, and it is this common thread which unites them in the provision of Fds.

2.4.3 Power

Parry, (2013) and Elliott, (2017) argued that, because of the university's status, the balance of power is often seen to lie with the university, as they own the student numbers, the funding and the quality assurance systems. It is the university which dictates the regulatory and operational framework within which the partnership must operate. This power to control (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008) would suggest an asymmetric power balance (Cardini, 2006). Since power balance is seen as key to successful partnership development, Parry (2013), suggested that it is difficult to establish a successful partnership in circumstances such as this where power is unequal. However, the dominance of the university is seen by others (Stanton, 2009; Elliott, 2017), and in practice, as an oversimplification of the relationship, and it is argued that it is more important to evaluate how power is used (Huxham and Beech, 2009). The relationship is symbiotic, and although, on the surface, universities hold many of the cards, the colleges have access to the students, without whom there would be no partnerships. Colleges also tend to have less bureaucratic processes in place than universities and are thus able to respond more quickly to meeting local needs, and it is their locality which enables them to build relationships with employers, who are fundamental to the philosophy of Fds (Elliott, 2017; Parrett,

2022). The power dynamics will be explored further through the literature review and data collection process,

2.4.4 Culture

Much is written about the need for FE colleges delivering HE to develop an HE ethos and culture, and on the difficulties in doing so due to the demands on their time and the role of those delivering HE courses, (Lea and Simmons, 2012; Elliott, 2017).

However, there is very little research on what this means in practice, although, as discussed above the move to more performative cultures may be reducing the cultural differences between, HE and FE (McAllister, 2016; Webster, 2017). Much of the debate on developing an HE culture is focused on the lack of time college staff have for research and the range of problems in developing a culture different from that of the college, due to high contact hours and a lack of specialisation (Feather, 2016; Dixon, 2017; Feather, 2017). There are also suggestions that the limited number of HE students impacts culture as there is a lack of HE identity. However, while the number of students will have an impact on the value colleges place on their HE role, developing an HE ethos goes far beyond the number of students being taught. It is important to examine the place of HE in FE.

For the majority of colleges, HE is only a small part of their provision, with very few staff involved. These staff tend to also have FE responsibilities. It is not uncommon for college staff to teach at all levels and to have to swap between these during a teaching day (Feather, 2015). Staff involved in teaching HE form only a minority of FE staff, and those specialising in HE are an even smaller group. This can be overcome by developing communities of practice (Mayne *et al.*, 2013; Hobley, 2017), but due to the small number of staff involved these are more level-specific than

subject-specific. Those trying to develop an HE ethos may find themselves in a small enclave, which can create divisions within the college and require staff to transition between approaches and cultures, depending on their teaching commitments on a particular day. As organisation culture is built by the individuals involved, (Alvesson, 2013), this would suggest that the culture of the partnership forms and reforms depending on the focus of those involved at any particular time, thus making a permanent HE culture difficult to develop.

The nature of the staff members themselves also impacts the ability to develop an HE culture. Staff in FE teaching HE have often moved into this role from other responsibilities in the college and develop their HE expertise “on the job”, in contrast to the majority of HE staff, who are recruited as specialists. The different backgrounds of staff members result in different values and attitudes. FE staff tend to see themselves as teachers, with an emphasis on supporting students and are loyal to the employing college rather than to a discipline (Feather, 2016). The emphasis on nurturing and supporting students rather than challenging them is to be expected in FE, due to the higher proportion of non-traditional learners. This, coupled with average contact time of 25 hours per week, makes it difficult for FE staff to expand their role to include areas such as research which HE staff see as normal (Lawrence and Hall, 2018). HE staff, on the other hand, tend to regard themselves as specialists and experts, with a duty to move knowledge forward, with teaching as only part of their role. However, increasing pressure on HE staff due to larger class sizes and less research time means that this is becoming increasingly difficult (Feather, 2017), once again narrowing the differences between HE and FE,

While staff roles and attitudes are important, this study sees the key challenge as being that HE culture is characterised by seeing knowledge as contestable and scholarly activity as the development of knowledge through research (Lea and Simmons, 2012; Feather, 2016). This will be explored further in the literature review and through the data collection.

2.4.5 Funding

Although, nowadays, colleges of FE are independent legal entities, more than 80% of their funding comes from government and its agencies; thus, colleges have been subject to major constraints over the last 10 years. Where fees are charged for vocational courses, these are often met by employers, and again the availability of these funds has been under pressure. In England, where this research is based, a third of students studying at HE level in FE colleges are enrolled on courses in partnerships with universities and form part of those universities' numbers. Another third are studying on undergraduate courses funded directly by the Higher Education Funding Council, (HEFCE). These students are owned by the colleges themselves. The rest comprise students on higher-level programmes funded directly by the funding agency for FE or similar courses financed entirely through fee charges (Association of Colleges, 2019). Cynics argue that it is the lower cost of providing HE in FE, which is behind its promotion by central government, and indeed the ability of colleges of FE to charge lower fees is one aspect which makes studying in FE colleges attractive to non-traditional learners. However, it is the student-centred approach which is key to the success of non-traditional learners, and which is vital for the colleges in delivering their mission of being community-based and widening participation (Parry, 2017).

While some colleges do have degree awarding powers, these are not widely used and partnership with universities is the main route for validation of degrees and receiving public funding for higher education in English colleges. Although funding comes to the colleges via the universities, they have the ability to choose and change partners depending on costs and subject expertise. Once again this shows that not all the power lies with the university, although there is a dependency if colleges wish to offer foundation and higher degrees (Scott, 2010). Most of these arrangements operate on a franchise basis, with colleges receiving only part of the public funding allocated to universities for the teaching of these students. A 'top slice' is retained by the partner universities to cover the costs of validation, quality assurance and other academic and administrative services. The universities are 'fully responsible' for the students and accountable for '*all aspects of finance, administration and quality*' (HEFCE, 2017, p.5).

Colleges thus receive less funding per student than universities for delivering HE, but technically the cost of providing HE in FE is lower (RCU, 2017). Compared to most universities, FE staff teach longer hours and receive lower salaries (Feather, 2016). As discussed above, in section 2.4.4, there is much less emphasis on research in colleges, so colleges they do not carry the same research costs. The cost base of colleges is also lower; since most students are local, the college is not usually bearing the cost of providing accommodation. However, one key feature of HE in FE which makes the offering attractive to many students is the smaller class sizes, which provide for a more intimate approach and the ability to provide the support non-traditional learners need, (Dhillon and Bentley, 2016; Allen and Parry, 2022). This means that colleges may not achieve the economies of scale of universities, thus increasing the cost per student.

2.4.6 Quality

The nature of the learning environment plays a major role in ensuring the quality of the student learning experience, with universities often having access to greater resources to provide the correct infrastructure. However, increasingly colleges are providing more dedicated space to HE students, thus helping to create an HE ethos and an environment conducive to HE learning. Due to the smaller scale, this can also help to ensure that students are studying in a more intimate and less hostile environment than that of a large university. The growing use of technology in teaching also means that students have access to the same resources.

The quality systems in place, play a major role in the assessment and demonstration of quality and once again demonstrate a power imbalance. Universities are responsible for setting their own policy and monitoring regimes within the QAA framework. For colleges, this is a two-stage process of developmental engagement (working collaboratively with the quality agency) and summative review (using the same reporting categories as for universities) by means of an institutional audit (Elliot, 2017.) Both partners must follow the codes of practice set down for collaborative provision (QAA, 2018) and both franchising and validating universities are party to periodic external review and assessment of the quality of the higher education taught in colleges. If student satisfaction and TEF ratings are a true reflection of quality (Office for Students, 2023), then the results for colleges are comparable with those for higher education institutions, suggesting that, although complex, the quality systems in place ensure similar results for the students concerned.

2.4.7 Governance

The autonomy of universities means that they are able to develop structure and governance arrangements specifically tailored to their own purposes within the regulatory framework. However, the range of funding regimes coupled with the wide range of options for study in FE mean that colleges are accountable to a number of different bodies and often need to take into account a range of governance requirements (Greatbatch and Tate, 2018). Although colleges of FE are seen as less bureaucratic and more flexible, the governing body has to ensure compliance with a wider set of regulations than those affecting universities. This can make the management of HE in FE overly complex, especially as HE provision is only a small proportion of the college provision. As such, HE provision may not always be given the emphasis and attention it deserves, and the governing body may not necessarily have the right experience for this type of provision, creating tension within the college (Feather, 2016).

2.5 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the context of partnership working between universities and colleges of FE. It has explored the nature of these partnerships and identified several key areas which will be explored through the literature review and the primary data collection. These are summarised below:

- The nature of partnership and its duration
- The role of senior management and management arrangements
- Culture
- Power balance

- Commitment

Part 2

The Literature Review

Chapter 3:

Partnership

3.1 Introduction

At the core of this research is the aim of understanding what makes some partnerships more successful than others. This chapter explores the literature on partnership in order to clarify the nature of partnership and explore ways in which partnership development has previously been researched. The chapter begins by reviewing the literature to reach a clear definition as Devine and Roberts (2003) identified that one problem of partnership research is that there is a multiplicity of definitions. The chapter then goes on to critique the literature to explore the nature of partnership and how it is developed. It ends by summarising the key issues raised by the review which will be explored through the data collection.

Much of the literature on partnership is from the field of organisational studies and is mostly focused on the private sector, although there is a growing body of literature examining public-private partnerships, public-third sector partnerships and public sector partnerships. Although early work on the growth of public sector partnerships examined dyadic relationships (Provan and Milward, 2001), much of the current work on this topic examines public sector partnerships from a network perspective (Valk, 2014), with particular reference to the Public-Private Partnership model favoured by government during the 2010s for major infrastructure projects. The ACP is a network, although OBU's relationships with individual colleges within the ACP are

dyadic; therefore, both areas of research need to be examined. While there are a number of studies examining the nature of partnership in the public sector, it seems to be under-researched in the HE and FE sectors, (Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013; Stefani, 2015), again highlighting the need for this study. In line with the drive to share good practice in partnership working and for organisations to learn from each other, this review draws on research from both the public and private sectors to provide a sound theoretical basis for the study.

The chapter is laid out as follows:

3.2 Definitions of partnership

3.3 Types of partnership

3.2 Definitions of partnership

There are numerous definitions of partnership, mostly developed for private sector partnerships, which range across the spectrum from purely transactional relationships, at one end, to those which adopt a more relational approach characterised by social exchange, mutual trust and interpersonal commitment, at the other (Darwin *et al.*, 2000). This research is focused on the relational approach, which is seen as the “new” way of working; though MacNeil, writing, from a legal perspective, as early as 1980, said that all partnerships involve some type of relationship and developed a typology of 26 different forms of partnership, ranging from loose networks to formal joint ventures, and bringing together organisations with different motives, values and objectives. Although criticised, at the time, by the legal profession for seeing relationships as a social construct, his approach is now seen as the “norm.” MacNeil’s (1980) work provides an underpinning for much of the

literature consulted in this review and is not explored further. Using MacNeil (1980) as a base, Murphy *et al.* (2015) saw the success of a partnership as dependent on how closely motives, values and objectives are aligned. This aligns with the features of successful educational partnerships discussed in Chapter 2 and it is these which this research is aiming to explore.

To provide clarity, it is important that terminology is defined. Douglas (2009, p.3) defines partnership as “*working together*”. However, this simple definition does not encompass the complexity of the dynamics of partnership working, highlighted in the previous chapter and needs to be expanded. Although developed almost 30 years ago in research on private sector partnerships, one of the most commonly cited definitions of partnerships in both public and private sector research (e.g., O’Leary and Vij, 2012; Shilke and Cook, 2015) is that developed by Mohr and Spekman in 1994:

“purposive strategic relationships between independent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit and acknowledge a high level of mutual independence.” (p.135)

In the above definition, ‘firms’ include both public and private sector organisations. This definition accurately characterises the ACP, as the key feature of the ACP is that it consist of autonomous organisations working together on a specific project to achieve a mutual objective: widening participation in higher education.

While this is a useful definition, which incorporates the key features of partnership, the duration of the partnership is not mentioned, and this is seen as key in education partnerships (Robinson *et al.*, 2006).

Shaw (2003) viewed partnerships as being transitory in nature and defines partnership working as:

“working together in a specific project in which each entity retains its independence and the relationship is temporary” (p.108)

The short-termism implied by Shaw's definition is in stark contrast to Ambrose *et al.* (2010), who saw partnership as being characterised by long-term trust and commitment; neither is it in line with OBU's approach to the ACP, which is also seen as a long-term commitment. With the exception of Shaw (who, as discussed below, uses different terminology for long-term partnerships), the longevity of partnership is a recurring theme in the literature. For example, Chicksand (2015) described partnership as:

“an on-going collaborative relationship between two legally separate organisations, based upon a commitment to the equal sharing of the costs, risks and rewards derived from working together” (p.122).

He also introduced the concept of equality in partnership, which will be discussed later in the sections on power and reciprocity.

Understanding terminology is key, and Shaw (2003), instead referred to long-term partnerships as strategic alliances, although Iyer (2003) suggested that all business relationships can be viewed as alliances in that even transactional exchanges require mutual dependency. This fits with MacNeil's (1980) relational contracting view and demonstrates the interactions involved in any business relationship. Based on work in both the public and private sector, and therefore more relevant to this study, Iyer (2003) defined alliances as:

“working in partnership in which there is a mutual recognition and understanding that the success of each firm depends in part on the other firm/firms” (p.43).

Brinkerhoff (2002a) took the definition of partnership, in the public sector, a stage further, and sees the ideal partnership as:

“a dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. Partnership encompasses mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability and transparency” (p.216)

While this definition may be a useful, all-encompassing ideology, to adopt it may not always be possible or practical. It may be difficult for the parties involved to meet all the conditions, although as became apparent during this research, in many ways, the ACP comes close. Brinkerhoff (2002b) accepted these criticisms and sees mutuality and organisational identity as being the defining aspects which separate partnership from other types of relationship, such as a contractual relationship or a joint venture. Mutuality is the shared objective and organisational identity and can best be linked to culture.

The common theme of all these definitions is the need for shared goals, mutuality, and the retention of some degree of autonomy by the participating organisations. These are areas for investigation during the data collection part of this research. Based on this brief overview of partnership definitions, this research regards

alliances, as defined by Iyer (2003), as partnerships and sees Mohr and Spekman's (1994) definition as the most appropriate. Therefore, the following definition will be used:

“purposive strategic relationships between independent organisations who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit and acknowledge a high level of mutual independence.” (Mohr and Spekman, 1994, p.135).

In common with this study, Mohr and Spekman (1994) were concerned that the literature had focused on the antecedents of partnership while there had been little focus on how these antecedents contributed to partnership success, and that despite the presence of the antecedents, a high proportion of partnerships failed. The high failure rate of partnerships in the private sector was still being lamented by Kale and Singh in 2009 and is still the case (Li *et al.*, 2016; Ramadas *et al.*, 2018; Vecchi *et al.*, 2022); yet partnership working is still seen as the way forward. As in this study, Mohr and Spekman's (1994), aim was to understand the behavioural aspects of partnership working which contributed to partnership success, such as trust, commitment and communication, in order to provide managerial guidance on the selection of partners and the management of partnerships. Like many studies aimed at identifying causal links, Mohr and Spekman (1994) developed a framework which they used to test three hypotheses. Their framework grouped the behavioural characteristics of partnership in which they were interested into three areas (attributes of partnership, communication behaviour and conflict resolution techniques) which they had identified from their literature review as likely to be important.

It is the framework and the hypotheses themselves which are of greatest interest to this study, rather than the measures of partnership success, as they are concerned with the process of partnership (Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2008). Based on a survey of 124 responses, and in line with a number of other studies (Nahapiet, 1998; Iyer, 2003; Cropper *et al.*, 2008; Ramadass *et al.*, 2018), they found that coordination, commitment, trust, quality, information sharing, participation and joint problem solving were all present, to a greatest or lesser extent, in successful partnerships. Interestingly, in contrast to other studies (Iyer, 2003; Lotia and Hardy, 2008; Chicksand, 2015), they found that length of partnership was not a contributory factor to success. They accepted that the study could be criticised for gathering data from only one partner in a dyadic relationship. However, it is useful to this study that they designed the questionnaire by interviewing key informants in the sample in order to develop the measures and gain agreement on likely indicators of partnership behaviour, demonstrating that interviews are a reliable way of gathering this type of data.

3.3 Types of partnership

Having clarified the definition of partnership, it is necessary to discuss variety in the natures and types of partnerships. As discussed above, partnerships range across a spectrum of relationships. Metcalfe and Lapenta (2012) suggested that each study used its own classification with the types of partnership being practically limitless. While this may be the case, in an academic study it is necessary to be clear about terminology and to be consistent. This section looks at a range of classifications before drawing conclusions on the most appropriate terminology for this study.

Sandfort and Brinton Milward (2008) saw partnerships existing in a continuum between Cooperation and Service Integration, depending on the extent and formality of the relationship.

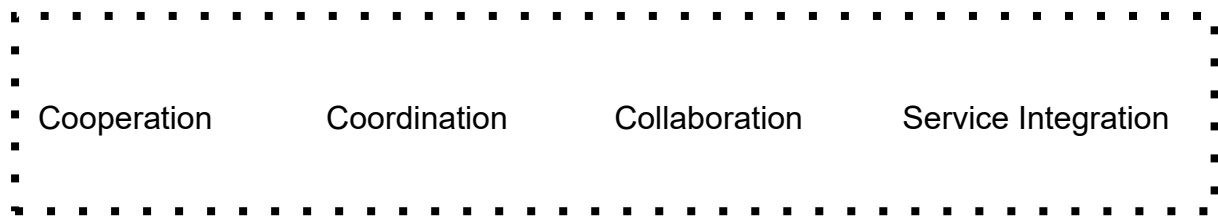


Figure 3: Partnerships continuum (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008, p.154)

Sandfort and Brinton Milward (2008) characterised these as follows:

- Cooperation tends to be informal and supported by personal relationships.
- Coordination involves independent organisations focusing resources on common activities.
- Collaboration requires joint planning and a sharing of resources, authority and rewards.
- Service Integration suggests that resources, authority etc. are so closely intertwined that it is not possible to separate them and is regarded by the researcher as analogous with a joint venture and beyond the scope of this research.

This view is supported by Frey *et al.* (2006), who saw partnership as having seven stages of integration, and in line with Sandfort and Brinton Milward (2008), who viewed collaboration, in which partners retain their own identities, as the highest form of partnership

While this seems to provide a convenient way of classifying partnerships, there are other options. McLaughlin and Osborne (2004), looking at partnerships between the public and third sector, classified partnerships according to their purpose. They identified three types, all of which would be classed as collaborative by Frey (2006) and Sandfort and Brinton Milward (2008).

- Co-governance - partnerships involved in the planning and delivery of services;
- Co-management - collaboration on the production of services;
- Co- production - the involvement of users in the design and delivery of services.

While the students of the ACP are involved in service design and review, they are not involved in delivery, and co-production will not be discussed further.

These classifications are helpful in distinguishing between purposes; however, they are restrictive, in that they suggest exclusivity when, in practice, one partnership may encompass all three types. Brandsen and Pestoff (2006) supported this view and stressed the need to examine partnership at both organisational and individual level. Provan and Milward (2004) added a third tier: network level. Provan and Milward's (2004) approach fits well with the ACP, which is a network of organisations with dyadic and more complex partnerships occurring within it. Sandfort and Brinton Milward (2008) added a policy level above the organisational level. Data will need to be collected from all these levels to understand the processes involved in this study. Based on this classification system, co-governance partnerships would usually occur at organisational or policy level, with co-production at individual level. There is significant overlap and between co-governance and co-management and co-management and co-production.

The ACP involves both co-governance and co-management. Lotia and Hardy (2008): Valk (2014); Chicksand (2015) described these types of partnerships as collaboration and added a new dimension,- the features of partnerships, as well as the outcomes to aid classification.

There are numerous definitions of collaboration, with the simplest being:

“working across organizational boundaries towards some positive end”

(Huxham and Vengen, 2005, p.4).

It is, however, difficult to see how this differs from the definitions of partnership discussed above, and classification may be increasing complexity rather than clarifying it. As with Douglas’s (2009) definition, Huxham and Vengen (2005) failed to address the complexity and dynamic nature of the relationship. This is more adequately captured by Lotia and Hardy (2008), whose definition, while failing to distinguish between collaboration and co-operation, echoes the need for durability and dynamism encountered in Brinkerhoff’s (2002a) definition of partnership.

“collaboration- cooperative interorganizational relationships, which rely on neither market nor hierarchical mechanism of control to ensure cooperation and coordination and instead are negotiated in ongoing communicative processes.” (Lotia and Hardy, 2008, p.366)

However, this definition does suggest equality, which may not always be necessary, depending on how power is used. This highlights the need to examine power balance in any study of partnership (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008). O’Flynn, 2009) built on this and saw collaboration as being the result of two organisations working to achieve common objectives while retaining organisational integrity for

other activities. This is in line with Mohr and Spekman's (1994) definition of partnership. It is this approach in which the ACP is engaged.

To complicate matters further, Valk (2014), discussing the nature of partnership in the education sector, which should be most relevant to this study, described three stages of collaboration: philanthropic, transactional and integrative. Although Valk described these as stages of collaboration, it is not necessarily a staged process and, as with McLaughlin and Osborne's (2004) classifications of partnership, these categories are not mutually exclusive. A collaborative partnership may encompass one or more of these types and can change with time. The use of terminology here is interesting, as Valk (2014) used 'transactional' to describe a collaborative arrangement, while other authors, e.g., MacNeil (1980), have used the term 'transactional' when there is no element of relationship in the exchange. This, again, highlights the need to clarify terminology and use it consistently. Based on Valk's (2014) definition, the ACP would be described as an integrative collaboration. However, based on Lotia and Hardy's (2008) approach, this classification would appear to be tautological, as collaboration in line with their definition provides for a degree of integration. It is Lotia and Hardy's, (2008), definition which best describes the partnership under investigation, and it is the control, cooperation and coordination mechanisms set out in their definition which are investigated in this study.

Collaboration is seen as important, since it enable partners to retain their own identities while achieving common goals, and is key to building RC (Ramadas *et al.*, 2018)

3.3 Partnership development

Mohr and Spekman, (1994) identified several processes which facilitate partnership working. These involved developing clear communication channels to facilitate information sharing and coordinating activities to achieve shared objectives. These processes are all underpinned by trust. They also stressed the importance of having clear conflict resolution processes while they acknowledged that partnerships built on trust may reduce conflict. This is supported by Trim and Lee (2007). Elezi, (2021,) looked at knowledge management partnerships in the HE sector and took this idea further. In line with Lea (2012) and Feather (2016), Elezi (2021) highlighted the need to develop a common culture. This leads to shared norms and processes which then facilitate the necessary information sharing. These are the areas which will be explored further through the literature in Chapter 5 and through the data collection process.

3.4 Summary

Devine and Roberts (2003) identify that one of the problems of partnership research is that there is a multiplicity of definitions, and this review has identified that not only is this the case, but that terminology is used interchangeably e.g. partnership and relationship (Reynaers, 2013; Healey *et al.*, 2014). One contribution this review seeks to make is to guide the reader through the maze of definitions and provide clear guidance on terminology to improve clarity and understanding.

Although almost 30 years old Mohr and Spekman's (1994) definition of partnership is still cited by many and is a suitable description of the partnership under investigation though it fails to recognise the longevity required by educational partnerships or the

dynamism captured by Brinkerhoff (2002a). The common theme emanating from this review is that successful partnerships are based on coordination, commitment, trust, quality, information sharing, participation and joint problem solving. It is these issues which need to be explored further through the literature reviews and data collection.

Chapter 4

Relational Capital

4.1 Introduction

This research is concerned with identifying the factors which make a partnership successful. Kale *et al.* (2000) saw Relational Capital (RC) as the mechanism which leads to partnership success. Although developed over 20 years ago, this concept is still widely used in discussing partnership success (Aaltonen *et al.* 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). RC is also now being discussed when examining relationships built on social media platforms (Kim *et al.*, 2021). This section reviews the literature on RC to define it and identify its components, in line with Research Objective 2. It first identifies three different definitions of RC, before identifying the components of RC and its benefits and problems, and then looking at its relevance to this research.

An initial review of the literature identified that the definitions of Relational Capital (RC) can be divided into three main approaches, which have developed in parallel since the 1990s, in response to the need to be able to explain, and in some instances to value, the importance of relationships to business performance. This section will discuss the three main definitions that I have identified and their relevance to this study, before moving on to identify the components.

The first approach to RC discussed here was developed by writers on strategy. This approach sees RC as the relational dimension of Social Capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) and was developed by Kale *et al.* (2000), who defined RC as:

‘the level of mutual trust, respect and friendship that arises out of close interaction at the individual level between alliance partners’ (Kale *et al.*, 2000, p.218).

The second approach examines RC at organisational level (Provan and Milward, 2001) and developed from efforts by researchers in the field of economics and accountancy to put a financial value on the intangible assets of a firm. It sees RC as the relational element of Intellectual Capital (Edvinsson and Malone, 2007):

“Relational capital is defined as all resources linked to the external relationships the firm such as customers, suppliers or R&D partners. It comprises that part of human and structural capital affecting the firm’s relations with stakeholders (investors, creditors, customers, suppliers, etc.) plus the perceptions that are held about the firm (brand, reputation, etc.)”.
(Grasenick and Low, 2004, p.271)

The third approach again looks at relationships at an organisational level and was developed from the Intellectus Model (Bueno *et al.*, 2014). Although, in common with the definition by Kale *et al.* (2000), it is based on the work of Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), it sees Social Capital flowing from RC and gives RC a wider definition, more aligned with that of economists. Bueno *et al.* (2004) stated that:

“the concept of relational capital is introduced, as the value of the set of relationships between the firm and its environment.” (p.561)

This research is concerned with the nature of relationships in a partnership, which Provan and Milward (2001) would define as network level and is not interested in valuing this relationship; therefore, the context is in line with Kale *et al.*’s (2000)

definition. This literature review will focus on sources which share this definition. However, research based on other definitions and looking at RC at organisational level (Provan and Milward, 2001) may bring other insights and approaches to the measurement and evaluation of RC, and therefore that work will be examined briefly.

4.2 Relational dimension of social capital

The resourced-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) developed the concept that a firm achieves competitive advantage by developing resources which are rare, valuable, inimitable and non-substitutable. In a knowledge-based economy, it has become difficult for firms to exist alone, and they increasingly develop partnerships in order to fulfil their aims. It is the ability to develop and exchange knowledge between firms which is now regarded as providing competitive advantage (Kale and Singh, 2009). Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) original work goes further, saying that it is the Social Capital developed between players in a (business) relationship that facilitates knowledge development and exchange. While this research can be regarded as rather old in such a dynamic field, current researchers such as Steinmo and Rasmussen (2018) build on this approach.

The Critical Realist (CR) approach to research, I have taken, stresses the importance of context and before looking in detail at RC it is necessary to briefly examine its origins from Social Capital (SC). There are many definitions of SC, but Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) defined it as:

“the sum of the actual and potential resources, embedded, within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit.” (p.243)

They went on to identify SC has having three main dimensions: cognitive, structural and relational. The cognitive dimension is seen as the resources which provide a common culture in a partnership. This will be discussed later. The structural dimension is the pattern of connections between the individuals involved. It is the relational dimension which is of most interest to this study. It is derived from the work of Granovetter (1992) and describes the personal relationships people build as a result of regular interaction. These relationships are based on trust, trustworthiness, norms and sanctions, obligations and expectations, identity and identification. These components of RC will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. While identifying different dimensions, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) accepted that they are interrelated, and it is this interrelatedness which leads to the confusion over terminology, alluded to in the introduction to the section, which this review hopes to clarify and simplify.

The work of Kale *et al.* (2000) examines the relational dimension of Social Capital and seeks to examine how partners in strategic alliances can learn from each other without losing their own core capabilities i.e., maintaining their independence in line with Mohr and Spekman's (1994) definition of partnership. They saw RC as being crucial in this as it creates:

“a mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit others’ vulnerabilities even if there is an opportunity to do so’ (Sabel,1993). This confidence arises out of the social controls the relational capital creates.”
(Kale *et al.*,2000 p.222).

4.2.1 The components of relational capital

Kale *et al.* (2000) went on to identify five variables affecting RC: personal interaction, mutual respect, mutual trust, personal friendship, and high reciprocity. Blonska *et al.* (2013) also included these components in their definition of RC, while Zornoza *et al.* (2009) provided a similar definition for bonding Social Capital and use trust and Relational Capital interchangeably. They also differentiated between trust and trustworthiness, highlighting this is a factor to be investigated. Labianca and Chung (2006) also equated bonding Social Capital with trust. In their study of 278 firms in the US, they identified that RC was not only important in knowledge exchange in dyadic relationships but also facilitated the formation of networks (Kale *et al.*, 2000). This is particularly important within the context of this study, due to the nature of the ACP.

In their study of Japanese strategic alliances, Cullen *et al.* (2000) stated that:

“Relationship capital is the quality of the relationship that exists between social actors” (p.224)

Referring to the concept as relationship capital, they saw its major components as trust and commitment, but also said that it can include norms of reciprocity, information exchange and cultural sensitivity. Robson *et al.* (2006) also made reference to Relationship Capital, but again saw the major components key to any relationship as being trust and commitment, in line with Morgan and Hunt (1994). Sambasivan (2011) also equated RC with relationship quality, as did Coleman (1990, cited in Collins, 2006). Within this context, therefore, Relationship Capital can

be seen as the equivalent of RC and a further component of culture is identified, although Naphiet and Ghoshal (1998) would see culture as forming the cognitive dimension of Social Capital. Robson *et al.* (2006) also referred to relationship Capital. Collins *et al.* (2004), in their study of public-private partnerships, from an economic geography perspective, also saw culture as an important component, as it influences the development of trust, information sharing and joint problem solving. Capello and Faggian (2005) supported this by suggesting that RC is strongest where there is a cultural compatibility between organisations, as RC is formed by explicit and tacit cooperation between partners, with tacit cooperation occurring as a result of trust and friendship. Lee (2009) also viewed culture as being relevant to developing relational norms. Building on the work of Putnam (2000), Prashantham (2011) discussed the importance of coethnicity in developing norms in his exploration of bonding Social Capital, which he equated to the relational dimension of Social Capital (Oh *et al.*, 2006; Zoranza, 2009). However, Tser-Yieth *et al.* (2009) and Lai Xuan and Truong (2005) found culture to have less of an impact on partnership performance in international partnership than RC itself. Griffith *et al.* (2010) also found that culture had little impact on the role of relational assets in building marketing capabilities. These contrasting views suggest that the importance of culture to RC is an issue which requires investigation in this study.

Although more often examined by those adopting an economic view of RC, goodwill is often seen as a component, especially by those looking at buyer-supplier relationships, with both Petersen *et al.* (2008) and Prashantham (2011) supporting this view. Petersen *et al.* (2008) sought to assess goodwill by the “*degree of mutual respect, trust and close interaction that exists between partner firms*” (p.54), thus

linking back to Kale *et al.* (2000). This fits with the views of Adler and Kwon (2002), who saw goodwill as the central construct of Social Capital:

“by ‘goodwill’ we refer to sympathy, trust and forgiveness, offered us by friends and acquaintances” (p.20)

Cousins *et al.* (2006) suggested that not all partnerships reach the high level of interaction, high information exchange and high trust required to create RC and saw informal socialisation as more important than formal socialisation in its development. This was built on by both Aaltonen *et al.* (2018) and Byun *et al.* (2018). This fits the notion that friendship resulting from repeated personal interaction is a key component. This is supported by Delerue-Vidot *et al.* (2006), who stated that:

“Relational capital contributes to the emergence of close personal ties between individuals that contract with each other”. (p.747)

Abili (2011) also stressed the importance of friendship in developing trust and respect. The importance of friendship fits with social exchange theory, concurring that individuals in a partnership can be described as social actors, and links to Granovetter’s (1992) concept of relational embeddedness depending on personal relationships. Moran (2005), building on the work of Granovetter, also discussed the importance of close personal relationships if trust is to be established.

Sambasivan *et al.* (2011) added a further dimension of communication to their definition, key to the information exchange which Relational Capital facilitates. They, too, use the terms Relational and Relationship Capital interchangeably.

“Relational capital refers to trust, commitment and communication between supply chain partners” (p.549)

This approach fits with that of Uzzi (1997), who saw trust, fine-grained information transfer and joint problem solving as key to relational embeddedness, as they support the social norms which are essential for a successful partnership, and again suggested that culture plays a major role.

The key components of RC which will be explored in Chapter 5 and the data collection can therefore be summarised as:

Component	Definition	Key Author
Personal Interaction	"relational capital rests upon close interpersonal ties "	Kale <i>et al.</i> , 2000 p, 218
Mutual Trust	"we conceptualize trust as existing when one party has confidence in an exchange partners reliability and integrity':	Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p 23
Mutual Respect	"valuing others for what they believe"	Murphy <i>et al.</i> , 2007 p 49
Friendship	"voluntary, personal relationship, typically providing intimacy and assistance, in which two parties like each other and seek each other's company,"	Price and Arnould, 1999 p. 39
Reciprocity	"a social norm dictating that an action performed by one party requires compensating movement by another)	Hoppner and Griffith, 2000 p 920
Commitment	"an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity with exchange partners"	Khoja <i>et al.</i> , 2010 p.283
Culture	"The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems."	Schein, 2010 p 18

Power	"the ability to influence, control or resist the activity of others"	Huxham and Beech, 2008 p.556
Communication	"Communication captures the utility of the information exchanged and is deemed to be a key indication of partnership vitality".	Morgan and Hunt, 1994 p 138

Figure 4 Components of relational capital

4.3 The economic approach

The previous section introduced the concept of "goodwill" as an important component of RC. Although its definition suggests that it is the sum of a number of other components. Goodwill is a term which has been used for some time by accountants to describe the difference between a firm's book and market value. As the knowledge economy has grown, the need to value intangible assets (Sveiby 1997) has increased, as these are often seen as more valuable to a firm than its "book value". Edvinsson and Malone (1997) developed the term Intellectual Capital to define the intangible asset, goodwill, which they saw as the sum of Human and Structural Capital. This is an expansion of the structural dimension of Social Capital discussed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). In this context, Structural Capital includes *"customer capital, the relationships developed with key customers"* (p.11). Both Edvinsson and Malone, (2007) and Bontis (1998) equate good will and Intellectual Capital and used Tobin's "q" to quantify goodwill. Koole and Roose (2010) saw this as an oversimplification and argued that goodwill and Intellectual Capital cannot be used interchangeably, and that Intellectual Capital is far more than goodwill. They suggested that Human and Relational Capital are intertwined as the people in the organisation are required to form the relationship.

Leger (2010) built on and expanded the external relationships theme:

“relational capital represents the portion of a company’s market value which is attributable to its portfolio of business relationships”. (p.406)

This definition is developed further by Ghane and Akhavan (2014) who, building on Bontis (2002), stressed the need to include relationships with customers as well as those with other stakeholders and saw RC as the value of knowledge accumulated in the value chain.

Dewhurst (2004) also included customers and identified three components of Intellectual Capital: quality, market reputation and customer satisfaction, again linking back to goodwill. This fits with Prashantam (2011) who, researching strategic alliances through a resource theory lens, saw Relational Capital as the trust and goodwill elements of Social Capital.

The work of Kong and Prior (2008) is particularly relevant to this study, as they examined the importance of Intellectual and Relational Capital in public sector relationships. While not seeking to put an economic value on RC, they used Bontis’s (2002) definition and saw RC as an important factor in measuring performance. Their definition involves a further expansion of the concept:

“Relational Capital is the flow of knowledge to the external environment. This includes reputation and influence over the distribution channel, suppliers, clients as well as industry associations.” (Kong and Prior, 2008 p.123)

This definition is shared by Sinclair (2007) who saw RC as being important in building brand value (thus supporting Bontis 1998):

“Relational Capital refers to an organization’s relationships with the outside world. It includes both reputation and image at large and all individual stakeholder relationships.” (Sinclair, 2007 p.97)

Capello and Faggian (2005) offered a similar definition, which also fits with the nature of the ACP being made up of similar institutions.

“Relational capital is defined as the set of all relationships – market relationships, power relationships and cooperation – established between firms, institutions and people that stem from a strong sense of belonging and a highly developed capacity of cooperation typical of culturally similar people.” (Capello and Faggian, 2005, p.77)

In contrast to Kale *et al.*’s (2000) definition of RC, which focuses on the internal relationships in a partnership, the economic approach sees RC as being the value of the external relationships of an organisation. Kong and Prior’s (2008) research is useful to this study, in that it does not seek to value this relationship, but to use the concept of IC as a means of evaluating public sector partnerships, providing some parallels with this study.

4.4 The intellectus model

The third approach identified can be seen as a hybrid of the previous two. The Intellectus Model was developed in Spain in the late 1990s and seems to be used mostly by researchers from Southern Europe. Bueno *et al.* (2014) expanded on their

earlier work and saw Intellectual Capital as consisting of human, structural and relational capital and defined Relational Capital as:

“the accumulated value or wealth generated by the value of the knowledge which comes into the organization through the relationships and actions shared with external or social agents (Social and Competitive Intelligence) and it refers to customers, Social Capital, and stakeholders.” (p.334)

Vieira *et al.* (2015) expanded on this and saw RC as vital in the ability of an organisation to learn. Although having a similar definition of RC to that adopted by the economic approach, in line with Kale *et al.* (2000) it is not seeking to provide an economic valuation but to examine the impact of RC on organisational and partnership performance.

Martine de Castro *et al.* (2003), looking at the Intellectus Model, stressed the need to further divide Relational Capital into Business and Social Capital, with Business Capital representing the relationships developed with organisations in pursuing daily business activities. Social Capital is seen as the value of relationships with the external environment and other stakeholders. Although purporting to be developed from Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), this approach contrasts with theirs in that it considers Social Capital to derive from Relational Capital (Bueno and Salmadin, 2004). Martin de Castro *et al.* (2003), also suggested that it may be necessary to include Cultural Capital as a component of the Intellectus Model, fitting with the approaches of Collins *et al.* (2004); Capello and Faggian (2005); Lee (2009) and others.

Dewhurst *et al.* (2004) did not distinguish between Business and Social Capital but saw RC as deriving from market reputation, quality and customer satisfaction. This is

in line with Martin de Castro *et al.* (2004), who saw corporate reputation as being a manifestation of Business Capital.

While these definitions do not describe the approach to RC being used in this study, some useful lessons can be learned from the methodologies adopted and the measures identified, and authors using these definitions will be referred to later in this research.

4.5 The Importance of relational capital

It has already been established that RC facilitates knowledge sharing, which is vital in the field of education (Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; Paolini *et al.*, 2018; Steinmo and Rasmussen, 2018). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) saw the relational element of Social Capital as facilitating the sharing of best practice, which is one of the objectives of the ACP. Uzzi (1997) also found that where partnership tasks require cooperation and trust, RC is beneficial. This is because the relationship norms developed result in the parties wanting to support each other, which generates a climate for information exchange. These relational norms can be seen as the culture of the partnership (Schien, 2010). This closeness facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge and thus provides a climate for innovation (Moran, 2005; Vieira, 2015). Prashantham (2011) also stressed the importance of shared norms in facilitating the speed of alliance formation. Uzzi (1997) would also suggest that this can accelerate decision making. Welborne and Prado del Val (2009) shared this view and saw RC as key to innovation in collaborative partnerships, as well as vital in reducing transaction costs due to the increased speed of decision making.

One of the challenges of partnership is the need for individual organisations to share information with partners, while at the same time protecting their core capabilities. The development of RC is seen as one way in which this balance can be achieved (Kale *et al.*, 2000; Ho and Wang, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). Based on this, RC also has the capacity to reduce opportunism and conflict due to the levels of trust and respect developed. Delerue–Vidot *et al.* (2006) and Blonska *et al.* (2013) supported this and suggest that the informal governance structures that RC engenders reduce opportunistic behaviour and give partners the confidence to trust that the knowledge shared in a relationship will not be transferred to another. Robson *et al.* (2006) went further and suggested that RC removes the need for formal control procedures and thus the negative connotations of the power relationship linked to them.

Increasingly, organisations need to develop multiple relationships in order to compete. With experience of successful relationships with one partner, organisations will then go on to develop wider networks (Kale *et al.*, 2000), linking to the importance of the multiplexity of relationships identified by Provan and Milward (2001). This is supported by Welbourne and Prada del Val (2009), who stressed the importance for SMEs, in particular, of being able to develop RC in order to compete in the longer term.

4.6 Problems of relational capital

RC takes time to build (Petersen *et al.*, 2008) and the benefits, often intangible and difficult to quantify, may be outweighed by the costs of this development (Alder and Kwon, 2002). The definition of Relational Capital as something developed by individuals highlights another problem. Cegarra- Navarro *et al.* (2011) suggested that staff turnover and time may reduce Relational Capital, as old relationships

disintegrate, and new ones are formed. Adler and Kwon (2002) also highlighted that the lack of individual ownership of Relational Capital means that it can be destroyed by the withdrawal of one party. Huggins (2010) tried to resolve this by suggesting that Network Capital is more important than Social or, indeed, Relational Capital, and Hudson (2004) stressed the importance of partnerships being fluid and dynamic if they are to succeed. In contrast to Moran (2005), Edelman (2004) found that the close relationships and ties formed can also be to the exclusion of new relationships which would improve information exchange and that the norms developed can lead the parties involved to be less open to innovation and subject to groupthink. This is supported by Welborne and Prado del Val (2009), who suggested that by being closely involved in one network, SMEs may miss out on opportunities to develop new links and to access new resources. Hansen (1997), in contrast to Uzzi (1997), also highlighted that tasks can take longer to complete where ties are strong due to the time consumed by socialisation. which becomes an important part of the relationship.

4.7 Measuring relational capital

Many of the researchers seeking to examine the impact of RC on performance, and those aiming to identify its economic value, have adopted quantitative survey approaches to gain empirical data, (Kale *et al.*, 2000; Cousins *et al.*, 2006; Abdullah *et al.*, 2011) They have, however, recognised that RC is context-specific and that surveys tend to be either industry or country-based, suggesting a cultural dimension to their results which has not been explored and which calls the generalisability of the results into question. However, Griffith *et al.* (2010) found little difference in results between US and Japanese firms and Ghane and Akhavan (2014) found that differences in performance were mostly the result of the relationship between

organisations and were not sector-specific, suggesting that culture has a minimal effect.

Kale *et al.* (2000) developed a Likert scale which has been used by a number of authors. Lai Xuan and Truong (2005) also sought to measure RC by asking respondents to rank each component using a Likert scale. Capello and Faggian (2005) and Welbourne *et al.* (2009) also obtained comment on each component. Huang *et al.* (2010) used factor analysis to examine the components of RC. Ghane and Akhavan (2014) built on these approaches by developing a framework to aid the management of RC by examining each of the indicators they identified as being relevant from an economic point of view. Asiaei and Jusoh (2015), in their study of Intellectual Capital, also stress the need to examine the contributions the components of RC make to its business performance.

Despite the dominance of quantitative research investigating RC, Adler and Kwon (2002) regarded Social Capital, and hence its component RC, as a metaphorical construct and not quantifiable. Edvinsson and Malone (1997), while seeking to value Intellectual Capital to improve financial reporting, identified that some elements are qualitative. Building on their work, Mertins *et al.* (2009) also suggested that a quantitative approach is not appropriate as there is a need to inform investors of how intangible assets are generated and contribute to performance. Bue and Lee (2000) suggested that a critical realist approach would better identify how and why networks develop and that a qualitative methodology would give a greater understanding of participants' perceptions of relationships. In support of this, Bueno and Salmadin (2004) stressed the need for a case study approach to examine the impact of values on Relational Capital.

Uzzi (1997), in his study of relational embeddedness, the basis of RC, adopted a qualitative ethnographic field study approach to gain in-depth rich data on the nature of buyer-supplier relationships. Both he and Edelman (2004) acknowledged that a qualitative approach provides only limited generalisability but argued that the rich insights obtained compensate for this. Sinclair (2007) also adopted a qualitative approach and used semi-structured interviews to look at factors which affected the development of RC, albeit using a very narrow definition and in a specialised context. Due to the social and contextual nature of the concepts, Abili (2007) adopted a mixed method, multiple case study approach to assess current Social Capital and influences on it.

Kong (2010) took a different approach and suggested that the concept of Intellectual Capital provides a useful framework for evaluating the performance of non-profit organisations and is not a measure in itself. This is the approach adopted in this study, where the concept of RC is being used to evaluate the relationship between Oxford Brookes and its partners in the ACP.

4.8 Summary

The concept of RC results from the need for organisations to leverage intangible capabilities and, in particular, knowledge exchange, in order to compete in a dynamic world. This study will examine RC in accordance with the definition from Kale *et al.* (2000):

‘the level of mutual trust, respect and friendship that arises out of close interaction at the individual level between alliance partners’ (p.218).

Definitions of RC based on Kale *et al.* (2000) identify the components of Relational Capital as: trust, commitment, friendship, culture, communication, reciprocity, information exchange, personal interaction and mutual respect. Lee (2009) recommends that balance of power is also examined in any study of RC, as this affects levels of trust. Hansen and Bunn (2009) identified many of the same characteristics as contributing to relationship quality and proposed that there is a direct correlation between relationship quality and collaboration, which fits with the nature of the relationships being examined in this study. This literature review will examine each of the components identified above in turn.

RC is seen as beneficial as it facilitates knowledge exchange; but where relationships are too firmly embedded, groupthink can occur, which prevents innovation and may slow the decision making process.

The majority of studies of RC used quantitative methods in an attempt to measure the impact of RC on partnership performance or to value it, in order to add RC as an asset on the balance sheet. However, a number of authors have highlighted the need for a qualitative approach to examine the components and gain an understanding of their importance to relationships.

The diagram below summarises the components of Relational Capital and its outputs.

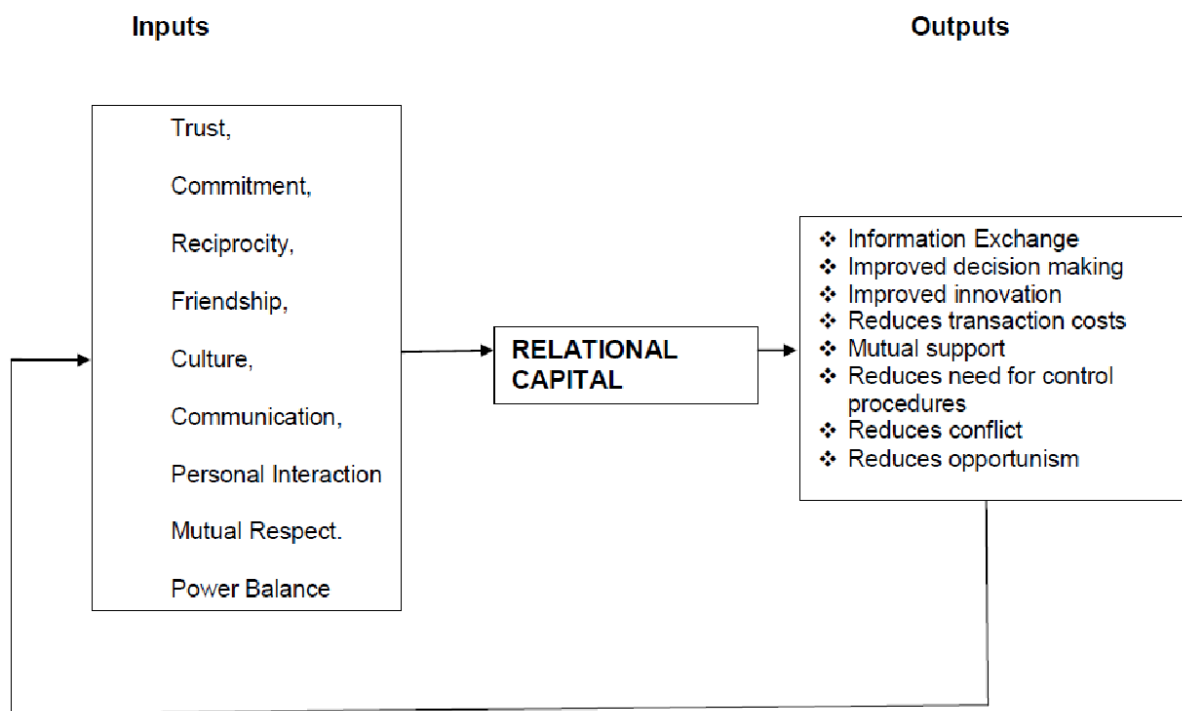


Figure 3: The components of Relational Capital and its outputs

Chapter 5

The Components of Relational Capital

5.1 Introduction

If partnership working is the way forward, as discussed in the introduction, it is important to understand the key features of partnership. Provan and Sidow (2008) called these process indicators and identified them as learning, trust, fairness, legitimacy and power. These indicators are interrelated, again stressing the complexity of partnership. This expands Brinkerhoff's (2002) view that partnership is about equal relationships and is based on organisational identity and mutuality. Mutuality is seen as consisting of jointly agreed purpose and values, mutual trust and respect. Organisational identity refers to the aspects of an organisation which make it distinctive and is closely linked to culture, again suggesting close interrelationship, as values cannot be separated from culture. A number of studies of successful partnerships, (Shaw, 2003; McQuaid, 2000; Ramadas *et al.*, 2018) identify similar characteristics: trust, flexibility, understanding, balance of power, shared mission, compatibility, communication and commitment. Kale *et al.* (2000) saw these as elements of Relational Capital (RC) and said that it is strong RC which leads to the success of a partnership. Based on studies in the private sector, Gulati *et al.* (2006) argued that RC is a strong safeguard against failure. Moran (2005) echoed this and suggested that it is "relational embeddedness" (p.1130) which helps to ensure the success of a network. McLaughlin *et al.* (2009) built on their work and translated it to

the public sector, suggesting that, in future, good public governance will rely on “*relational capitalists*” (p 40).

As the focus of this research is the role of RC in partnership development, this chapter discusses each of the antecedents identified in Chapter 4. Communication forms the basis of all human interaction (Mohr and Spekman, 1994) and is well researched in the literature. Its role in partnership development is worthy of a thesis in its own right. As a result, I have not included a specific section in this literature review on communication as I could bring no further insights to this very well researched topic though it is a thread which runs throughout especially as personal interaction is key. Although each of the components of RC are explored individually in this chapter a common thread is their interrelatedness and it is difficult to examine one component without reference to others. Kale and Singh (2009) stress the importance of coordination in developing successful partnership and the importance of the Liaison Manager in coordinating the partnership was a major theme running through the findings, so the chapter then goes on to discuss the role of boundary spanners in building, maintaining and coordinating partnership working. The chapter ends by highlighting the key issues which need to be explored through data collection and provides a framework showing the relationship between RC its components and partnership.

In line with the Critical Realist philosophy and abductive strategy underpinning this research this development of this literature review has been an iterative process and the literature was revisited at several stages throughout the research process to aid analysis and strengthen the discussion. The role the findings played in informing this

review are set out in each section and Figure 18 in Chapter 6 shows the key influences from each case study. The chapter is laid out as follows:

5.2 Culture and Values

5.3 Trust

5.4 Commitment

5.5 Reciprocity

5.6 Friendship

5.7 Mutual Respect

5.8 Power

5.9 Boundary Spanning

5.9 Summary and Conceptual Framework

5.2 Culture and values

Weare *et al.* (2014) saw successful collaborations as the result of organisations sharing a collaborative culture. This is characterised by those involved developing norms and processes which recognise cultural difference between the organisations and individuals involved and build on commonalities. Cultural differences at an organisational level may create tension in developing common processes, but these are often offset by the complementary strengths brought to the partnership by each party. This section will explore the meaning of these terms and their significance to partnership development.

The importance of examining partnership at more than one level (network, organisational and individual), (Provan and Milward, 2001) was discussed in Chapter 3. Similarly, culture derives from and is built upon the shared values of those involved in an organisation. These values develop from and are influenced by the national, organisational and personal environments of the individuals which make up the organisation (Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 2010). Asiaei and Jusoh (2015) saw culture as *“acting like an organisational glue”* (p.672). While this is a rather basic definition, it emphasises the importance of culture to organisational performance, showing that it underpins all aspects of an organisation, and begs the question ‘if culture is the organisational glue, does it also hold the partnership together?’ This highlights the importance of examining culture at the data collection stage. The importance of developing a shared culture became more important as the research progressed and in particular identified the need to clarify what is meant by developing an HE culture in FE. To aid this a precise definition of culture is required. Alvesson (2013) suggests that definitions of culture are often closely linked to research philosophy and are culturally influenced. This, however, is true of all research topics and is not a reason for avoiding definition. While culture may be a nebulous concept, for the purposes of this research and in line with the approach taken throughout this thesis, it is appropriate to have a clear definition and to examine its relevance to the context.

Hofstede is one of the seminal writers on culture so it would be remiss in reviewing the literature on culture not to discuss his contribution. In his work on the impact of national cultures on organisational performance Hofstede (1980) provided the following definition:

“Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values” (Hofstede, 1980, p.24)

Although Hofstede’s work has been developed and used widely by both academics and businesses to evaluate organisations for over 30 years (Minkov and Hofstede, 2011), his approach can be criticised for assuming that nations are homogenous, which is not a true reflection of society in Britain, or indeed many other countries today (Jackson, 2020). Hofstede (1980) would argue that individuals within an organisation are imbued with their own national culture, bring these values to the organisation and influence the way an organisation’s culture is developed. The lack of a clearly defined national culture means that this approach may no longer work in practice and is not seen as relevant to this study. This decision is supported by Griffith *et al.* (2010), Lai Xuan and Truong (2005) and Tser-Yieth *et al.* (2009), who found that national culture had little impact on RC, even in international partnerships, and is reinforced by Ho and Wang (2015), who found that RC helped to alleviate cultural differences. Looking at HE, Heidrich and Chandler (2015) also found that, due the diversity of the workforce, national culture played little role in developing a HE culture. These findings were reflected in this study, suggesting that the work of Hofstede contributes little to this research.

Alvesson (2013) provided a more relevant approach, arguing that organisational culture is developed by the individuals in a firm in response to the internal and external environment of that firm. This is built on Schein’s (2010) definition, which saw culture as being developed by the individuals within the group and suggested that the culture of a partnership may be different from that of the participating

organisations, as an attempt to bring stability and order to the partnership and establish common practices (Huxham and Vengen, 2005).

“The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (Schein, 2010, p.18)

It is the way in which newcomers to a group learn from the existing members that ensures continuity, and perhaps explains why culture can be difficult to change (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2015).

Roos *et al.* (1997) and Edvinsson and Malone (2007) went further and viewed culture as being embedded in the Structural Capital of the organisation and owned by the organisation, making it an inimitable asset, again suggesting that culture is a constant. If this is the case, what happens in partnership? Kamaluddin and Rahman (2010) developed this theme of inimitable assets and suggested that Cultural Capital should exist in its own right, alongside Structural, Human and Relational Capital. However, their approach fails to recognise the importance of culture in RC development and does not appear to be supported elsewhere in the literature. All these approaches, however, support the influence of culture on all aspects of an organisation and on the role the individual plays. The importance of the individual, as well as the organisation, is also a trait of the other elements of partnership discussed in this chapter and again emphasises the need to consider partnership at more than one level. What needs to be examined is the impact of organisational culture on

individuals and vice versa. This fits with the need to explore partnership issues at different levels (Latta, 2020).

The main theme that can be taken from these definitions is that culture develops from social interaction and that it is the people involved who create the culture. It is their mindset which affects the attitude to all other elements of partnerships and the way they are developed. Culture is important due to its impact on trust, management processes and behaviour at all levels (Alvesson, 2013; Canoski, 2022) and, as such, can be seen as influencing all aspects of partnership. Discussion of the other elements must take place within the context of the culture that exists or is being developed in the partnership.

5.2.1 Classifying culture

At its most basic culture is defined as, “the way we do things”, and it is perhaps the familiarity with these basic assumptions that mean we do not often think of or notice culture, (Schien, 2010), which is why it is hard to classify and define. However, providing some typography helps to clarify meaning and provide a basis for understanding its nature and manifestation. Johnson, Scholes and Whittington's (2008) cultural web helps to clarify the organisational and personal traits which contribute to culture but do not provide a classification. The data collection highlighted this and led to the work of Canoski, (2022) who saw organisational culture as the behaviour which resulted from these outwards signs and viewed it as a combination of the values, structure and power systems of the organisation. He built on McNay (1996) and identified 4 types of organisational culture in universities based on the degree of "strictness" or "looseness" of two dimensions: definition of

policies and implementation control. He saw culture changing in response to external influences. His typology is set out below:

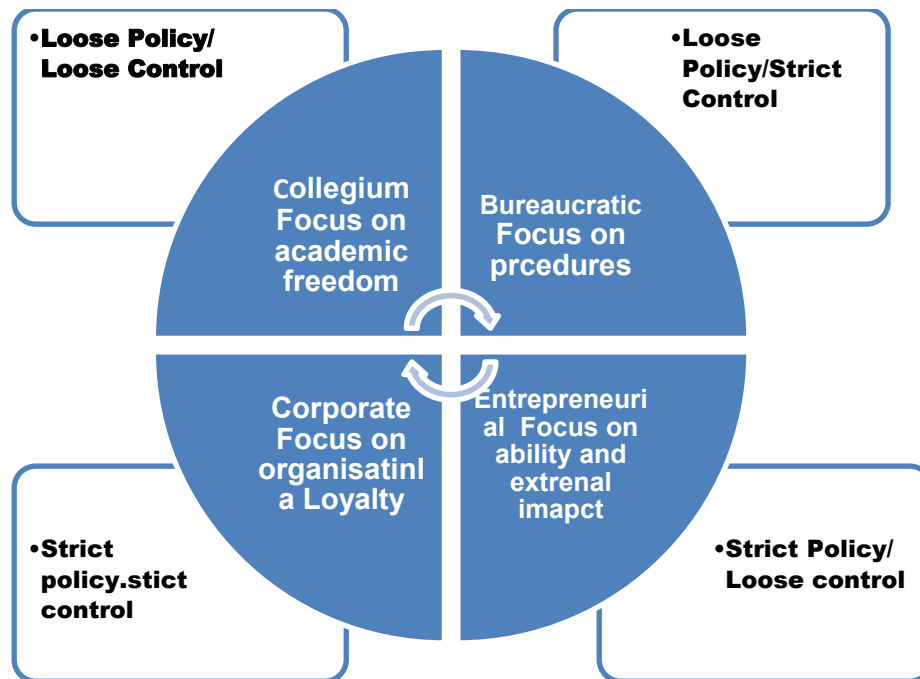


Figure 5 Definitions of university culture (Canoski, 2022)

While this provided a classification for organisational culture it did not take into account the influence of academic discipline on culture and how subcultures develop in organisations. Gaus *et al.*, (2019) tried to address this by classifying culture according to research philosophy with a hard culture linking to positivism and interpretivism to soft culture. They further broke this down to look at the application of knowledge following 4 cultures:

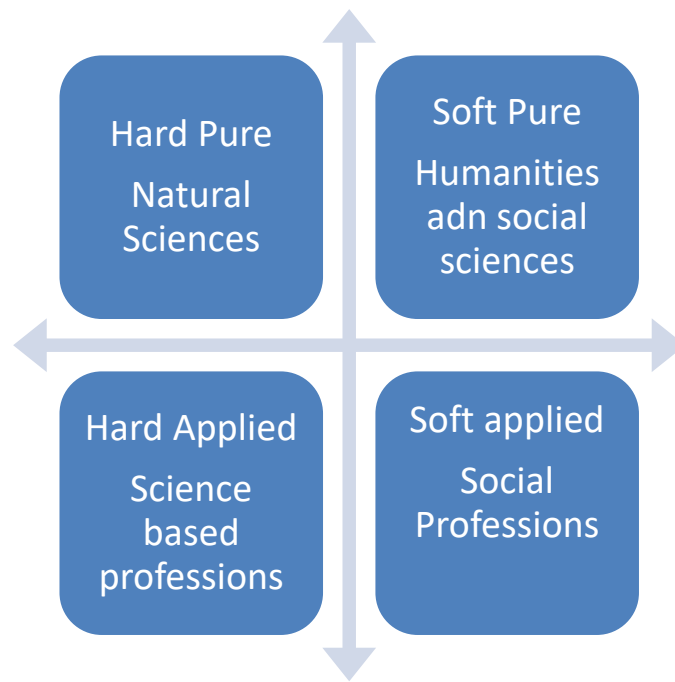


Figure 6 Cultural Types (adapted from Gaus et al., 2019)

While this type of classification is useful it does not take into account the culture of cross-disciplinary teams which are becoming more common in research (Bowen *et al.*, 2017) but do help to conceptualise culture.

Jones *et al.* (2007) took a different approach and saw stakeholder culture having a major impact on organisational culture as stakeholder assumptions and values influence all aspects of the organisation. This is particularly useful when considering partnerships. They describe stakeholder culture as existing on a spectrum from agentic based on managerial egoism to altruistic with the emphasis on the common good.



Figure 7 Stakeholder cultures (adapted from Jones *et al.*, 2007)

While these approaches provide ways of classifying culture which is helpful in providing an overview of culture, they do not explain what is meant by an HE culture nor how it is developed in FE a key issue in this research.

5.2.2 Developing an HE culture in FE

The importance of understanding what is meant by an HE culture in FE was highlighted by the findings and led to the development of this section. Chapter 2 examined the context of teaching HE in FE and stressed the importance of developing an HE culture in FE, although this is not clearly defined (Feather, 2016). One problem of defining HE culture is that HE institutions are built upon of a range of subcultures, depending on academic discipline and pedagogy (Bendermacher *et al.*, 2017; Gaus *et al.*, 2017). Subcultures range from 'hard', as often exhibited in the natural sciences, which take a positivist view, to 'applied soft' in social sciences, where a more interpretivist view is usually held (Gaus *et al.*, 2017). This fits with Alvesson (2013), who saw culture as linking directly to research philosophy.

While HE culture may be discipline-specific, it is often characterised by seeing knowledge as contestable and by defining scholarly activity as the development of knowledge through research (Lea and Simmons, 2012; Feather, 2016). Traditionally, HE staff have combined teaching with research and the creation of knowledge, whereas the emphasis in FE has been on the dissemination of knowledge rather than its creation (Hobley, 2017). This built on by Feather (2010), who found that FE

staff preferred the concept of being 'modifiers of curriculum' (p.193) rather than being 'knowledge gatherers'. FE staff engage in scholarship in developing and preparing their own teaching, but the environment in which they are working does not usually provide opportunities for more traditional research (Turner *et al.*, 2015). Lea and Simmons (2012) argued that the concept of scholarship and research needed to be set in a wider context. Scholarly activity in FE is focused more on application and integration than new discovery. The increased emphasis on knowledge exchange and impact puts FE staff in prime position to demonstrate scholarly activity through application, though there is still the problem of time constraints. (Feather, 2017). This suggests that the cultural differences are more about approach than attitude, linking back to disciplinary and pedagogic differences (Gaus *et al.*, 2017). The secret of success, perhaps lies not in trying to find common ground or developing the same ethos in a college as in a university, but in embracing those differences and developing a partnership culture peculiar to the needs of that partnership (Schein, 2010; Weare *et al.*, 2014). This culture is based on the shared values and goals of those involved, with the aim of teaching students to contest knowledge and apply it.

If culture has a major impact on all aspects of the development of partnership, it is important to examine how this impact is manifested. However, due to the value-laden and therefore subjective nature of culture, there is some debate on how this should be done, and indeed if a "good culture" is strong and rigid or more flexible and able to adapt quickly to meet changing pressures (Alvesson, 2013). This approach builds on Schein (1996), who argued that it is not the culture itself which is important but its impact on behaviour. As this study is examining how partnerships

develop, it will be interesting to explore the role that culture plays through data collection.

5.3 Trust

Trust is one of the most studied aspects of partnership and exchange. In view of this, a detailed review of the literature on trust is beyond the scope of this study but it is important to understand what is meant by trust and how it is manifested. Trust is seen as essential for any form of interdependency. Dyer *et al.* (1987, p.23) stated that '*Trust is considered a critical construct in relational exchange*', while Adobar (2006) saw trust as a cornerstone of strategic alliance. It increases cooperation, improves relationship flexibility, shortens the decision-making process, increases quality and lowers monitoring costs (Jennings *et al.*, 1993; Bachman and Inkpen, 2011; Stensacker and Massen, 2015; Gavin *et al.*, 2021).

“trusting relationships facilitate cooperation in networks. Trust acts as a glue that holds networks together, enabling networks to function effectively even though they lack hierarchical power structure” (Lambright *et al.*, 2007, p.77)

Once again, the relationship to culture is emphasised, as culture is also seen as the “glue” which holds the organisation together (Asiaei and Jusoh, 2015). Trust is seen as important, as the reciprocity of a relationship means that the players must be able to rely on each other. Moran (2005) built on this and said that the greater the ‘*relational trust*’ (p.1136), the more likely are the partners to interact. Trust can be seen as the hardener in the glue. This fits with the concept that trust increases with repeated interactions between those involved.

Increased trust is seen as the consequences of RC (Kale *et al.*, 2000), and this begs the question ‘is there a difference between RC and trust?’. This is another area for exploration in this research. It could be argued that as trust is a given, there is no need to explore it further. However, its development and maintenance must be key. This section aims to define trust, examine how it is manifested and discuss the contribution it makes to partnership.

5.3.1 Definitions of trust

There are numerous definitions of trust, but all tend to involve the parties concerned being dependent on each other, with a belief that the other party will not act opportunistically, and in the presence of some element of risk or uncertainty (Lane and Bachman, 1998). This mutuality links clearly to the definition of partnership adopted for this study. This is summarised in Morgan and Hunt’s (1994) definition, which has been widely used in explorations of both public and private sector partnerships for the past 30 years and is relevant to both interorganisational and interpersonal trust, with ‘party’ referring to individuals, teams and organisations:

“we conceptualize trust as existing when one party has confidence in an exchange partners reliability and integrity.” (Morgan and Hunt, p.23)

This definition is relevant to both interorganisational and interpersonal trust.

5.3.2 Interpersonal and interorganisational trust

In line with the need to look at partnerships at more than one level, in discussing trust it is necessary to differentiate between interpersonal and interorganisational trust (Bachman and Inkpen, 2011), although they are interdependent, as trust within

organisations is created by the interaction between individuals. Vanneste (2016) went as far as defining interorganisational trust as:

“the extent to which members of the focal organisation trust those of the partner organisation” (p.7)

Interorganisational trust develops from interpersonal trust, and it is this which is most commonly studied (Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012). However, organisational trust can be developed without personal interaction, as it is based on the reputation and resources available to the organisation, which are often the basis of initial partner selection (Atouba, 2019)

Adobar (2006) reinforced the interrelationship between organisational and personal trust by suggesting that although trust is a personal value, it is influenced by the organisational setting. This links closely to the influence individuals have on the formation of organisational culture, discussed above. Lambright *et al.* (2010) went further and saw trust as a personality trait influenced by the social network within which the individual exists. It is the personal nature of trust which leads to Kale *et al.* 's (2000) definition of RC discussed in Chapter 4. As already discussed, partnership is built by individuals within an organisation and the emphasis in this review is on interpersonal trust although, where appropriate, reference will also be made to literature on interorganisational trust.

5.3.3 Trust and trustworthiness

Although Putnam (2000) and Perri *et al.*, (2006), would differentiate trust from trustworthiness *“Trustworthiness not trust not simply trust is the key ingredient”* (Putnam, 2000, p.136. Zhang (2018), in line with several other authors e.g.,

Cumming and Bromiley (1996) and Lee (2009), saw trustworthy behaviour as stemming from a person exhibiting the components of trust. Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Adobar (2006) would go further and state that trust stems from the belief that the other party is trustworthy. This review makes no distinction between the two.

5.3.4 Components of trust

To gain an understanding of trust, it is necessary to deconstruct this definition.

Because of the wealth of literature on the topic, there is a great degree of diversity in the description of its components, bases and outcomes. Butler (1991) suggested that a useful approach to studying trust is to define its determinants. This is important to this study, as they can provide a guide to how trust is developed in a partnership.

Butler (1991) saw trust as having two bases: global and specific, with the specific component being the most important. This fits with Putnam's (2000) concept of thin trust and thick trust, developed by examining the development of Social Capital. Thin or global trust is seen as the general approach in society that others will do you no harm. Putnam (2000) saw thin trust as useful, as it widens participation in relationships and forms the basis of the relationship when the parties involved have no prior knowledge of each other. Thin trust, therefore, can be the basis of interorganisational trust. However, he accepted that this is often unsustainable as partnerships require personal interaction. Thick or specific trust is based on personal interaction and knowledge of the other's likely behaviours and is seen as more important in predicting relationship outcomes, demonstrating again the importance of individuals in a trusting relationship. This is reflected in a number of studies finding that trust is context-specific e.g., Fulmer and Dirks (2018), and is in line with the Critical Realist stance of this research.

Several authors, e.g., Butler (1991); Moran, (2005); Pirson and Malhotra, (2011); Bhagat, (2009), identified a number of conditions of trust which are set out in the table below:

Butler (1991)	Moran (2005)	Pirson and Malhotra (2011)	Bhagat (2009)
Availability	Competence	Benevolence	Benevolence
Competence	Integrity	Competence	Competence
Consistency	Predictability	Integrity	Honesty
Fairness	Mutuality	Reliability	
Integrity		Reputation	
Loyalty		Transparency	
Openness			
Overall Trust			
Promise Fulfilment			
Receptivity			

Figure 8 Conditions of trust

These conditions were used to measure trust but more importantly, the authors found that their presence to a lesser or greater extent helps ensure that trust is present and had moved away from thin to global trust. All these conditions can be

described as personality traits and are influenced by personal culture. This view is supported in other studies (e.g., Doney *et al.*, 1998) who also saw shared norms and values as being important in the development of trust, reinforcing the way that culture underpins all aspects of partnership.

In line with Morgan and Hunt (1994), Bhagat, (2009), found that relationship strength is based on trust and commitment, which are components of RC. Commitment will be explored further in the next section.

5.3.5 Forms of trust

Having identified the components of trust, Skandrani *et al.* (2011) identified four bases for trust:

- Calculative
- Identification-based
- Predictive
- Intentionality-based

This is in line with the work of Adobar (2006), Lane and Bachman (1998), Seppanen (2007) and others, who added deference. In their review of the literature, Li *et al.* (2012) identified six bases: dispositional, cognitive, institutional, calculative, identification and knowledge. Robbins, (2016) argued against classifying varieties of trust as he argued that these varieties are not different types of trust but the cognitive process by which trust is formed. He referred to relational trust to differentiate it from varieties of trust and defined relational trust as:

“a belief about another person’s trustworthiness with respect to a particular matter at hand that emerges under conditions of unknown outcomes”

(Robbins, 2016, p976)

However, while accepting Robbins, (2016) point, this research is concerned with how trust is built and in line with the approach taken earlier in this thesis this section aims to compare and contrast these different approaches and clarify the terminology.

Calculative trust, often referred to by economists, is founded on making a rational decision based on knowledge of likely behaviour in a situation and is described by some as knowledge- based. Cullen *et al.* (2000) referred to this as credibility trust, as at organisational level it is based on reputation:

“the rational component of trust is that confidence that the partner has the intent and ability to make their promised contribution to the alliance.” (Cullen *et al.*, p.225)

Reich-Graffe (2014) saw calculative trust as the most fundamental form of trust, as it is based on self-preservation, with humans assuming that they will not harm each other. Coleman (1990) developed his theory of Social Capital from his view that calculative trust is based on one party transferring resources to another in the belief that they will use them better, again showing the direct link between partnership, RC and trust. This highlights the reciprocal nature of trust and the need for partnership to provide mutual benefit (Lane and Bachman,1998). Skandrani *et al.* (2011) found that calculative trust was most common between large corporations with formalised procedures and often exists in newly formed relationships when partners are relying on reputation. The weakness of this approach to trust is that, in a dynamic environment, influences on behaviour cannot be predicted, although many would

argue that trust forms the basis of a relationship where behaviour cannot be predicted.

Identification-based trust tends to produce the highest level of trust, as it is based on shared norms and beliefs (Fukuyma, 1995) once again linking back to culture.

Granovetter's (1992) theory of relational embeddedness is based on the notion that trust derives from societal relations and obligations. Skandrani *et al.* (2011)

countered this, saying that identification-based trust is formed during the relationship once shared norms are developed. Adobar *et al.* (2006) supported this approach, seeing identification-based trust forming as a result of group membership. Kasten (2018) took this further and portrayed identification-based trust as being formed by the shared social identity developed, highlighting the need for social interaction, if not friendship, in a partnership. This will be explored later in this chapter. It fits with Lu's (2009) view that trust develops over time and provides a robust foundation for effective partnership, and the view that partnerships develop their own culture (Schein, 2010). This reinforces the need to explore partnership at more than one level (Provan and Milward, 2008), with Vanneste (2016) stressing the interdependence of organisational and personal trust whilst emphasising that they can be different.

Predictive trust usually manifests in existing relationships, suggesting prior knowledge of how a partner will respond in a particular situation, and is based on a shared ethical stance, again showing the cultural influences on trust. It is predictive trust which often influences partner choice for new ventures (Welbourne Prada del Val, 2008; Kale and Singh, 2009; Bhagat, 2009) and provides one explanation as to

why OBU limited the membership of the ACP while continuing to expand the number of programmes being developed.

Intentionality- or cognitive-based trust stresses the psychological aspect of trust.

“trust is the result of natural selection; there are people whom one feels worthy of trust, it is not the case with others” (Skandrani et al., 2011, p.399)

This, again, may explain why some partnerships seem to work better than others as it emphasises the role that individuals play. Cullen *et al.* (2000) stressed the importance of this emotional element of trust and described trust as being based on belief more than fact. Intentionality-based trust can be linked to calculative trust, as discussed above, since calculative trust is based on assumptions of behaviour rather than fact.

Deference-based trust, which relies on one party exerting power of sanction over another, is the weakest form of trust, as it mitigates against the belief that one party will not act opportunistically (Lewicki and Barker, 1995). Putnam (2000, p.136) supported this by quoting Diego Gambetta, (2000)

“Societies which rely heavily on the use of force are likely to be less efficient, more costly and more unpleasant than those where trust is maintained by other means”.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) agreed and found that long term success is associated with a lack of coercive power. This will be explored further in the section on power.

5.3.6 Problems of trust

The importance of trust to a relationship is clearly documented, but there are also downsides. Trust is a personality trait and a voluntary behaviour. Individuals in a relationship can choose not to trust or not to act in a trustworthy manner, even if the conditions of trust are present. This demonstrates that trust can be destroyed by an individual, suggesting that relying on it is risky. Therefore, whilst trust must be developed if a partnership is to continue, other factors must also be at play. It is also possible to abuse trust, thus breaking the basis of the relationship. Fraud and embezzlement are examples of crimes which result from this (Granovetter, 1985). “Honour among thieves” is built on trust being used in an unacceptable way.

Seppänen *et al.*, (2007), saw the identification of antecedents of trust, its dimensions, and consequences as separate entities an oversimplification, as there is often a causal affect between them. For example, communication is needed to build trust, but improved communication is an outcome of trust. Trust removes the need to exercise power, but the way power is exercised is dependent on the level of trust. However, trust may also mask asymmetric power (Stensaker and Maassen, 2015). This level of complexity fits with the findings of Skandrani *et al.* (2011), who found that participants had different interpretations of trust and highlights the complexity of the components of RC,

5.3.7. Distrust

Having established that too much trust can cause problems in partnerships, it is also necessary to examine distrust. On the surface distrust is the opposite of trust, so it can be assumed that relationships cannot be built if there is distrust. However, Lewicki *et al.* (2016) would see this as an over-simplification. Trust is concerned with

confidence in positive outcomes, whereas distrust suggests uncertainty about negative consequences (Min and Zickar, 2022). It is therefore possible for one party to have high trust in one aspect of a partner's ability, but distrust in other competences, and for the relationship to be successful. Lewicki *et al.* (2016) would go further and suggest that just as trust can be built through repeated interaction, so too can distrust, where a partner does not live up to expectations. Distrust, therefore, should not be seen as the opposite of trust but as another set of beliefs based on experience or assumptions, which can exist in parallel to trust.

5.3.8 Summary of the role of trust

This section has highlighted the importance of trust in the development of partnership and has described its components and forms, and its interdependence with culture. It has also identified the problems of being too trusting and that distrust can exist in a partnership without damaging it. As the components and outputs of trust have been identified as being similar to those of RC, it has also brought into question the need to examine how RC differs from trust or whether they are different names for the same construct. This has highlighted the need to examine, during data collection, attitudes to trust and its formation.

5.4 Commitment

The need for longevity in partnership was discussed earlier in the chapter. This suggests importance of organisational commitment to that partnership. This section aims to review the literature on commitment in order to define it, to discuss its importance to partnership and to identify potential means of evaluation. Within the context of this study, the topic being examined is commitment to achieving the goals

of the partnership and not commitment to the individual organisation. However, if a person is not committed to the organisation, they are unlikely to be committed to achieving its goals through partnership (Eden and Huxman, 2001).

Cullen *et al.* (2000) regarded trust and commitment as being the most important aspects of partnership. While they are interrelated, they are distinct components and need to be understood independently. Berry and Parasuranam (1991) saw relationships as being built on mutual commitment. Morgan and Hunt (1994, p.23) defined commitment as:

“an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts to maintain it.”

This approach is echoed by Cullen *et al.* (2000) and reinforced by Khoja *et al.*'s, 2010, p.283) definition:

“an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity with exchange partners”

Mottaz (1989) regarded this as attitudinal commitment which was exhibited by both organisations and individuals. He differentiated it from behavioural commitment, exhibited by individuals within an organisation which he defined as;

“the degree to which individuals become attached to an organization as the result of investments (time, effort, identification, rewards, and such), as reflected by their intent to remain with the organisation.” (Mottaz, 1989, p.144)

Khoja *et al.* (2010) built on this and saw commitment as having three bases: calculative, attitudinal and temporal, which fit closely with the bases of trust.

Calculative commitment has the same basis as calculative trust (Lane and Backman, 1998) and is based on the concept that relationship formation has a purpose and will provide mutually positive returns. Bresnen and Marshall (2000) found that incentives can be used to motivate individuals to develop calculative commitment, suggesting that calculative commitment is not inherent but can be developed, and indeed bought, to further the interests of the individual or organisation. Cullen *et al.* (2000) saw calculative commitment as the basis for the development of all alliances which are formed to further business interests, although social relationship may then follow.

Attitudinal or behavioural commitment results from participants identifying with the relationship and can be linked to identification based trust (Skandrani *et al.*, 2011) and to partnerships developing their own culture (Schein, 2010). This identification with the relationship results in participants wishing to go beyond contractual boundaries to make it work in the longer term (temporal commitment - Khoja *et al.*, 2010). Kayser (2011) strengthened this and said that behavioural commitment occurs when participants move beyond self-interest to wishing to achieve the common good and, as a result, invest emotionally in their partners. This leads to developing norms of reciprocity (Cullen *et al.*, 2000). This fits with Granovetter's (1992) approach to relational embeddedness. Yaqub's (2010, p.111) definition emphasises the attitudinal and temporal constructs and suggests that commitment is a personality trait, thus closely aligned with culture and attitudes towards trust.

"I have defined commitment as a predisposition that comprises of an actor's willingness to (1) stay long in the relationship, (2) accept the norms and values that govern the relationship, and (3) contribute maximum effort for the welfare of the relationship".

This, again, emphasises the personal nature of partnership and its success being reliant on individuals.

Allen and May (1990) added normative commitment as another form of commitment which is based on loyalty to an organisation and as discussed in the introduction, is not seen as relevant to this study, although Engleberg *et al.* (2012) found that normative commitment could lead to attitudinal commitment and vice versa, once again showing that the development of partnerships is a cyclical process, and it is difficult to separate the individual from the organisation.

While it is useful to examine the bases of commitment, Odekerken-Schröder and Bloemer (2004) suggested that defining two types of commitment confuses the relationship between drivers of commitment and the concept itself. They argue that while the drivers of commitment can be either calculative or attitudinal, what is more important is its existence. This fits with Sappanen's (2007) view that differentiating between drivers and outcomes of trust fails to recognise the interrelatedness and Robbin's (2016) concerns that classifying trust confuses the difference between the process and the source of trust.

The development of commitment through repeated interaction fits with the view that commitment, like trust, develops cyclically (Butler, 1995) and is an inherent part of partnership development. This could suggest that trust and commitment are inherent in any partnership and there is no need to explore them. However, calculative commitment develops first, and it is usually only when this is established that attitudinal commitment develops. It is the development of attitudinal commitment which results in relationships being sustainable. Extrinsic rewards have no impact here, showing that although calculative commitment can be bought, in the short-

term, attitudinal commitment cannot and must be developed through personal interaction.

The concept of personal repeated interaction being key fits with the concept of friendship being a component of RC and helps to explain why socialisation is so important (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2002). These authors suggested that culture influenced the ability to socialise. This was built upon by Emden *et al.* (2005), who suggested that norms and values are developed within the partnership as a result of commitment. These norms and values may differ from those already existing within the separate partner organisations. This development of new norms helps to explain why national culture has little impact on trust development and fits with Skandrani's (2011) approach to identification-based trust. Once again showing the interrelatedness of the concepts being discussed.

5.4.1 Importance of commitment

Sharma *et al.* (2006) saw commitment as being key to relational performance, as it results in three main outcomes: cooperation (Morgan and Hunt, 1994); relationship longevity (Ryu *et al.*, 2007); and satisfaction (Mohr and Spekman, 1994). This reinforces Axelrod's (1984) view that the longevity of a committed relationship helps to reduce opportunistic behaviour, and hence monitoring costs, as both parties see the benefits of repeated business. The relationship marketing literature puts the emphasis on satisfaction leading to repeat business in buyer-seller relationships. While this may not be as relevant to this study; however, satisfaction helps to build attitudinal commitment.

Attitudinal commitment helps to reduce the need for formal contracts and therefore provides the relationship with the flexibility required to operate in a dynamic situation.

The importance of information transfer is key to the development of RC and Emden *et al.* (2005) found that organisational commitment was key to organisational learning.

5.4.2 Problems of commitment

The definitions of commitment demonstrate its often implicit nature and therefore it is possible for those involved to have different perceptions of the level of commitment required (Vosgereau *et al.*, 2008). These differences in perception will affect the ability of the parties to develop attitudinal commitment, which has been demonstrated to be most important for sustaining relationships. Rinfret (2008) supported this when he found that it was the individual's personal perception which influenced their commitment to a relationship. This demonstrates that RC, via its components, is vulnerable to the behaviour of individuals, stressing the need for individual commitment to a successful alliance. As previously discussed, there is an optimal level of trust in a relationship (Thorgren and Wincent, 2011) as too trusting a relationship can be detrimental to achieving organisational objectives. Cullen *et al.* (2000) saw similar problems if calculative commitment on the part of one party was significantly stronger than the attitudinal commitment. Increased emphasis on reciprocity and socialisation will help negate this.

5.4.3 Trust-commitment cycle

This review has identified that, while they are distinct concepts, trust cannot exist without commitment, and vice versa, and that both must exist to foster the cooperative behaviour required in the ACP. Cullen *et al.* (2000) went further and stated that commitment cannot exist without trust. The trust-commitment cycle, and its impact on alliance performance, demonstrates that the two cannot be separated,

and that the existence of trust and commitment leads to reciprocity. This is in line with trust-commitment theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) which, although developed almost 30 years ago in the field of relationship marketing, is still widely cited in studies of trust and commitment in other fields, e.g., (Fullerton, 2003; Sharma et al, 2015). This theory posits that commitment and trust are interdependent and lead directly to collaborative behaviour between partners, which focuses on the long-term benefits of the relationship key to educational partnerships.

5.5 Reciprocity

Morgan and Hunt (1994) saw the interdependence of trust and commitment leading to mutuality or reciprocity, one of the key dimensions of partnership identified by Brinkerhoff (2002). There is much debate in the literature as to whether reciprocity is an output or a component of trust (Kogut, 1989; Seppänen *et al.*, 2007; Vanneste, 2016). Delgado- Marquez *et al.* (2012) further complicated matters by defining reciprocity as the trust developed by observing another party's actions and responding to them. Kanagaretnam *et al.* (2011) added to this, regarding reciprocity as being equivalent to trustworthiness. This review has already established that it will not distinguish trust from trustworthiness. The question arises, therefore, as to whether reciprocity needs to be considered as a distinct element of partnership because of its impact on trust and commitment, or whether reciprocity is a given since partnerships are developed for mutual benefit. Cullen *et al.* (2000) saw the three as interlinked and discussed the "reciprocity of trust and commitment". This section of the literature review will seek to define reciprocity, discuss its role in partnership development and examine potential mechanisms for its evaluation.

Gouldner (1960) defined reciprocity as “*a mutually gratifying pattern of exchanging goods and services*”, (p. 165) and stated that it is the basis of all exchange. As partnerships are formed for mutual benefit, this suggests that reciprocity must be present for a partnership to be formed. Gouldner (1960) went on to say that reciprocity is a cultural norm. This was echoed by Hoppner *et al.* (2015), who defined reciprocity as:

“a social norm dictating that an action performed by one party requires compensating movement by another” (p.64)

This definition is in line with the concepts of calculative commitment and trust (Lane and Backman, 1998) and further supports the view that reciprocity cannot be separated from trust or, indeed, culture. The notion that reciprocity is a “social norm” also links reciprocity to behavioural commitment (Cullen *et al.*, 2000).

Building on the work of Gouldner (1960), Hoppner *et al.* (2015) identified two forms of reciprocity: equivalence, which refers to the comparability of exchanges between partners; and immediacy, which governs the time frame of reciprocation. These two do not need to be balanced, but both must exist. Homeomorphic equivalence occurs where the exchanges are alike, while heteromorphic equivalence describes a situation where the exchanges differ but are of similar value. Morgan and Hunt, (1994) argued that homoeomorphic exchanges improve relationship quality as they demonstrate shared values and relationship benefits, thus meaning that the reciprocity is more easily recognised. However, Hoppner and Griffith (2011) disagreed with this and saw homoeomorphic reciprocity as having a somewhat negative connotation, in that the partner only does what is expected, whereas in

heteromorphic reciprocity, the partner is demonstrating willingness to be flexible and develop the partnership.

Axelrod (1980) refers to equivalence reciprocity as utilitarian. Li and Rowley (2000) added the concept of cyclical reciprocity, with the frequency and regularity of exchange being important, and suggested that a lack of cyclical reciprocity impedes trust building. This cyclical link to the concepts that both trust and commitment building are cyclical (Butler, 1995).

5.5.1 Importance of reciprocity

Reciprocity or mutuality is core to the concept of partnerships, as it is based on the notion that partnerships endure when the exchanges between individuals are mutually beneficial.

“This concept is critical in the maintenance of stability and commitment within the social system due to the establishment of mutual, enduring associations where both parties have concurrent rights and obligations”. (Kingshott and Pecotich, 2007, p.1055)

The norms generated govern behaviour and the culture within the partnership and form part of the control process. This fits with the view that where relationships are strong, there is less need for formal control. Li and Rowley (2000) supported this and found that an organisation's history of reciprocity influences the development of new relationships. This is reinforced by Delgado-Marquez *et al.* (2012), who found that trust transfer between parties is positively influenced by past experience of reciprocity with a mutual third party. This finding fits with the concept of knowledge-based trust discussed by Lewicki and Bunker (1996), again highlighting the

inseparability of reciprocity and trust. Li and Rowley (2000) found that lack of cyclical reciprocity reduces trust building. Due to its importance, reciprocity is also used in assessing resource interdependency, measuring willingness to exchange knowledge and, extensively, in evaluating past ties.

5.5.2. Problems of reciprocity

It has been established that reciprocity is the basis of all social and economic exchanges (Gouldner, 1960). Although this is usually seen as having a positive effect on a relationship, its “tit for tat” nature can be seen as negative when it is used for control or punishment. Brandes and Frank (2012), when looking at the impact of reciprocity on individuals, found that negative reciprocity adversely affected performance.

5.5.3 Summary

Reciprocity is a social norm which forms the basis of all exchanges. As the relational nature of an exchange increases, so too does the importance of reciprocity, and as a result, reciprocity is an antecedent of both commitment and trust. This inability to separate reciprocity from commitment and trust, in a relational context, perhaps explains why the literature search did not find authors who study the concept in its own right when examining business relationships.

5.6 Friendship / Social interaction

One of the key features of partnerships is their dependence on social interaction. This is reinforced by Andersson-Cedereholm and Gyimothy (2010), who suggested that successful business relationships are long-term and harmonic (with the

friendship developed supporting this harmony). Kale *et al.* (2000) went further and saw friendship as being both an antecedent and an output of successful relationships. The questions must be asked: - 'does social interaction within a business relationship necessarily lead to friendship?' and- 'is business friendship the same as personal friendship?' Interviewees stressed the difference between business relationships and personal friendships and in line with these findings this section will seek to define friendship and discuss the differences between personal and business friendships.

Friendship is defined as a:

“voluntary, personal relationship, typically providing intimacy and assistance, in which two parties like each other and seek each other’s company” (Price and Arnould, 1999, p.39)

Price and Arnould, (1999) went on to identify its key features as: intimacy, loyalty, honesty, trust and enjoyment of each other’s company. Beetles and Harris (2010) supported this and suggested that a friendship does not exist in the absence of intimacy, which is seen as the:

“disclosure of information and conversational practice that would not normally be anticipated in a business relationship” (p 351)

This supports Ingram and Zou (2008), who saw business friendship as providing opportunities to discuss problems seek counselling and companionship, thus improving the level of relational exchange.

However, it is the voluntary nature of friendship and the level of intimacy which, perhaps, differentiates business friendships from personal ones (Ingram and Zou, 2008).

5.6.1 Importance of friendship

Friendship has been examined in many studies of partnership and organisations, (Price and Arnould, 1999; Grayson, 2007; Rank, 2010) and its importance lies in its capacity to improve trust and the exchange of tacit information. It has been defined as the existence of social interaction outside the workplace. Kingshott and Pecotich (2007) supported this view and commented that social interaction is crucial in shaping attitudes. Moran (2005) added to this, portraying social interaction as key to relationship building.

“Besides the inherent value of being integrated into a friendship network, friendship has been suggested to be instrumental in obtaining other relevant resources such as important information and may also be the basis for forming coalitions”. (Ranke and Tusche, 2010, p.155)

5.6.2 Problems of friendship

Friendship, by its nature, is a dyadic relationship and Galaskiewicz (2011), highlighted that it is difficult for individuals to have a close relationship beyond a triad. However, few business relationships are so narrow, and therefore friendship can exclude others involved in the partnership. Ingram and Zou (2008) also saw friendship as being potentially problematic, as work colleagues may be asked to combine spheres of life that they may wish to keep separate. They also suggested that the intimacy required of friendship may undermine the calculatedness of a business relationship, which needs to put business priorities first. Friendship can, therefore, detract from the business relations and reduce a business's effectiveness, especially if cronyism becomes involved.

5.6.3 Summary

Business friendships need to be differentiated from personal friendships, as they are not voluntary and may lack the level of intimacy normally required. However, friendship does improve information exchange and access to resources. What must be remembered is that business relationships endure, despite changes in personnel, thus suggesting they are not primarily based on friendship (Ingram and Zou, 2008).

5.7 Mutual respect

It is interesting that Kale *et al.*, (2009) include mutual respect in their definition of RC as well as trust and friendship as respect plays an inherent part in both the development of trust and friendship and they cannot exist without it. The findings of this study saw respect being key to partnership though it is not written about widely in the literature. However, as discussed above perceptions of the level of friendship and trust between people can vary (Ranke and Tusche, (2010) suggesting that the level of respect may also differ. This section defines respect and examines its impact on partnership.

Wong, (2020) defined mutual respect as:

“a relationship between individuals who mutually recognize one another as reason-assessing beings capable of seeking justification”. (p.262)

This demonstrates the importance of recognising the skills and views of those involved and sees respect as being voluntary. Murphy *et al.* (2007) suggested that respect is part of the value framework which underpins all relationships, and that trust cannot exist without it. Chen and Tsjovold (2008) saw respect as a value embedded in culture. They found that respect was essential in collaborative

partnerships and that a lack of respect can be disruptive. Bhagat (2009) and Robert (2010) supported the view that respect is a component of trust and that it can be used to measure trust. Due to its influence on trust and commitment respect is more important in partnership than friendship as it forms the mechanism by which those involved gain understanding of each other's values and of the impact of behaviour.

5.8 Power

Many of the definitions of partnership refer to the power balance and suggest a high level of mutuality in a partnership reduces the need for a dominant partner to control the situation through the use of power (Lee, 2009). As the partnership under investigation is collaborative it could be expected that the power balance is equal. To manage power within a partnership, it is necessary to understand the power dynamics and this became evident during the data collection with the emphasis being on how power is used rather than its equality. Huxham and Beech (2008) saw power in a partnership being exercised in three main ways:

- *Power over* – a concern with control
- *Power to* – a concern with joint outcomes
- *Power for* – a concern with transferring power.

Power over - is regarded as the ability of one party to exercise control over another and is perhaps more commonly seen in transactional relationships or at the cooperation end of the partnership spectrum (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008). This asymmetric relationship is usually seen as detrimental to partnerships, with

collaboration working best when power is balanced (Myles and Taylor, 2001).

However, power over can be beneficial when the dominant party uses its power over resources to support the partnership or to prevent others from taking control.

Power to - is a key feature of coordination (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008). It demonstrates a concern in achieving joint outcomes and is seen as key to partnership success. This view can be criticised, however, as it is concerned more with partnership outcomes than with the influence of partnership members.

Power for - is mostly about the ability to transfer power and to empower the weaker party and support end users to take control (Huxham and Beech 2008). It is seen as the goal for co-production partnerships (Bradsen and Pestoff, 2023; Verschuere *et al.*, 2012). It is also often seen as being diametrically opposed to power over, as it sees partnership and collaboration as providing a mechanism for individuals to become empowered. However, Himmelman (1996) argued that empowerment requires one party to provide the opportunity for the other to take control, and therefore the two are mutually dependent.

As previously discussed in this chapter, facets of partnership do not necessarily fit into neat classifications and parties to a partnership may exhibit one or more of these types of power depending on the stage and nature of the relationship.

As well as looking at the forms of power, it is necessary to examine sources of power. At the macro level these can derive from (Huxham and Beech, 2008):

- Resources
- Importance
- Structural position

The majority of research focuses on the macro level, and on the power balance between the parties involved in the relationship as a result of the nature of the source. However, Fiol *et al.* (2002) argued that the power dynamics of day-to-day activities of a partnership at the micro level have the greatest influence on partnership outcomes. This fits with the concept of RC, which is concerned with the micro level. O’Leary and Vij (2012) also stressed the need to look at interpersonal relationships in the study of collaborative partnerships. As with other value-laden concepts, it is the perception of the power balance at the micro level which has the greatest impact (Kim *et al.*, 2005), with great emphasis being put on personal power. However, this perception is often linked to positional power at the macro level. Huxham and Beech (2008), suggested that in discussions about power it is necessary to examine both levels.

5.9 Boundary spanning

One of the key themes emerging from this literature review is the role of individuals in building and maintaining partnerships and their components and this was evident in the findings where the role of the Liaison Manager was seen as key and led to the development of this section. Kale and Singh, (2009) stressed the importance of appointing someone to manage and coordinate partnership working to ensure success. These people need to understand not only the workings of the organisations involved but also those of the partnership. These coordinators are seen by many (Williams, 2013; Pryor and Henley, 2018; Leung, 2013; Nederhand *et al.*, 2018) as boundary spanners, while McLaughlin *et al.* (2009) would refer to them as ‘relational capitalists’. Okhuysen *et al.* (2013) calling boundary spanners relational entrepreneurs. Developed in the field of organisational studies in the

1960s, boundary spanning has increasingly been seen as important in the development of successful partnerships in both the public and private sectors, and especially in relation to education partnerships (Pryor and Henley, 2018; Bordogna 2019; Fan and Stevenson, 2019; Lucas, 2020). Furthermore, Fan and Stevenson (2019) saw boundary spanners as moderating some of the negative impacts of RC, especially in ensuring that organisational goals were not subjugated to those of the partnership.

This section examines the role of boundary spanners in building relationships and defines the traits and competencies required to be effective. In doing so, it establishes the skills required to build the necessary RC. Pryor and Henley (2018) defined boundary spanning as:

“The capacity to establish direction, alignment and commitment across boundaries in service of a higher vision or goal” (p.2213)

Williams, (2013) viewed boundary spanners as the individuals whose role it is to coordinate and service the collaborative process. Several other authors (Leung, 2013; Livingston *et al.*, 2017), saw boundary spanning as covering organisational, spatial, cultural, and attitudinal boundaries. This was reflected by Wegemer and Renik, (2021), who also saw historic influences affecting the role of the boundary spanner. The historic influence was closely linked to culture and previous experience of partnerships which supports the concept of partnerships being built on calculative trust, Cullen, *et al.*, (2000). Williams, (2013), focusing specifically on the public sector, built on this but took a different perspective and looked at the roles and competences required to fulfil these activities. He identified four key roles which must

be fulfilled: reticulist entrepreneur, interpreter/communicator and coordinator. These roles are summarised below:

Reticulist	Entrepreneur	Interpreter/ Communicator	Coordinator
• Managing linkages • Managing Relationships • Powerbroker	• Problem solving	• Gatekeeping • Developing trust • Consensus building • Conflict resolution	• Coordination • Planning • Servicing

Figure 9 Key roles of Boundary Spanners (after Williams, 2013)

Williams (2013) accepted that it was difficult for one person to fulfil all these roles. He saw boundary spanners as individuals with a specific role in supporting and developing collaboration, he acknowledged that these activities must take place at all levels within a partnership and can thus involve a range of people adding to the complexity of the relationship. The need to build relationships at all levels with an organisation fits with Provan and Milward (2008), who stressed the need to examine partnership at different levels across an organisation. The wide-ranging role of boundary spanners is encompassed in Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos (2019) definition:

“people who pro-actively scan the organizational environment, employ activities to collect information and to gain support across organizational or

institutional boundaries, disseminate information and coordinate activities between their 'home' organization or organizational unit and its environment, and connect processes and actors across these boundaries". (p.3)

The researchers explored four types of boundary spanning activities: (1) information collection and knowledge exchange; (2) relational activities; (3) coordinating and negotiating with internal and external actors; and (4) mediation and facilitating cooperation. These fit well with Williams's (2013), four skills. Building on this Wegemer and Renick (2021) identified five role spectrums exhibited by boundary spanners: focus, task orientation, expertise, disposition and agency. They saw these as being influenced by 4 main factors organisational, cultural, relational and historical. The new aspect they introduced was the relational dimension which showed how important the attitude and approach of the individuals involved are. The key being whether the BS was focused on the partnership or the organisation. This attitude links to the approach taken in executing Williams, (2013) roles and is an area for exploration through the data.

5.9.1 Boundary spanning leadership

While boundary spanners are seen as individuals with responsibility for building and maintaining partnerships, Pryor and Henley (2018) researching HE, stressed the need for boundary spanning leadership, (BSL) to enable organisational ties to be developed and a boundary spanning culture created. Lee *et al.*, (2014) proposed 6 boundary spanning practices; buffering, reflecting, connecting, mobilising, weaving and transforming all of which help establish direction and build commitment to shared objectives. Pryor and Henely (2018) in their research applied these to a university setting and found that many of these practices were already in existence

but that applying them all helped universities take on new challenges. This fits with Yip *et al.*, (2016), who argued that adopting BSL allowed greater collaboration and the development of new more outward looking practices.

5.9.2 Boundary spanning and this research.

This short review of the literature on boundary spanning has highlighted the importance of boundary spanning to partnership development and maintenance. As discussed above the need to examine boundary spanning arose from the findings and this short section will aid the analysis of the findings and their evaluation in the discussion.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter provides the theoretical underpinning for this research and identifies the key issues which aid the interpretation of the data collected. It has defined the ACP as a collaborative partnership in line with Mohr and Spekman's (1994) definition:

“purposive strategic relationships between independent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit and acknowledge a high level of mutual independence.” (p.135)

The chapter identified culture, trust, commitment, reciprocity, friendship, mutual respect and power as the inputs of partnership, which are transformed as the partnership develops to enable the output of achieving the partnership objectives. However, it sees mutual respect as being more important than friendship as respect forms the basis of friendship. These inputs form Relational Capital (RC), which is the glue which holds a partnership together and can be defined as:

“the level of mutual trust, respect and friendship that arises out of close interaction at the individual level between alliance partners” (Kale et al., 2000, p.218).

The chapter then moved on to examine the role of boundary spanners in building and maintaining partnerships.

The literature review has identified that RC plays a major role in ensuring partnership success and provides a suitable lens through which to explore partnership.

The interrelationship between these elements of RC and their relationship to partnership working is summarised in the diagram below. It is these elements which will be explored through data collection.

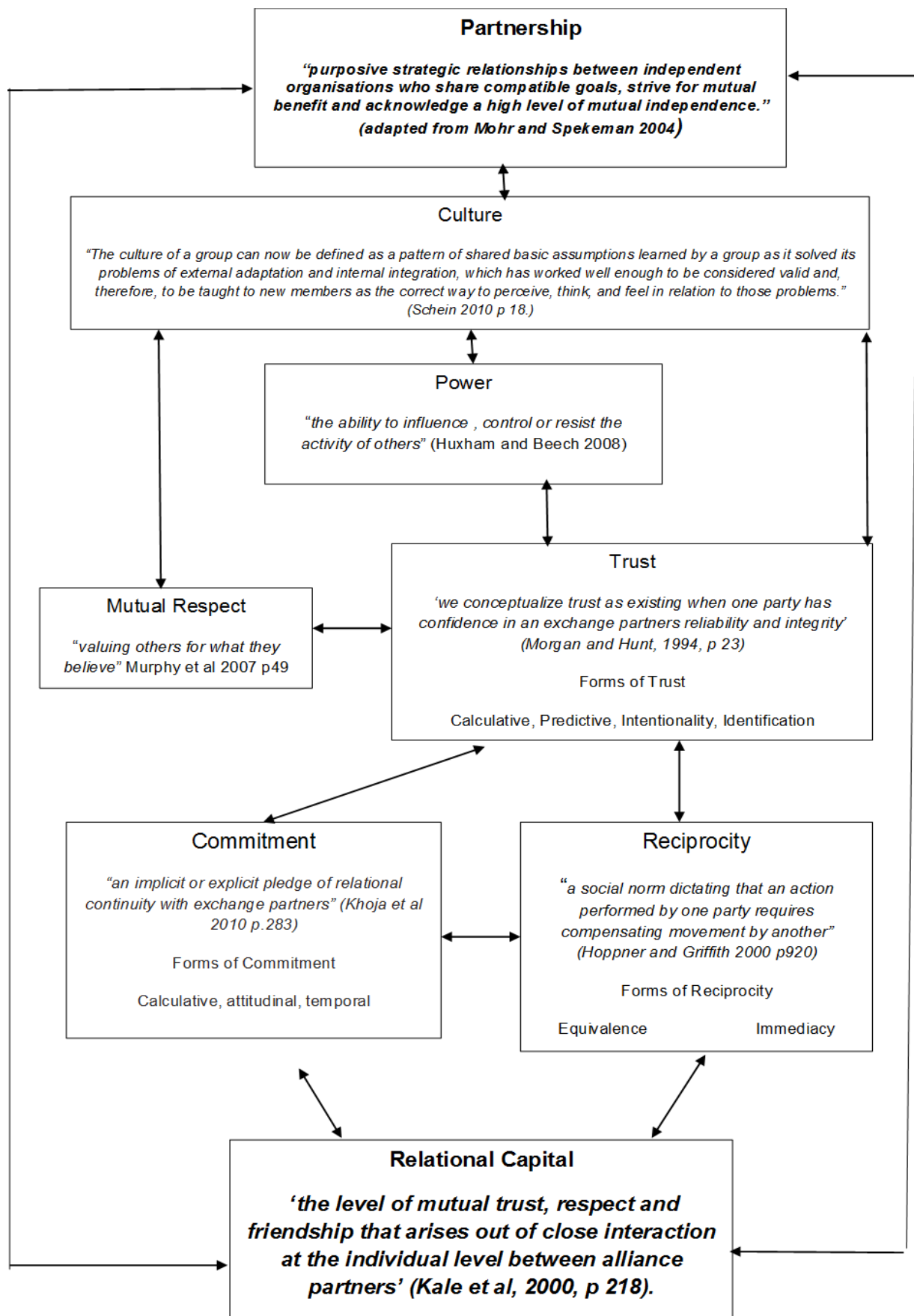


Figure 10: Interrelated aspects of Relational Capital

Part 3

Methodology

Chapter 6

Methodology

“... the only relevant arguments for using a concept are its usefulness, fruitfulness, and efficiency in genuine empirical research.” (Van Deth, 2003, p.89)

6.1 Introduction

Research is a journey of discovery, for both the researcher and the reader, as concepts are explored in a new light and new findings discovered. This chapter maps out this journey by exploring the methodological principles which underpin it and demonstrates how the above quote has guided the approach taken to answer the research question and meet the research objectives set out below:

The Research Question

How do relational dynamics influence HE-FE partnerships?

The Research Objectives

1. To explore the context of HE-FE partnerships within the education sector;
2. To review the literature to explore the factors which contribute to partnership success;
3. Investigate experiences of partnership working in the HE sector and views on what contributes to partnership success.

The chapter starts by providing a rationale for the researcher's philosophical stance of Critical Realism (CR) by placing it on the spectrum of research philosophy between positivism, at one end, and interpretivism or social constructivism at the other (Tashakori and Teddlie, 2003). It does this by comparing it to the other two main philosophies used in social science research: positivism and social constructionism (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Peters *et al.* (2012) argued that it is important to understand the differences between these approaches, as they influence the nature of the research undertaken and how results are interpreted.

The chapter then moves on to examine the chosen approaches to design, investigation and analysis. These are in line with Ryan *et al.*'s (2012) Critical Realist (CR) research spiral, which follows the methodological principles of CR research developed by Wynn and Williams (2012) and helps to ensure that all issues are addressed and have a sound theoretical underpinning. The lack of theoretical underpinning is often seen as a weakness of CR research (Prowse, 2010).

6.2 Design

The first stage of research design is to understand the researcher's view of reality and how knowledge is developed. It therefore covers; ontology, the researcher's view of reality; epistemology, the researcher's assumptions about the most appropriate ways of developing knowledge; and axiology, the researcher's view of the role of values. There is much debate on which comes first - the philosophy or the research question? This section will seek to answer this question within the context of the research question, "How do relational dynamics influence HE-FE partnerships?"

The traditional approach to research has been that philosophy determines the research question and approach and that there are two opposing research philosophies: the traditional scientific approach, positivism, seeking to identify facts; and, at the other end of the spectrum, interpretivism, seeking to explore meaning. Increasingly this is regarded as too simplistic. Guba and Lincoln, (1994), posit that in determining an appropriate approach the researcher needs to consider the ontological question, the epistemological question and the methodological question. However, determination of an “appropriate approach” depends on the researcher’s philosophical stance and this is a somewhat circular argument. While the features of partnership have traditionally been studied from a positivist stance, the literature review identified that many of the elements of partnership are value-laden and subject to interpretation, suggesting the need for an interpretivist approach to look for meaning in a social context. The topic of this research, partnership, is a social construct (Fleetwood, 2005). However, this research seeks to view the nature of partnership through a theoretical lens. This suggests that it is necessary to combine both philosophies - but is this possible? Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) would suggest that this dilemma is solved by adopting a pragmatic approach. While pragmatism provides the researcher with flexibility, there is a danger that, by seeking to find practical solutions in a changing world, the researcher may fail to fully examine the underpinning theory. Maxcy (2003, p.85) reiterates this by suggesting that pragmatism:

“allows for a number of projects to be undertaken without the need to identify invariant prior knowledge, laws, or rules governing what is recognized as “true” or “valid” as the results are of importance”.

Robson (2011) also cautions against pragmatism and stresses the importance of research having a sound theoretical underpinning, as this research does. He suggested that CR may provide a better basis for social research. This view is supported by a number of authors and CR is increasingly being adopted as the research approach for business research (e.g., Peters *et al.*, 2013; Fletcher, 2017).

The following section compares and contrasts positivism, social constructivism and critical realism before moving on to discuss critical realism in detail and its appropriateness for this research.

Beliefs and Assumptions	Positivist Approach	Critical Realist Approach	Social Constructionist Approach
Nature of Reality	Reality is single, tangible and objectively given	Reality exists independently of social interaction	Realities are socially constructed, there can be multiple constructions and realities, they are accessed through shared meaning
Relationship of knower to the unknown	Knower and known are independent	Knower and some knowns are interactive but the known can be independent	Knower and known are interactive and inseparable
Possibility of generalisation	Generalisations are possible and are time- and context-free	Generalisations are possible by uncovering the underlying essence	Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible
Possibility of Causal Linkages	There are real causes which precede or are simultaneous with their effects	Causal mechanisms exist but may not be observable	It is impossible to distinguish causes from effects
Role of values	Inquiry is value-free	Inquiry is value-driven	Inquiry is value-bound
Research methods usually used	Quantitative	Pluralist	Qualitative
Aim of knowledge	To increase predictive knowledge of phenomena	To understand causal links within a context	Deep and meaningful understanding of phenomena

Figure 11: Contrasts between positivism, critical realism and social constructivism (adapted from Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

6.2.1 Positivism

The key features of positivism are summarised above. For a number of years positivism has been the dominant paradigm which has guided researchers. It developed from the study of natural sciences and is based on the ontological stance that reality exists independently of the researcher. Positivist researchers are seeking to determine objective fact from empirical evidence. It assumes that the researcher and subject are separate from the object of investigation and the relationship between them is value free. Positivist research uses quantitative data to test hypotheses, draw firm conclusions and identify causality (Lincoln and Guba, 1994). This is the philosophical stance adopted in the study of natural sciences but there are several issues raised by its adoption in management research and, in particular, in the study of partnership (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). These are outlined below:

Management is a social construction and relies on the interaction of people, who bring their own values and beliefs into the relationship, as does the researcher. This nullifies the ability for the research to be value-free and independent of the researcher.

In addition, positivism fails to take the context into account and assumes that the data gathered can lead to generalisations. However, the interaction of people is context-specific and, while some behaviour patterns can be predicted within a given context, it is not always possible to generalise.

6.2.2 Social constructionism

Social constructionism developed from the view that research cannot be divorced from the researcher and that the research interacts with the research subject. Reality is

constructed from these social interactions, giving the name to the phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In social constructionism, researchers are attempting to make sense of the world in which they live and they recognise that the researcher and the subject being investigated create this sense through their interactions. Unlike positivists, social constructionists are not seeking to find cause and effect but to develop a view of the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2013). To achieve this, researchers are most likely to carry out in-depth qualitative studies typified by ethnography, phenomenology and discourse analysis (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2017). They also stress the need for reflexivity to explore the researcher's influence on the study.

Social constructivism overcomes many of the limitations of positivism outlined above, but its assumption that everything, including truth, is socially constructed brings into doubt the relevance of any research findings as they are the researcher's own interpretation and would be interpreted differently by others. Fleetwood (2005) suggested that social constructionism exaggerates the role of the researcher and the impact of human activity on reality. He went on to suggest that many of the tenets of positivism are useful in discussing management research, as there are known facts, and that social constructionism ignores what may be deeper explanations of phenomena. He champions a stance of critical realism. As a result of my background in natural sciences, Fleetwood's view rings true to me. The interactions of people cannot change the natural laws of the world. The sun will rise and set every day, regardless of a researcher's views. Critical Realism best describes my stance.

6.2.3 Critical realism

Critical realism has developed from the Transcendental Realism Philosophy, developed by Bhaskar in the 1970s to bridge the philosophical gap between Humean positivism and Kantian interpretivism (Bhaskar, 2008). It seeks to develop research which examines real world problems and is particularly relevant for those researchers aiming to explain *why* something happens. Syed *et al.* (2010) identified four key characteristics:

- Commitment to realist ontology, which acknowledges causal mechanisms which may not be directly observable;
- Epistemology which accepts the interpretivist approach that knowledge is socially constructed, but distinguishes between transitive and intransitive knowledge;
- Methodological pluralism, which recognises that a number of research methods may be necessary to explore material, social and conceptual structures;
- An acknowledgement that social theory cannot be purely descriptive and that the interpretation of facts is value driven.

Critical Realism (CR) is built on three main strands:

1. CR is predicated on identifying casual relationships but distinguishes between events that actually occur and the structures and the mechanisms that cause them. An event does not have to be observed to exist. However, CR recognises the external influences on events and sees context as being highly

relevant. For this reason, it adopts a stratified hierarchical approach to causality and considers both exogenous and endogenous mechanisms.

2. CR Builds on Bhaskar's (2008) transformational model of social action. It sees agency and structure as being intertwined but considers that they are both equal and distinct. Social structure is different from physical structure; it only exists through social interaction and is identifiable only through social activity, dependent on actors and relative to time and culture.
3. Social science is value-laden, and it is not possible to describe social phenomena in neutral terms.

CR therefore provides a solid ontological base for capturing the 'why?' question, by concentrating on context, meanings and interpretation of causal influences. It recognises that *"research is carried out by flesh and blood figures who are engaged in real life activities"* (Troyna, 1994, p.6) and thus provides a rich ontology which takes into account the material/objective dimension of social reality. Peters *et al.* (2012) went further and suggested that CR has developed beyond a philosophy into a research approach appropriate for studying business relationships.

The main benefits of CR are that it provides a bridge between rigour and relevance, provided that sound methodological principles are used, and, more importantly, reflects the philosophy of me, the researcher, in this study.

6.2.3.1 Limitations of critical realism

While CR seems to provide an appropriate approach for this study by overcoming some of the constraints of both positivism and constructionism, it does have its limitations (Prowse, 2010). Although based on sound philosophical principles, there

is no designated methodology; CR encourages methodological pluralism, while failing to provide guidance on how and when approaches should be used and combined. This can lead to inappropriate methodological choices and result in research which does not meet Van Deth's (2003) criteria of usefulness, fruitfulness and efficiency, which are guiding this research. Choosing the middle way, avoiding both positivist and interpretivist approaches, can also lead to a lack of analytical depth. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) also suggested that, as CR is based on naturalism and tries to take a holistic approach, often by collecting quantitative data, it is in fact a form of positivism.

The methodology and analytical techniques used in this study provide a mechanism for overcoming these limitations.

6.2.3.2 Relevance of critical realism to this research

The adoption of a CR perspective in the study of business relationships is becoming more popular (Byrne and Ragin, 2009; Ryan *et al.*, 2010; Robson, 2011), to help explain the structures, processes and mechanisms by which relationships are formed and develop. This fits with Easton's (2010) view that CR is about asking "Why things happen. Why they stay the same and identifying the conditions that brought them about."

The aim of this research is to answer these questions within the context of the people involved in the Associated College Partnership of Oxford Brookes University, by viewing the partnership through the lens of RC. This fits with the nature of CR, which attempts to understand what the components and their interaction are like in order to explain a set of events:

“CR-based research focuses on answering the question of what the components and interactions within this reality must be like in order to explain the occurrence of a given set of events.” (Wynn and Williams, 2012, p 789)

The context-specific nature of the study fits with both an interpretivist and CR approach. However, CR aims to identify causal links by discussing the generative mechanisms which result in events. Kale *et al.* (2000) view RC as the causality for partnership success and as such it is the generative mechanism CR is seeking to identify.

I have a critical realist view of the world; in that I see reality as existing on a number of levels shaped by historical knowledge and experience. The research is examining business relationships, which Fleetwood (2005) would define as being socially real, in that they are constructed by the interaction of people. It is necessary to examine both the structure of a relationship and the interactions between individuals within it.

Ontologically, the aim of the research is to understand the intricacies of these relationships - to look at the patterns confined within the framework of a partnership, more eloquently described below:

*“Untangle (the weave), but in keeping the tangle and looking at the patterns it produces” (Goerner, 1999, p.138, cited in Ryan *et al.*, 2012)*

Is a partnership the “weave” or a “generative mechanism” (Syed, 2010)? This research examines this. Lee (2000) also believed that CR can aid understanding of how and why networks develop (the ACP is a network), and that a qualitative methodology would offer a greater understanding of participants’ perceptions of relationships.

Critical Realists accept that their view of the world is based on existing theories and experiences (Robson, 2011) and, as such they are elaborating on theory (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). The topic of this research results from the researcher's personal experience of partnership and uses existing theory, RC, as the lens through which to view the partnerships under investigation and to form the basis for the design of the data collection instrument. However, the nature of the research question demonstrates that the researcher accepts that there may be other theoretical explanations. therefore, this does not restrict the researcher to gathering data only on RC. This fits with CR's adoption of epistemic relativism, in that researchers can only explain what is real to them and, in doing so, accept that knowledge, while built on theory, is fallible. However, by pre-determining the theoretical framework shaping the research, the researcher is displaying the theoretical bias that is inherent in CR and the research design needs to take this into account. It does so by using a theoretical framework to support the gathering of primary data but also seeks to identify issues outside the framework as the research question is broader than the concept of RC. The research can therefore be described as having an abductive strategy.

6.3 Abductive strategy

The emphasis in theory driven research such as that in this study is to take a deductive approach. However, this may result in missing patterns of evidence which do not conform to the theoretical framework being applied, (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013) Abduction provides an opportunity to identify patterns in the research and then explore how these may be linked to theory to a new conceptual framework (Mitchell, 2018). I see abduction as using theory as a guide to, but not a restriction on,

exploring a phenomenon. From the outset, I accept that that the theoretical concepts explored in the literature review may not provide the answer to the research question but form a useful starting point. The aim of this research is to take the theoretical concepts of partnership and RC as a starting point and consider them within the context of the Oxford Brookes University ACP. The research question being much broader than either of these concepts is abductive by nature. The elements of partnership and the framework of RC identified in the literature review (see Chapters 3- 5) provide the topics on which data will be collected and will contribute to the design of the research instrument. However, it is important that the theory does not restrict the research. Therefore, during the data collection and analysis stages, I will seek patterns which are not explained by the base theory. This is demonstrated by the decision to explore boundary spanning once its importance become noticeable from the data gathered. Using an embedded case study (Yin, 2014), data will be collected in a number of stages, with the initial findings of one case being used to refine and inform the data collection for the next. This contributes to the iterative process which underlies CR and provides an opportunity to go beyond the confines of an abductive strategy (Reed, 2009). Dubois and Gadde (2002, p.554) describe this as “*systematic combining*”. The application of abduction to the research process will be discussed later in the data collection and analysis sections.

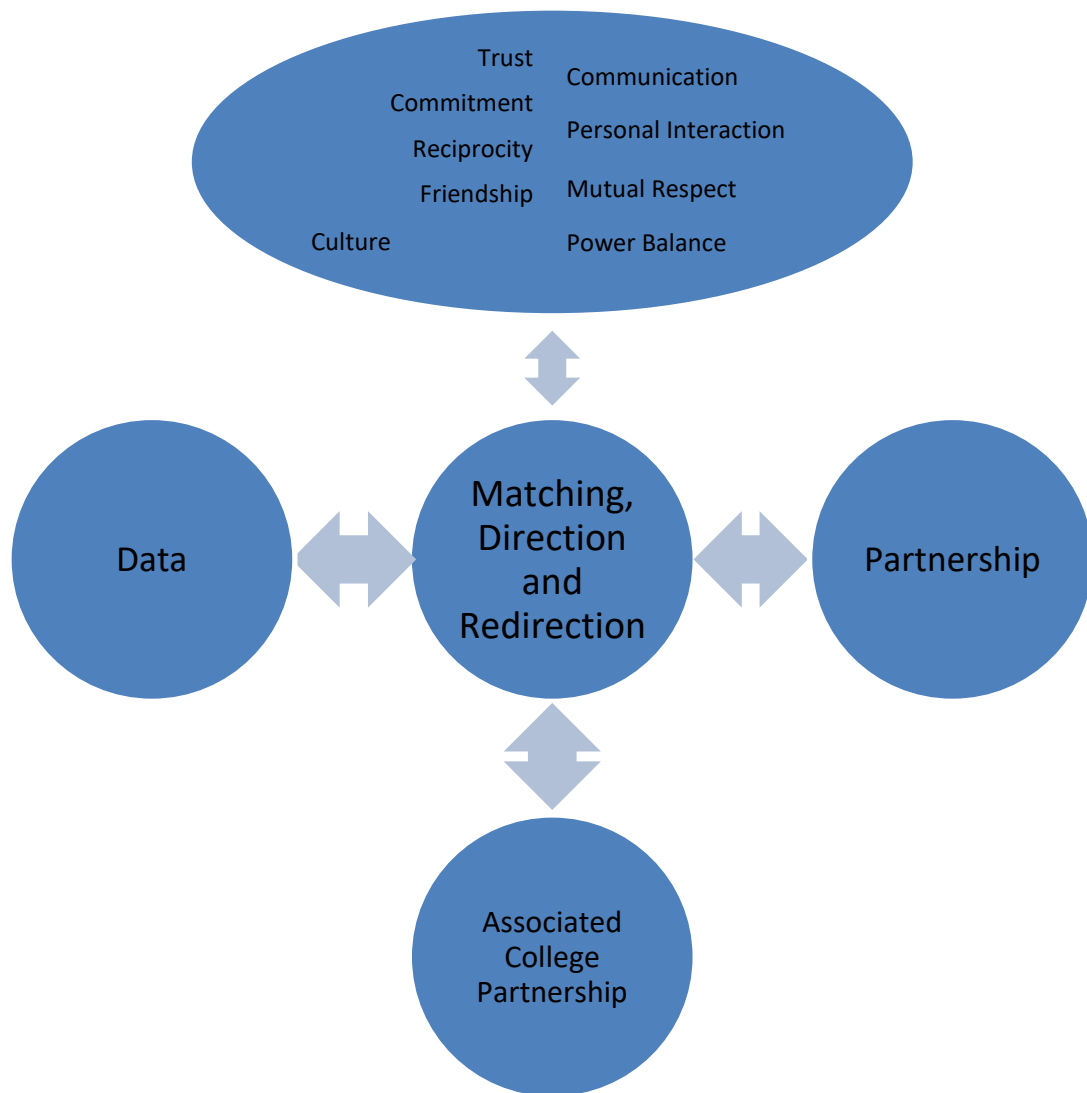


Figure 12: Abductive strategy in this research (adapted from Dubois and Gadde, 2002)

This is an accurate description of the strategy being undertaken in this study.

This study is based on the embedded case replication design (Yin, 2014).

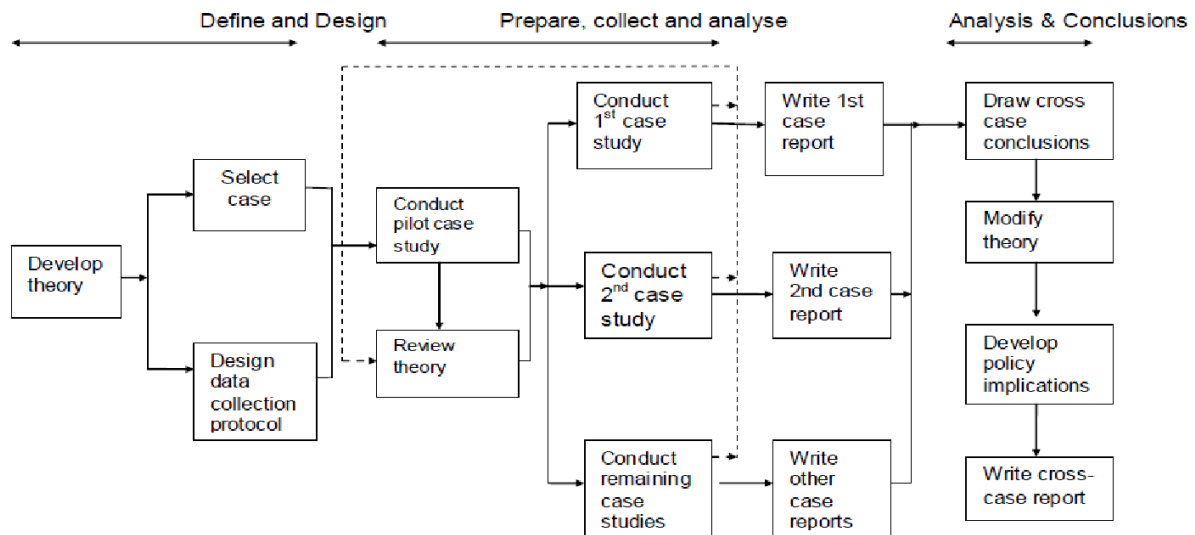


Figure 13: Embedded case replication design (adapted from Yin, 2009)

The first stage of the research was to carry out the literature review set out in Chapters 3 to 5. This review provided me with a theoretical understanding of the nature of partnership and how the use of RC as a framework identifies areas for data collection. In line with this abductive approach, the first part of this chapter looks at the theory relevant to the philosophical stance and research design adopted for this study, before seeking to apply it. The multi-stage nature of the design provides opportunities to review theory at each stage of data collection. This is an iterative process and shows the need to go beyond the confines of abduction (Ryan *et al.*, 2012).

A case study is seen as an appropriate research design for CR studies (Easton, 2010; Prowse, 2010; Tsang, 2013), as by its very nature it is providing the context which CR requires. Bueno and Salmadin (2004) went further and suggested the use of case studies to understand the value-laden nature of partnership. The unpicking of

the complexity of partnership in order to gain an understanding of what works well is the essence of this research.

6.4 Case study

Case studies are being used increasingly in business research (Byrne and Ragin 2009; Easton, 2010; Stake, 2000; Wynn and Williams, 2012). Yet, despite the frequency of its use, the term has multiple definitions and case study is referred to as a research strategy, an approach, a method and a design. This study adopts the view of several authors (Verschuren, 2005; Robson, 2011; Yin, 2014) that case study is a research strategy.

Yin is seen as one of the leading proponents of the use of case studies in research (Tight, 2010). He argues that case study is a research strategy as it incorporates design, data collection and analysis. His definition, used in this study, stresses the need to consider not only the strategy adopted but also its appropriateness for the topic being investigated.

“A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- *investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when.*
- *the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”*
(Yin, 2014, p.16)

Verschuren (2003), while arguing that ‘case research’ would be a better description, also saw case study as a research strategy, as expressed in this detailed definition:

“A case study is a research strategy that can be qualified as holistic in nature, following and iterative-parallel ways of preceding, looking at only a few strategically selected cases, observed in their natural context in an open-ended way, explicitly avoiding (all variants of) tunnel vision, making use of analytical comparisons or sub-cases and aimed at description and explanation or complex entangled group attributes, patterns, structures or processes.” (p.137)

This definition stresses the complex nature of the phenomenon being examined through case study and the need to use multiple sources of data. This is simplified by Yin (2014), who identified 3 key features of case study research which are in line with the CR perspective underpinning this study:

1. Examines a distinct situation in which there are multiple variables;
2. Requires multiple sources of evidence;
3. Is based on theoretical propositions which guide data collection.

The holistic nature of case study research means that it can be used for a variety of purposes: descriptive, explanatory and exploratory. Eisenhardt (1989) added testing and generating theory to this, whereas Ketokivi and Choi (2014) saw case research as having three main approaches: theory generation, as developed by Eisenhardt, (1989); theory testing; and theory elaboration. The latter is the purpose of this research.

Further classification is provided by Yin (2014), who identified four design types based on the number of cases and the unit of analysis:

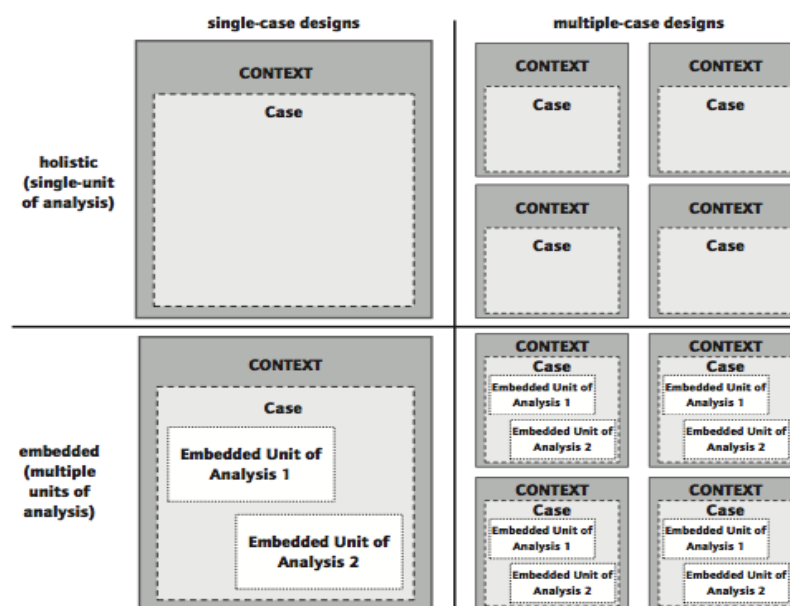


Figure 2.4 Basic Types of Designs for Case Studies
SOURCE: COSMOS Corporation.

Figure 14: Four types of case study (Yin, 2014)

In determining the most appropriate case study design it is necessary to consider Van Deth's (2003) criteria. What is the most useful way to study such a complex phenomenon?

The ACP itself cannot be described as a case; despite it being a clearly defined entity (Yin, 2014), it is subject to an array of external influences and develops to meet them, suggesting that the context is fluid so the ACP cannot be seen as a single case. A multiple case design, where a number of partnerships between the university and colleges of FE were compared and contrasted, would provide for the ability to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena in different contexts and provide for comparison. This approach was the initial choice of the researcher. However, these partnerships cannot be described as a case, as they are not

necessarily clearly defined and differ in nature. The context and cultural differences would also mean that the number of different variables involved would make the research more complex than necessary and impractical in the time available. It would also be seen as an extensive study, whereas this research has an intensive approach (Stake, 2000). An approach based on an embedded case study design is therefore seen as most appropriate. It provides for comparison but within a single context, thus reducing the variables which may influence the findings.

For the purposes of this study, the case is the relationship between one college and Oxford Brookes University, which can be clearly defined and has specific boundaries. The college chosen from the partnership runs a number of different programmes in partnership with OBU and therefore provides sufficient embedded cases to provide replication. It also has several different partnerships, which have been in existence for varying lengths of time, giving opportunities to look at the impact of time on the partnership while being bounded by the same context. A temporal approach is key when seeking to examine process, (Langley, *et al.*, 2014)

However, the need established in the literature review to examine partnership at different levels makes it difficult to identify a number of discrete cases embedded within the main case, as this would exclude examining the role of senior management, i.e., the partnership at organisational level, as this cannot be defined as a discrete case (Yin, 2014). This research is seeking to examine the partnership case from several different perspectives, rather than to examine discrete cases, and so it shares similarities with an embedded case by looking at a single case from different perspectives.

6.5 Research design

The cornerstones of good research are generally regarded as generalisability, reliability and validity. Several authors, such as Tracy (2010), have questioned their relevance to qualitative research and their application to this study is discussed later in the chapter.

One of the key criticisms of case study research, especially when based on qualitative data, is that the findings are not generalisable. Case study research is not seeking to be statistically generalisable. However, both Easton, (2010) and Yin, (2014) see case study research as seeking to expand and generalise theories thus developing analytical generalisation. Ketokivi and Choi, (2014) see analytical generalisation occurring when the reader can see the relevance of the research to their context. This fits with the CR approach, which seeks to identify tendencies rather than laws, (Fletcher, 2017).

Yin (2014) identified four tests of research design which must be addressed.

Tests	Case Study Tactic	Phase of research
Construct Validity	Multiple sources	Data collection
	Chain of evidence Key informants' review of draft report	Report
Internal Validity	Pattern matching Explanation building	Data analysis

	Rival explanations Logic modules	
External Validity	Apply replication logic	Design
Reliability		Data collection

Figure 15: Four tests of research design (Yin, 2014)

Construct validity refers to the choice of appropriate measures for the subject under investigation. The subjective nature of validity is improved by basing the research on recognised theoretical frameworks, being able to track the collection of evidence and allowing informants to view drafts of their reports, However, Morse (2018) warned against allowing interviewees to amend transcripts as this changes the nature of the data collected, and nuances can be lost. Using multiple sources of evidence is also seen as a way of increasing validity, as in this research where data was gathered from different perspectives.

Internal validity is usually only seen as relevant where the research is exploratory or seeking to establish a causal link (Yin, 2014) as is the case in this research. Internal validity was achieved by analysing each set of interviews and looking for patterns in them before using the lessons learned to inform the next set of interviews (Morse, 2018).

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings are generalisable and relates directly to the research question. As previously discussed, case study research is seeking analytical not statistical generalisability.

Reliability refers to the capacity for the research to be repeated and to obtain the same result in the same situation. However, Morse (2018) argues that this is only possible where a strict interview schedule is used, and each interviewee is asked the same question in the same order. This does not happen in interactive interviews such as those carried out in this research where I learned from each interviewee and my questioning developed from there. Reliability in a traditional sense cannot be achieved in an interview situation where the interaction between interviewer and interviewee will influence the data collected. One way in which reliability can be seen to be achieved is by reaching saturation (Morse, 2018) where interviewees start to answer question in a similar way as was the case in this research.

6.6 Case study and critical realism

Sayer, (2000) saw CR as supporting a range of research designs, which may be extensive or intensive. Case study is seen as being intensive, in that it is looking in depth at a particular phenomenon, and several CR researchers (Ackroyd, 2000; Easton, 2010; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Wynn and Williams, 2012) have viewed case study as providing a practical approach for exploring situations on a small scale where the research process is trying to understand things as they are.

“Case research allows the researcher the opportunity to tease out and disentangle a complex set of factors and relationships albeit in one or a small number of instances.” (Easton, 2010, p.119)

This situation describes the nature of the ACP which this study is investigating.

Wynn and Williams (2012) saw three aspects of case study research which closely reflect the principles of CR:

- A research question which is seeking to identify causality;
- A suitably bounded case which exhibits the phenomenon under investigation;
- Recognition that the research is aiming to be theoretically or analytically generalisable (Yin, 2014).

These three aspects are also recognised by Easton (2010). Their application to this study is discussed below.

6.7 Qualitative research

One of the features of CR is the recognition of methodological pluralism (Fletcher, 2017). However, the nature of this study and the number of people involved mean that quantitative techniques are inappropriate, and this is a qualitative study.

Hammersley (2013) defines qualitative research as:

“a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data driven research design to use relatively unstructured data to emphasise the essential role of subjectivity in the research process to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to uses verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis.” (p.12)

The key features of qualitative research are summarised below:

Qualitative research
Emergent and flexible design
Small scale in terms of numbers of people or situations researched
Inductive logic
Focus on meanings
Subjective - reflexivity of researcher important
Context specific
Value laden
Little or no use of numerical data
Social world is viewed as a creation of the people involved
Findings and analysis a matter of interpretation

Figure 16: Key features of qualitative research (adapted from Robson, 2011)

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) see qualitative research as a bricolage, in that qualitative researchers are weaving together a variety of information and data sources to develop an in-depth picture. This suggests that qualitative research is inherently multi-method and triangulation is in-built. Richardson (2000) rejected the notion of triangulation and suggested that qualitative research is a multi-faceted crystal, providing the researcher with the opportunity to look at the same issue from different angles. His view is that rather than gather data from multiple sources, the researcher needs to interpret the data from different angles. Both approaches demonstrate that there is a need for multiple perspectives in qualitative research, whether this is through sources of data or methods of interpretation. This multiple perspective will be discussed further in relation to both the data collection and analysis approaches.

The need to take a wider view means that there is no single method of data collection available to qualitative researchers and it is necessary to match the approach to the research question. This fits with the CR philosophy inherent in this study and with the views of Van Deth (2003), who stressed the need for multi-method and multi-level research to strengthen the value of empirical data in researching Social Capital, from which RC develops.

As discussed above the quality of quantitative research is assessed using the criteria of generalisability, validity, reliability and objectivity. The nature of qualitative research casts doubt on the usefulness of these criteria and a number of qualitative researchers, (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Morse, 2018), have suggested that the wide variety of qualitative research methods means that it is not possible for there to be a standard approach for evaluating their quality. In particular, qualitative research is not designed to be generalisable to other contexts but to provide a generality in terms of theoretical implications (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). They stress the need for case research to meet their duality criteria which require research to be “*situationally grounded and seek a sense of generality*”, (p.234) By this they meant that the researcher must be empirically disciplined and take into account idiosyncrasies in the data collection phase and seek to find a broader theoretical understanding. The sense of generality means that while the context of the research is unique the researcher should look at how their research is relevant in other situations.

Tracy (2010) identifies eight criteria for evaluating qualitative research: worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence. Although these criteria are subjective their practicality was tested and endorsed by Gordon and Patterson (2013). Welch and Piekkari (2017)

warned against sticking rigidly to any evaluative framework as this mitigates against the nuances of qualitative research.

6.8 Data collection

6.8.1. Sampling

Qualitative research aims to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through the interpretation of rich data. It is therefore important that the data collected can be seen as “trustworthy” (Creswell, 2013). This simplifies Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) advice that qualitative researchers need to ensure the credibility, trustworthiness and dependability of the data being gathered. Section 6.4 explained the rationale for choosing the selected case. The choice of interviewees was also purposive, in that they all needed to have first-hand experience of partnership within the chosen case and as the literature review identified the need to explore partnership at a number of levels: policy, organisational and individual (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Provan and Milward, 2004; Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008) there needed to be representatives from each level. Interviewees were therefore, in many ways, self-selecting, as only a limited number of people fit one or more of these criteria. Some were already known to the researcher, whilst others were recommended by colleagues and senior managers. The original intention was to interview representatives from partnerships between the college and each of the four Oxford Brookes faculties as well as representatives of senior management. However, staff changes in one of the partnerships with TDE coupled with another being prepared for closure meant this was not possible. The problems of maintaining confidentiality within a relatively small sample will be discussed in the data analysis section.

6.8.1.1 The Interviewees

Interviewee	Role	Case
A	OBU UK partnership team. Involved in setting up ACP. Developed OBBS partnership with B. Career in academic management. Left OBU shortly after being interviewed	OBBS and Management
B	College course leader for both Fd and BA and department head. Over 20 years of experience of teaching in FE. Involved in developing the FD and BA top-up. Experience of working with other universities. Joined college SMT during this research.	OBBS and Management
C	College full-time cohort leader. Moved to teaching in FE after career in HR with major international organisation. Teaches Level 2 to Level 6.	OBBS
D	OBBS partnership manager. Career in academic management.	OBBS
E	College part-time cohort leader. Lifelong career teaching in FE. Teaches from level 2 to level 6.	OBBS

F	Member of UK partnership team. Experience of partnership working with other universities.	Management
G	Member of college senior management Team and ACP steering group. Lifelong career in FE.	Management
H	Liaison Manager in TDE. Former member of ACP steering group.	Liaison Manager
J	Former Education Liaison Manager. Long career of teaching in education and developing education partnerships both at OBU and elsewhere.	Education
K	Current Education Liaison Manager. Long career at OBU and working with ACP but mostly at PG level.	Education
L	College Education course Leader. Taught on the Fd for several years before becoming course leader 2 years ago. Also led Fds in partnership with other universities. Teaches HE only.	Education

M	College lecturer. Taught on the FD for a number of years. Experience in FE teaching but now concentrates on HE.	Education
N	OBU department head.	Health
P	Healthcare Liaison Manager. Background in nursing.	Health
Q	College department head. Background in nursing. Worked with P in setting up the Fd and had taught on it for the first 2 years before taking up her current role.	Health
R	College Healthcare course leader. Recruited to teach HE but now also teaches FE.	Health

Figure 17: Profile of interviewees

6.8.2 Interviews

Interviews have become one of the most common ways of data collection to gather both quantitative and qualitative data used by researchers taking a range of epistemological stances. Silverman (2004) went as far to say that we live in an “interview society”. Brinkmann, (2018) went further and suggested that interviews have become such a natural part of research that some researchers no longer feel the need to justify their use. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) explained the popularity of interviews in the following way:

“For survey researchers, the interview can be a reliable instrument giving valid data on facts and attitudes. For the qualitatively minded researcher, the open-ended interview offers the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another, or even for a politically correct dialogue where a researcher and researched offer mutual understanding and support.” (p. 304)

While the popularity of interviews has the advantage of more interviewees being aware of what is expected of them, and in theory can enhance response rates (Fontana and Frey 2000), it can also have negative impacts. Due to the familiarity of the format, interviewees may give answers that they assume the interviewer is seeking to help the researcher though this can detract from the quality of the data and add to bias. This will be explored further later in the chapter,

The key aim of a qualitative interview is to access the interviewees’ understanding of and views on a particular research topic (Cassel, 2009). For this study, this meant the interviewees’ understanding and experience of partnership.

Although the use of interviews is common, their structure can vary widely, from structured to unstructured and from individual to group, using a range of techniques including face-to-face, telephone and increasingly electronic communications.

Saunders *et al.* (2023) referred to interviews as standardised and non-standardised.

Structured interviews are more common in quantitative research, which is descriptive or explanatory. The aim is to gather responses to a range of standard questions.

This provides for replication and allows statistical analysis (Cassell, 2009). At the opposite end of the spectrum are qualitative unstructured interviews, where interviewees are encouraged to talk freely on a topic, which gives the researcher an opportunity to explore a subject in depth and, as such, are usually linked to exploratory qualitative research, though they can be used more widely. The aim of this research is to compare accounts and understanding of the same phenomenon (King, 2004). Therefore, the use of semi-structured interviews, where I had a list of questions or themes based on the theoretical framework supporting the study, will help to achieve this aim, while at the same time providing opportunities for interviewees to discuss wider issues. This enabled me to gain a wide range of views on the topic, but also provided the opportunity to explore other relevant areas which were identified during the course of the interview and is in line with the abductive design and the approach being taken for this research.

Although interviews are often regarded as individual events, the development of the interview schedule and the learning which the researcher takes from interviews means that they become interrelated and triangulation is achieved by linking interviews, other sources of data and theory, providing a richer interpretation. (Cassell, 2009).

While interviews are a common form of data collection, there are a number of criticisms.

6.8.2.1 Limitations of interviews

Yin (2012) identifies four main weakness of interviews which must be addressed for interviews to provide good quality data.

- Bias due to poorly articulated questions;
- Response bias;
- Inaccuracies due to poor recall;
- Participant reflexivity – interviewee gives what the interviewer wants to hear.

Alongside these issues, interviews are based on one-to-one interaction with the interviewer setting the agenda. Researchers must be careful that this inherent power imbalance is not detrimental to the interviewee (Cassell, 2009).

6.8.3 Application to this study

Data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews. Some members of the ACP are already known to me and can be described as key informants (Saunders *et al.*, 2023). As they are all academics or academic administrators, their familiarity with research and interviews can be seen as an advantage; however, it could also have some drawbacks, such as interviewees giving the answers that they think are expected (Fontana and Frey, 2000). However, as the underlying theme of this research is to gain an understanding of participants' personal experience, this should not be a problem with the semi-structured nature of the interviews providing an opportunity to clarify understanding and meaning. I also had the opportunity to re-interview some participants had the need arisen.

My personal involvement with the ACP and my relationship with some participants could be seen as a concern. As the academic liaison for the OBBS partnership my involvement was that of a “*boundary spanner*”, (Marchington and Vincent, 2004), which suggests a conflict of interest and could lead to bias. This is explicitly acknowledged, and my influence is explored in the research through the reflexive nature of the research (Mezirow, 1981). The CR philosophy underpinning the research also recognises that the researcher’s view of the world will influence the nature of observations made (Dobson, 2002). However, the trust already established should result in interviewees being more open and honest (Robson, 2011). However, my personal involvement with the ACP declined during the research period. This, coupled with staff changes, meant that I only had a working relationship, at the time the interviews were carried out, with the interviewees involved in the OBBS case. Although I knew members of the senior management team, I was not directly working with them, and I did not have a relationship with the other interviewees. The ability to minimise bias is also reflected in the multi-stage nature of the study and the use of a number of embedded cases means data is collected from a number of sources. The retroductive nature of the data analysis also provided an opportunity to re-interview some informants, if necessary, to clarify any issues.

For the first set of interviews which form the OBBS case study, the elements of RC formed the framework for data collection and the views of interviewees were collected against these topics. The use of the interview schedule, (Appendix 3), with all interviewees being asked the same questions allowed for comparison at the analysis stage. However, the semi-structured nature of the interviews also provided opportunities to explore issues affecting the partnership, beyond RC and examine

new areas and possible causal links. This can be described as abduction, (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 1994) and will be discussed further in the analysis section.

However, I found that the use of the interview prompt restricted the nature of the interviews and confined the scope of the discussions to those areas which were the focus of the questions, (Fontane and Frey, 2000) While the respondents were asked if there were any other issues they wished to discuss, few were added thus reducing the scope for abduction. The only topic interviewees did raise was the culture. I had omitted this from the interview guide as due to the shared goals and values, I had assumed that there was a common culture. The impact of this on the research will be discussed later.

Respondents providing the answer they thought I wanted was illustrated by the use of academic terminology when answering questions, which I was not expecting. One interviewee frequently referred to Hofstede in the discussion of culture, while another discussed partnership in terms of Johari's window. On reflection, this should have been explored further during the interviews.

Brinkman (2018) discussed the problems of power imbalance in interviews and as discussed in Chapter 2 due to the nature of the agreements between OBU and the college I saw the partnership as one of equals. However, this was not the view of the college interviewees with one interviewee commenting "*You are our expert so we rely on your views*". This could have been the reason the interviewees did not raise other issues though they had the opportunity to do so. They had provided the information they thought I wanted to hear.

To conclude the interview respondents were asked to rank the level of importance of each component of RC. The aim of this task was to get some indication of the

relative importance they gave to the components so that this could be explored further in subsequent interviews. The interrelatedness of the components of RC identified in the literature review means that interviewees found it almost impossible to separate them, with one respondent commenting that *“they fit together, so they can’t be ranked”*. This example of using a quantitative technique for qualitative research was a mistake often made by qualitative researchers (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014) and led to me reframing the interview guide and my approach to data collection,

The use of a detailed interview schedule perhaps coupled with a perceived power-imbalance reduced the scope for interviewees to explore issues beyond the confines of the schedule thus reducing the scope for abduction. As a result, I developed a more flexible and less directive interview guide for the remaining interviews so that issues more important to the interviewee could be explored. (Appendix 4).

All interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of the interviewee, and then transcribed verbatim soon afterwards by me to ensure familiarity with and closeness to the data (Richards, 1998). The transcription process also provided an opportunity for me to identify queries and ask interviewees for clarification at an early stage of data analysis. To ensure confidentiality the recordings and transcripts were kept by me on my personal laptop with copies on my own hard drive. I am the only person with access to these.

6.8.3.1 Timeline of data collection

In line with the embedded case design the data was collected and analysed for each case before the interviews were carried out for the next. This enabled the lessons

learned from each case to inform data collection in the next. The table below sets out the timescales for data collection and the key lessons taken forward.

Case	Period of Data Collection	Key Issues	Action
OBBS	Summer 2015	Refocus data collection to move away from elements of RC to what makes a partnership successful.	Update literature to look at culture. Strengthen literature on collaboration and power balance. Respect v friendship
Management	Spring/Summer 2016	Collaborative partnership. Equal power sharing.	
Liaison Manager	Autumn 2016	Importance of Liaison Manager.	Add literature on Boundary Spanning. Focus more on differences between HE and FE culture.
Early Years	Summer 2017	Partnership based on making best use of each other's strengths. HE culture in FE based on application of knowledge.	Strengthen literature on key feature of HE culture being application of knowledge.
Healthcare	Summer 2018	Emphasis on common values and respect rather than friendship.	Strengthen literature on personal versus. professional friendship. Update literature review to improve currency.

Figure 18 Timeline for data collection

6.9 Data analysis

One of the main problems of collecting qualitative data through interviews is the resultant large amount of narrative data which must be analysed. The key to success in qualitative research is to bring order to these stories and to ensure that this is done in a consistent and thorough manner, to contribute to the credibility of the findings. There are many approaches to qualitative data analysis: phenomenological, grounded theory, discourse, etc. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Yin (2014) highlighted five main ways of analysing case study data:

- Pattern matching;
- Explanation building;
- Time series analysis;
- Logic models;
- Cross-case synthesis.

With the exception of time series analysis, all are relevant to this study and can be seen as types of thematic analysis, in that they are looking for commonalities in the data.

Boyzatis (1998) saw thematic analysis as being key to the interpretation of qualitative research, and defined this as:

“a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organises possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon.” (p. vii)

Thematic analysis is seen as an effective method to gain understanding from qualitative data, as it provides a useful and meaningful way of organising data and demonstrating its richness (Pope *et al.*, 2007). In line with the abductive strategy adopted, the identification of themes can result from both the literature and the data collected and therefore allows for both theory testing and building (retroduction).

Template analysis (King, 2004) is a form of thematic analysis usually used for interview transcripts, although it can be developed for other forms of qualitative data. The first stage of the process is to develop a coding template which identifies the main themes under investigation.

6.9.1 Nvivo

Nvivo is software designed to aid qualitative data analysis and is ideally suited for template analysis (Waring and Wainright, 2008), in that it provides for the development of themes and for cross-referencing them. The use of software means that, although each case can be coded separately, there is then an opportunity for cross referencing themes, making pattern matching simpler (Weitzman, 2000) and using the variety of analytical techniques described by Yin (2014).

While the use of software is seen by many as an aid to data analysis, there are criticisms. One of the main tenets of qualitative data analysis is that the researcher needs to be close to the data (Richards, 1998). The use of software to aid analysis has been criticised for separating the researcher from the data (Lee and Fielding, 1991) and even for building theory for the researcher, but the software cannot develop the codes or group content thematically without the input of the researcher (Miles and Weitzman, 1995) and therefore it is the researcher who is always in control (Weitzman, 2000). However, there is a possibility that the ease of coding and

grouping may result in the researcher only finding the obvious (Lee and Fielding, 2001). How Nvivo was applied in this study is discussed in Section 6.9.2.

6.9.2 Application to this study

As this study is viewing partnership through the lens of RC, the elements of RC formed both the initial framework for data collection and the initial “coding template”, providing a mechanism for initial organisation and grouping of the data. This not only helped to identify key issues, but also resulted in areas outside of the template being investigated and provided an opportunity to reject issues not raised by the interviewees. The interview checklists and initial coding template are set out below,

Interview checklist

Overview of views on partnership

What makes a good partnership?

What is important to you in developing partnerships?

How important are individuals in a successful partnership?

Relational Capital

What is your understanding of the phrase Relational Capital?

What is your understanding of the following terms and how they affect partnership ? Please give examples.

Trust

Commitment

Reciprocity

Friendship/ Mutual respect

Balance of power

Are there any other issues you would like to raise?

Figure 19 Initial Interview guide and coding template

The application of the template to the first case study, (OBBS) identified that interviewees had placed emphasis on culture differences between OBU and the college whereas I had assumed that there was a common culture. As a result of this the literature review was updated to include a review of the literature on culture and especially a discussion of what was meant by an HE culture. The interview guide was updated to be less directive with the emphasis on Section 1 rather than on Relational Capital.

<u>Interview checklist 2</u> Overview of views on partnership What makes a good partnership? What is important to you in developing partnerships? How important are individuals in a successful partnership? Are there any other issues you would like to raise? .

Figure 20 Interview guide 2

The data for each set of interviews was analysed before the next set were carried out allowing for issues raised by one group to be expanded upon by the next group as shown in Figure 17. This shows the iterative nature of CR research and is in line with systematic combining (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). This led to new codes being added to ensure that views on culture, collaboration, communication and boundary spanning activities could be easily identified. These are set out in the table below:

New Code	Reason
Culture	Highlighted as key in OBBS case study
Collaboration	Sub heading in partnership based on OBBS and Management Study
Boundary Spanning with Williams, (2013) key activities as sub codes	Liaison Manager as a Boundary Spanner
Boundary Spanning Leadership	Identify examples to strengthen discussion
Communication	Clarify what is meant by good communication raised in all cases.

Figure 21 Additional coding

I saw Nvivo as a tool to aid and speed up data analysis and as a way of storing data. Coding helped to identify that some terms were used interchangeably e.g., partnership and relationship, trust and trustworthiness and thus aided comparison and analysis. However, by initially relying too heavily on the coding template outliers were missed as they were less easy to classify so the focus was on the role of Relational Capital rather than looking for other explanations as would be expected in an abductive strategy. Although, during the course of data collection and analysis the coding template was expanded as depicted in Figure 21. to aid cross- case comparison I returned to examining the original transcripts so that nuances could be more easily seen. Nvivo was helpful but is no substitute for being close to the data.

6.10 Ethical considerations

This research was conducted in line with the Oxford Brookes University Code of Practice for the Ethical Standards for Research Involving Human Participants (Oxford Brookes University 2014) and was approved by the University Ethics Committee. The Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1) was sent to all those invited to interview, and participants were asked to sign the consent form, (Appendix

2), before being interviewed. All interviews were recorded before being transcribed by the researcher, which helps to maintain confidentiality but also ensures that the researcher is very familiar with the data (Richards, 1998).

The main ethical issue in this research is maintaining anonymity in reporting the findings as the number of people involved in the individual embedded cases is very small. This has been dealt with by not naming the college and providing only outline details of interviewees. Since the interviews several have either left the organisations or changed role helping to preserve anonymity.

6.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to map out the methodology of this research. In doing so, it set out to explain the usefulness, fruitfulness and efficiency of the approach used to answer the research questions and meet the research objectives (Van Deth, 2003).

The chapter started by discussing why CR best fits with the researcher's personal philosophy and beliefs and discussing its appropriateness for exploring the research question.

It then explored why an embedded replication case study design was an appropriate way of meeting the research objectives, demonstrating that it provides the ability to compare and contrast views and to explore new issues that arise.

The use of semi-structured interviews and how they align with abductive research was discussed. These opportunities are enhanced by using Nvivo to aid thematic analysis and simplify cross-case analysis.

The chapter closes with a summary of the ethical considerations which arose.

Having examined the methodology used to gather the data, the next section will examine the key findings and begins by setting the context of the cases under consideration.

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Part 4

The Findings

Chapter 7

The Case

7.1 Introduction

This research examines the nature of partnership in the HE sector through the use of an embedded case design. This allows for cross-case comparison of the findings.

The research explores the partnership between Oxford Brookes University, (OBU), and a single large college of Further Education which delivers a range of programmes, from apprenticeships to master's level degrees. The college has a number of different partnerships with different faculties within OBU. The college also works with a number of other universities to deliver HE. To ensure confidentiality, the college is not named and referred to as “the college.”

The context of teaching HE in FE was set out in Chapter 2 and key issues arising from the literature discussed in Chapters 3-5

The chapter starts by providing information about the case under examination before the subsequent chapters looking at five embedded cases.

7.2 The Associated College Partnership

The Oxford Brookes Associate College Partnership (ACP) was started in 2004 to facilitate the provision of HE in colleges of FE within England. It does not encompass the multiple collaborative arrangements that OBU has with colleges and universities worldwide. This new partnership provided a mechanism by which OBU could take

advantage of the introduction of Foundation degrees in response to the government drive to widen participation in Higher Education (HE), changes in HEFCE funding and pressure from Oxford City Council to reduce the number of students on campus. In line with the philosophy of Foundation degrees, the partnership seeks to provide high quality HE through colleges of FE to those who, traditionally, may not have considered a university degree. Its importance to OBU was further strengthened in 2012, with the introduction of £9,000 fees, as part of OBU's commitment to widening participation in HE. There are some 1500 students studying for OBU degrees on 62 programmes managed by eight partner colleges of FE (Oxford Brookes University, 2021). The nature of the partnership fits the description of partnership proposed by Iyer (2003) and discussed in the literature review: it is a collaboration between two organisations who come together for a specific purpose while retaining their own identities.

In common with many other collaborations between HE and FE (Parry, 2016), the standard ACP delivery model involves the franchising of student numbers from the University to the ACP partner, for the delivery of programmes that have been developed in collaboration between OBU and one or more ACP member colleges. In most cases, the programmes were initially developed in partnership with one college and then expanded to any or all of the members of the ACP if they have the resources and expertise to run the programme and there is a demand for it. Some programmes, e.g., Healthcare, were initially developed as Foundation degrees to be delivered on campus before being extended to the ACP. For most programmes, the modules delivered are the same in each college, but on occasion there is some difference where there are particular local needs. For example, the BA (top-up) Early Years and Childhood Studies in Swindon has a module on Outdoor Play, whereas in

Solihull this is replaced with Literature for Young Children. There are also some differences in modules in some engineering degrees, to reflect availability of equipment and local employer needs. All programmes with the same names share the same learning outcomes. Students have enrolled status at both the partner College and at the University and are encouraged to make full use of university facilities, although geographic distance can prevent this. To help students to integrate into OBU, most programmes hold induction days at OBU, as well as other events during the course of the degree. Students also have the opportunity to participate in OBU graduation ceremonies.

In line with good practice in partnership development (Mohr and Spekman, 1994), when developing new partnerships and programmes OBU takes into account the market demand, strategic fit and financial viability of a proposed new partnership. When OBU first started developing Fds, care was taken that the courses on offer, while allowing for progression to the final year of on campus degrees, did not compete directly with those on campus, while still requiring the expertise of OBU staff. However, it soon became evident that the Fds were appealing to a different demographic and many students would not have considered applying to OBU. For this reason, many of the courses on offer replicate those managed on campus.

The criteria for new partnerships require that the college:

- is in good financial health and has the appropriate legal standing to enter into the proposed partnership;
- has an educational ethos that is consistent with the University's strategic priorities;

- has in place an appropriate governance framework for maintaining academic standards and quality, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- has the facilities and resources to provide a high quality higher education learning environment;
- has the ability to market the programme appropriately. (Oxford Brookes University, 2023)

7.2.1 Management arrangements

The ACP is managed by a steering group consisting of members of OBU senior management and representatives of the senior management teams of the partner colleges, mostly the principals. The terms and conditions of the partnership are set out in legal agreements, with management procedures set out in the Operations Manuals. Programme-specific details are set out in the programme handbooks. Further details can be found on the OBU website.

7.2.2 Liaison managers

The main link between OBU and the individual programme in the college is the Liaison Manager, who is usually an experienced Principal or Senior Lecturer in the field. They work closely with the Course Leader in the college. It is this relationship which forms the basis for the partnership and is the key to its success. This relationship, in particular, is explored in detail through the data collection process.

The Liaison Manager role description and person specification are available in Appendix 5 and are also included in the Operations Manuals. They may be tailored, if necessary, according to the needs of the collaborative arrangement. Slightly different arrangements occur in Oxford Brookes Business School where the role is

split between a link tutor, who provides academic support, and the UK and International Partnership team.

The OBU Head of UK Partnerships provides an additional operational link between the University and ACP members. This includes working with Associate Deans (Strategy & Development) to agree target student numbers and financial arrangements. The UK Partnerships team is also responsible for managing and servicing the ACP Steering Group.

7.2.3 The partner college

To ensure participant anonymity, the partner college cannot be named. Information was taken from the OBU annual review 2021. The partner college has: 3,600 students aged 16- to 18; 8,000 adult learners; 700 management and professional students; 1,000 apprentices; and 900 Higher Education students. It was one of the first members of the ACP, delivers a range of degree and apprenticeship programmes and has partnerships with all OBU faculties, as well as with other universities. Although the college, in many respects, regards OBU as the preferred partner, it works with other universities where OBU does not have the expertise or, in some cases, where OBU's processes meant that they could not react fast enough. It is regarded as a major and important provider of HE in its region, where it competes with a number of universities and colleges of FE.

Higher Education courses have been delivered at the college since 1991 and there are now over 40 courses available in a wide range of subject areas. 18 of these courses, ranging from foundation to masters, are in partnership with OBU. For logistical reasons, and due to staffing changes, only three faculties participated in this study. These cover degrees delivered to some 300 students.

HE provision is seen as a key part of the college strategy and, as a result, has provided dedicated facilities. Management provision is overseen by the Dean of HE and two Education Programme Managers (one for Enhancement and one for Standards), supported by a Director for Quality Improvement.

The embedded cases consist of partnerships with three different faculties within Oxford Brookes: Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS), Education, (Humanities and Social Sciences, HSS) and Healthcare, Health and Life Sciences (HLS).

7.2.4 OBBS

The partnership with Oxford Brookes Business School has been running an Fd for almost 20 years and the BA top up for 10 years. Since the interviews, a degree apprenticeship has been added to the suite of programmes and both the Fd and BA top up have been updated and revalidated, showing the long-term commitment of both parties to the relationship. The college initially approached OBU to develop the Fd following the breakdown of a partnership with another university, even though there were other universities located nearer.

Unlike other faculties, OBBS does not appoint Liaison Managers to programmes involving the ACP. Instead, the role is split between the UK Partnership Manager, who is responsible for quality processes and the administration of the partnership, and a member of academic staff, who provides academic support. At the time of the interviews, I provided this academic support. All interviewees were known to the researcher, who had built up a personal relationship with each of them. The reflexive nature of CR recognises the influence of the researcher on the research.

The college has two cohorts of students, full-time and part-time, for the Fd, with the BA top-up forming a third cohort. The course leader is responsible for the BA top-up and for managing the partnership overall. She line manages the part-time and full-time FD cohort managers. In this case, Oxford Brookes staff need to build relationships with all three of these college staff, with the key relationship being that between OBU and the course leader.

7.2.5 HSS

The partnership with HSS delivers three Foundation degrees and a BA top-up to some 90 students. All are also delivered by other members of the ACP.

Interviews were carried out with members of the senior management teams of both Oxford Brookes and the partner college, as well as key informants from both OBU and the partner college involved in the management and development of the programmes.

7.2.6 HLS

The partnership with the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences delivers four Foundation degrees and BA top-ups, with some 150 students involved. Only one of these programmes is also delivered by another member of the ACP.

7.3 The Structure of Part 4

The rest of Part 4 is structured in the following way:

Chapter 8 presents the findings of the OBBS case. In many ways this acted as a pilot as discussed in Chapter 6. The interviews were based on the first interview guide (Appendix 3) which proved to be too prescriptive and not in line with the

abductive nature of this research. This case led to the refocusing of the research from examining the relevance of RC to education partnerships and seeking to apply the concept of RC to the partnership to using RC as a lens through which to view partnership.

Chapter 9 presents the findings of interviews with senior managers from OBU and the college. Though not fitting Yin's (2014) definition of a case it is important to look at partnership development and maintenance from the organisational view.

Though again, not strictly a case, Chapter 10 presents the findings of an interview with a liaison manager. This boundary spanning role is vital in managing the partnership,

Chapter 11 presents the findings of the HSS case study with those involved in the Early Years Education programme.

Chapter 12 presents the findings of the Healthcare case.

Chapter 13 compares and contrasts the findings of each case and summarises the key issues which will inform the discussion.

Chapter 8

Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS)

8.1 Introduction

The initial aim of this research was to examine if the concept of Relational Capital (RC) could be applied to public sector partnerships. The interview schedule (Appendix 3) was designed to explore the interviewees' understanding of the concept of RC and its components and to discuss its relevance to the partnership in which they were involved.

Five respondents agreed to be interviewed: two from the OBU partnership team and three of the college staff involved in teaching on and managing the programmes. They had all worked at the college for some time and also taught FE. All three had master's degrees, with one having recently started work on a PhD. The College Course Leader also had experience of working with other universities. The fifth interview with E was carried out after the initial analysis of the first four interviews in order to further explore some of the issues raised.

8.2 The interviewees

Interviewee	Role
A	Member of OBU UK partnership team. Involved in setting up ACP. Developed OBBS partnership with B. Career in academic management. Left OBU shortly after being interviewed
B	College course leader for both Fd and BA and Department Head. Over 20 years of experience of teaching in FE. Involved in developing the FD and BA top-up. Experience of working with other universities. Teaches on BA top-up. Seen as college expert on QA procedures. Became college Head of Quality during the course of the research
C	College full-time cohort leader. Moved to teaching in FE after career in HR with major international organisation. Recently started PhD. Teaches Level 2 to Level 6.
D	OBBS partnership manager. Career in academic management. Joined OBBS from a quality role in OBU.
E	College part-time cohort leader. Lifelong career teaching in FE. Recently completed MA. Teaches from level 2 to level 6.

Figure 22 Profile of the OBBS interviewees

8.3 The management structure

The diagram below shows the management structure and the relationship between the interviewees and me, the researcher.

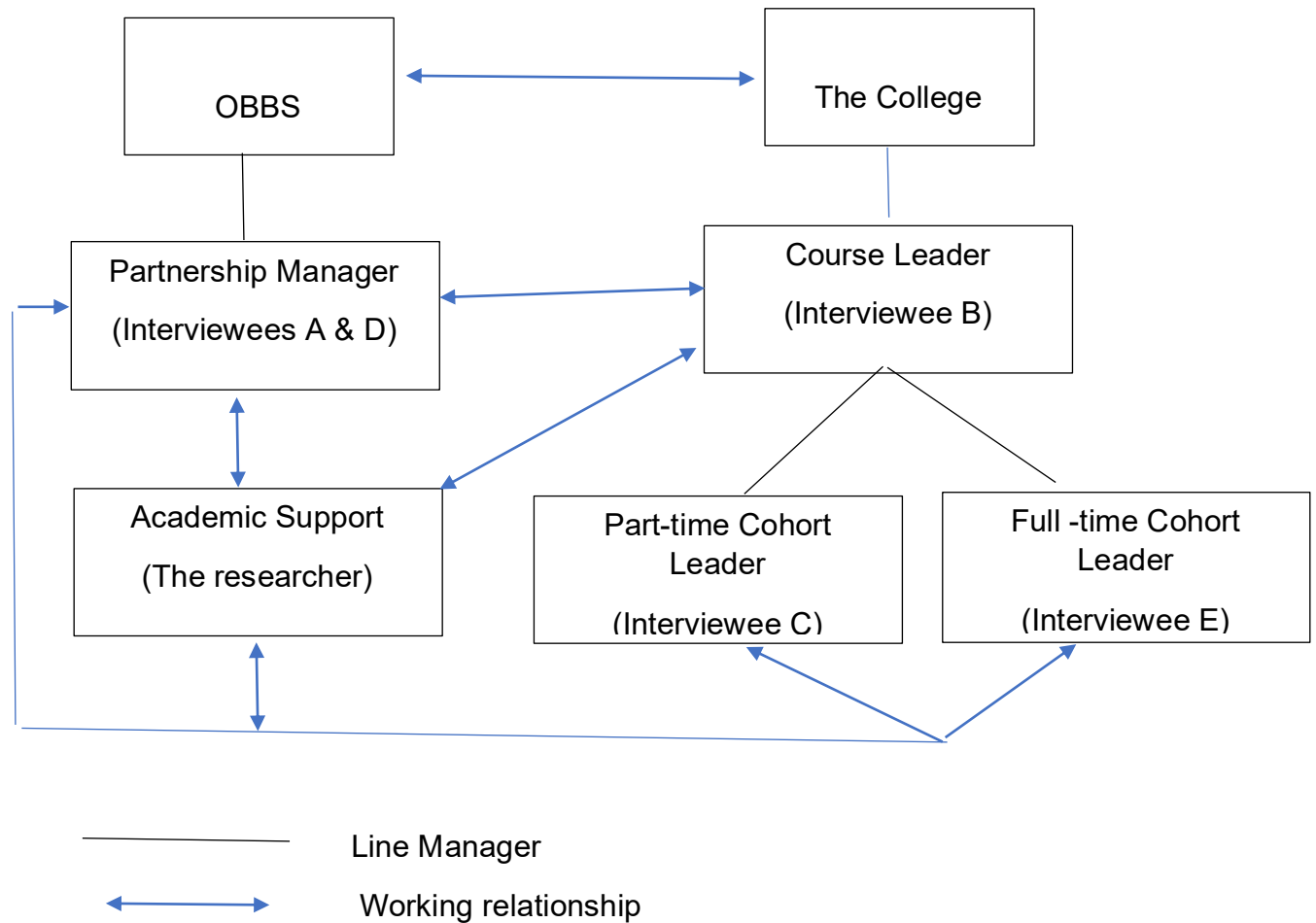


Figure 23: The management structure

8.4 The findings

In most cases, the quotes used below are verbatim, but to protect anonymity, names and other comments which could have led to identification of the interviewee have been removed. As I was providing academic support at this stage, my comments are added where they help to clarify operational practice. In several instances interviewees referred to OBU as Brookes

The chapter is structured in the following way. It starts by discussing the nature of partnership, then discusses culture which I did not initially ask about as outlined in Chapter 6, but which was seen as underpinning everything by the interviewees and raised not as a component of RC but as the basis for partnership. The chapter then discusses the interviewees understanding of RC before discussing its components: trust, commitment, reciprocity, interpersonal relationships and power balance. The chapter then summarises the key issues identified in this case which will inform the data collection in the next case. The chapter ends with a reflection on the process of carrying out this set of interviews and how this informed the approach taken for the rest of the research,

8.4.1 Nature of partnership

The interviews started with asking respondents what made a good partnership. Interviewees A, B and C opened by stating the purpose of partnership:

“partnership delivers benefits, mutual benefits” (A)

“You gain competency by developing partnerships” (B)

As A and B were both responsible for partnership development, it is not surprising that they had thought about the rationale for partnership working and stressed the importance of mutual benefit and gaining competency one of the common themes emerging from definitions of partnership in the literature review, (Chapter 3).

Interviewee C builds on their views and highlights one of the core reasons for developing a partnership (Ramadass *et al.*, 2018):

“one that can offer us a new skill or something we don’t have ourselves, so they are bringing something new” (C)

It is interesting that the other two, especially D, who also has responsibility for partnership development did not feel the need to discuss the purpose. This may be because working in partnership is now seen as a norm and therefore the reason for it is not questioned. The mutuality of partnership fits with Kale *et al.*’s (2000) view that reciprocity is a key component of RC, which will be explored later in the chapter. The concept of providing new competences fits with Brinkerhoff (2002) and Iyer (2003) and is the basis of the development of Fds in FE (Foskett, 2007; Dhillon and Bentley, 2016; Elliott, 2017).

NVivo analysis of the transcripts showed that, on the whole, the interviewees used the terms partnership and relationship interchangeably. However, at the beginning of their interviews, both interviewees A and B saw a difference between the legal partnership agreement between the two organisations and the relationship that is then built between them, and they stressed the dynamic nature of relationships:

“You put the framework in place and then you build a relationship with the people. It takes a long time to do that.” (A)

“You need a partner with the right skills. Yes, competency is important, as the first layer, competence, respect and then you get into the relationship with the people and for me that is the second stage of the partnership”. (B)

This shows that the due diligence carried out before the partnership arrangements are put in place is only the first step and that what is important is the focus of this research: how the relationship between those involved is then developed. It is how this relationship is built which is important.

“As you get to know the people you build a relationship with them” (B)

This fits with a common theme in the literature that relationships are built through repeated personal interaction.

Having established that the partnership is the framework within which the relationship exists, it is important to explore the basis of partnership.

“So, you look for organisations which have similar values to you and that can provide a sort of good basis for partnership because you work on a similar basis and you are looking for similar outcomes.” (E)

“...one that had the same values, yes, one with the same values but also a mutual respect and a common goal. And a common agenda” (C)

“At organisational level there is a shared culture, as we have shared values, which is key to supporting strategic relationships.” (A)

“It is the teams’ values and beliefs that contribute to the success of this partnership” (C)

“Every organisation has its own culture, but we make sure as much as possible it bonds with Brookes culture” (D)

In line with several authors, such as, Murphy (2015), the interviewees all shared the view that there was a need for common goals, shared values and expertise, which are central to most definitions of partnership (Iyer, 2003; Mohr and Spekman, 1994). Shared values and culture are key and underpin all relationships.

Having identified the basis of the partnership's formation, the factors leading to its success were discussed, and here the emphasis was much more on the relationship built at both organisational and individual levels. Two key themes emerge here. Firstly, the need for honesty, which links to trust:

“An open and honest relationship so there is no hidden agenda is really key to any partnership” (A)

“The integrity of the relationship and knowing when I question ‘why has this happened or not?’ you will not be offended” (B)

“Good relationships with staff in the colleges who actually you can be honest and transparent about” (E)

The importance of being responsive was also seen as important, with both E and C thinking that competence and mutual support formed the basis of the relationship:

“Two people who have a good relationship and can talk to each other and pick up the phone and deal with problems and deal with issues as they arise is key” (E)

“...good close contacts with the people we are dealing with, the people who are on the ground and can answer the day-to-day questions” (C)

“...best partnerships are with people who are responsive” (D)

Secondly the emphasis on personal relationships is at the heart of the concept of RC, but also brings into question the role of the organisation and the impact on partnership of changing personnel. Both are areas for discussion in this research. Transparency, openness, honesty and responsiveness are seen as the basis of any relationship, and how these are built and maintained will be explored later. In addition to these factors, interviewees A, B and D, who all had responsibilities for managing and developing partnerships, saw the need for the relationship to be long term and sustainable:

“...stability is a crucial thing for partnerships. This is long term” (D)

Due to their nature, longevity is a key feature of educational partnerships, and it is important that any arrangements made recognise this (Dhillon, 2013).

These comments highlight some of the components of Relational Capital which are discussed later, but as shared values are seen as being key, it is first necessary to discuss culture.

8.4.2 Culture

Chapter 2 discussed the tensions of teaching HE in FE and the problems of developing a shared culture which is seen as crucial for a successful relationship.

“...because without the shared culture you’d be struggling in all the other areas. It’s what binds us” (E)

As already discussed in the methodology I did not initially ask interviewees about culture due to the erroneous assumption that as OBU and the college had a shared values they also shared a culture, but culture's importance arose spontaneously when discussing the nature of partnership. All interviewees identified shared values as being important to the success of partnership, stressing their importance and there was much discussion of whether shared values led to a shared culture. This would suggest that relationships cannot be built unless there are shared values. It was the existence of shared values which led me to initially decide that there was no need to discuss culture,

"The shared values are important, but the shared culture comes from this" (D)

"Culture is very important. It is the values of the people you are working with and you sharing those values and beliefs." (C)

B teaches management at Level 6, and it is perhaps not surprising that she provided an almost textbook definition of culture and the role of the individual. However, as discussed in Chapter 6 her response suggested that due to her experience of interviews and her knowledge of the subject, she was trying to provide the answer she thought I wanted to hear (Fontana and Frey, 2000). What is more important however, is the interrelationship between individual and organisational culture which is also echoed by D:

"Culture here is the value and beliefs of the way people conduct business but also there is the other culture of the value and beliefs that are within you as an individual and how you were raised, that has an effect on how you perceive the relationship" (B)

Based on personal experience, C highlighted the need for organisational and personal values to be aligned (Alvesson, 2013). Once again showing the interrelatedness between personal and organisational culture and the importance of individuals in building that culture.

“So, for me to have a good working relationship at personal and organisation level, my values have to be aligned. I left a previous organisation because it was changing and no longer fit with my values.” (C)

As discussed in the literature review, (Section 5.3) there are numerous subcultures in academia (Canoski, 2022), and this was reflected by Oxford Brookes staff, who saw FE colleges as having a different culture from OBU:

“FE culture is different from university. HE is slower paced. FE are used to things happening more quickly.” (D)

“Although there is a different culture, what helps Brookes is we aren’t seen as an ivory tower of academics.” (A)

FE staff, however, saw more similarities once again demonstrating the importance of individual perception. Though this could be more a reflection how things work in practice and what forms the basis of a shared culture in the partnership

“It was very student-centred. It felt homely. It didn’t feel like a big impersonal university. So, in my mind we are a good fit.” (C)

“The way Brookes selects its partners has partly taken this into account. The culture is about helping students to achieve the best...” (E)

Interviewees also spoke about developing a new culture common to the organisations working together (Alvesson, 2010; Schein, 2013). It is this aspect which is the most important:

“...but culture changes as people change and policy makes it easier or harder to work together, and we have to adapt to that” (B)

“You are instilling your own values to them because they do not know otherwise and it becomes a shared culture.” (D)

A common understanding of what is required and attitudes to this are key to relationship success. This also highlights that in the absence of shared values a relationship cannot be built.

8.4.3 Meaning of relational capital (RC)

As discussed in Chapter 4, Kale *et al.* (2000) saw RC as being the cement of a relationship and its relevance to the partnership, in this study, is the focus of the research. As RC is not a phrase commonly used, all interviewees were asked to define it.

Once again A and B, in line with their definition of partnership, highlighted the need for relationships to be built over time, stressing the need for longevity:

“You need partners and relationships to achieve what you want to do in life and Relational Capital is all about that and building that up and being able to achieve things.” (A)

“It is the time you invest in other people and building relationships with them, whether that be an exchange of information, exchange of personal information...” (B)

D went beyond this to consider what the concept means in practice, by emphasising the role of personal relationships and introducing the concept of trust, by linking RC to individual judgment and moving beyond controls. Chapter 3 also discussed the role that trust plays in RC, both as a precursor and an output.

“Relational Capital is ‘how much do you get along with these people?’ to the extent you can question their views, you can correct them if you have to, you can rely on them in situations that are not in the rule or in the book. You can rely on their judgement.” (D)

B’s definition fits closely with that of Kale *et al.* (2000) being used in this study:

“Relational Capital, in my view, is not just that you get along with people and that you can go and get a glass of wine with them, Relational Capital is how much you respect the judgement of these people in the business environment. It is very important.” (B)

RC, therefore, is seen as being built as the relationship between the organisations and the individuals involved develops. It is the output of the relationship and its components which form the process indicators (Provan and Milward, 2008) under investigation in this study. It is therefore important to look at these process indicators.

8.4.4. Trust

Trust is key to all relationships (Dyer and Oh, 1987; Adobar, 2006) and this was echoed by the respondents, who saw the relationship as built on the trust between individuals. Interviewee A's definition provides a good summary of all the respondents' views, with the emphasis being on interpersonal trust (Lambright *et al.*, 2010):

"Trust is a tricky one to define. It means you have confidence in somebody, and they have confidence in you and when they say they are going to do something you trust that they will do it. And that what they are saying to you. They're not bullshitting you and they're speaking the truth." (A)

This equates trust with honesty, confidentiality and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and chimes with Butler's (1990) view of specific trust, which he saw as developing between individuals.

Time is again seen as an important factor (Lu, 2009):

"...with the new partners we've got now, I know them a bit, but trust will need to be built up and tested over the years" (A)

At the time of the interview, A had university responsibilities for developing partnerships, so it is perhaps not surprising that he was concerned with building long term relationships and thinking more from an organisational view.

C's emphasis was personal and linked more closely to developing personal relationships.

“It takes me a long time to decide whether I trust you, how much I trust you and how much I would be prepared to tell you about me.” (C)

All interviewees commented on trust reducing the need for controls (Jennings *et al.*, 1993). Not surprisingly, D, whose role is to monitor the partnership and ensure procedures are being followed, put the greatest emphasis on this:

“Trust that means people will trust me to turn up and work without being monitored. There is that trust that you will do what you are supposed to and go about your day-to-day business and achieve things without being permanently monitored and having to report.” (D)

While trust may reduce the need for controls, (in referring to a partnership which was not working well and in which I was also involved), A commented that an over-reliance on trust can lead to problems. This echoes Thorgren and Wincent (2011), who saw too trusting a relationship as being detrimental to the achievement of organisational objectives.

“Issues have taken a while to surface because we trusted them, and we didn’t check” (A)

While it was recognised that there needs to be trust between the organisations, based on experience and perceived competence, for them to commit to the partnership initially (Cullen *et al.*, 2000; Skandrani, 2011), B, who had more experience of partnership working than the other interviewees, saw trust as being the output of the relationship. This will be explored further, but also highlights that trust building is an iterative process dependent on a range of factors.

“...it is a conclusion which is why I think it is the final output of the partnership. Based on personal interaction, commitment balance of power, reciprocity of things...” (B)

Although trust and commitment are interrelated (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), they are seen as separate components of RC (Kale *et al.*, 2000) and so it was necessary to explore the interviewees' understanding of commitment.

8.4.5 Commitment

In line with the need for educational partnerships to be long term, D emphasised the commitment that the university demonstrates:

“We are showing a lot of commitment to those colleges in recognition of the good relationship we have got. We aren't planning to walk away.” (D)

This was echoed from the college view by B and C:

“...being committed to the partnership in the longer term, it isn't just for a year” (B)

“Commitment means you are in it for the long haul. That it's a long-term investment of your time and energy. It will deepen your relationship; it will give you some kind of deeper understanding of each other” (C)

Commitment, like trust, was seen by B to develop with time and perhaps as a result of OBU having agreed to allow the college to increase numbers:

“At the very beginning, the commitment is that we are going to invest in you and trust in you to deliver our programme, and as you go further along you

are doing a good job, so we are going to give you more numbers or support. Your commitment grows. So, you get given more responsibility and more resources and as that happens your commitment increases.” (B)

While these comments are focused on organisational commitment, both C and E, whose focus is on more student-facing work, commented on both personal commitment and commitment to the students, demonstrating the different perspectives from which partnership can be viewed (Provan and Milward, 2004; Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006):

“The staff need to be committed to the programme and work within its framework. It wouldn’t work if we weren’t committed to making it” (E)

“We have a commitment to the students to make sure things go well” (D)

Commitment is demonstrated by the organisation in committing resources in the long term and by the staff involved making sure the partnership works operationally so that the students receive the benefits of the partnership. Once again, though, personal commitment is seen as a personality trait and something that cannot be built, while organisational commitment is built.

8.4.6. Reciprocity

The benefits of the ACP for both Oxford Brookes and the colleges were discussed in the Chapter 2. As all partnership must be of mutual benefit, reciprocity is perhaps a given (Gouldner, 1960; Hoppner and Griffith, 2000). This was echoed by A and D:

“...to me it’s a given and if you have trust and commitment, that implies it is reciprocal. Why would you enter a partnership if you didn’t both benefit?” (A)

"We were working together for mutual benefit." (D)

B and C also saw reciprocity as being about exchange:

"It is about exchange of favours, good will, professional relationships - that is how I see reciprocity" (B)

"...it's like what you are giving back, what you'll give to others" (C)

What is important, however, is the nature of that exchange, which is not necessarily the same in each direction, (Hoppner and Griffith, 2000):

"We all contribute but it can be in different ways" (E)

However, B felt the need to try to make the exchange equal, which she saw as a personality trait:

"I try and reciprocate as much as I can knowing that the university is doing more than I am doing. You are working harder than us to make things work, you come here, do the moderation etc and I feel that we are not reciprocating so when there is an opportunity, I do what I can, but this is personality." (B)

The view that reciprocity is a personality trait fits with Hoppner and Griffith's (2000) view that reciprocity is a cultural norm, and with C's view. For some, reciprocity is not automatic, but unless there is an element of reciprocity the relationship will fail.

"It is quite natural for people to say 'what am I getting out of it? What's in it for me? Why am I doing this for them?'. It's all about them and not me and I think that is quite a common way of thinking about things and relationships. If a relationship become that unbalanced, it becomes uncomfortable." (C)

The comments of B and C show how important individuals are in making a relationship work, which will be explored later.

Reciprocity thus forms the basis of partnership and is required at all stages of partnership development. It is a driver of formation, the process and an output.

8.4.7 Interpersonal relationships

The role of individuals is an inherent part of partnership development, and it is important that those involved develop “good working relationships”. However, whereas Kale *et al.*’s (2000) definition sees Relational Capital as being between individuals, personal interaction at all levels was seen as important for partnerships to succeed in the longer term.

“That is really important, and it underpins the relationship it isn’t a relationship between two people, it’s between lots of people and all are needed to make it work. If I left tomorrow and you left the day after, the partnership wouldn’t collapse. It happens at all levels.” (A)

This counteracts the identified weakness of Relational Capital being dependent on individuals (Cegarro- Navarro *et al.*, 2011; Adler and Kwon, 2002) and supports the views of Huggins (2010) and Hudson (2004), while reinforcing Provan and Milward’s (2004) view that partnership needs to be studied at different levels. What is important is the nature of that interaction.

Although Beetles and Harris (2010) state:

“The level of intimacy and lack of reciprocity usually associated with friendship is not commonly found in business relationships.” (p.351)

Kale *et al.* (2000) saw friendship as both an antecedent and a component of RC.

Ranke and Tusche (2010) explained that it is the perception of the level of friendship that it is important and that this will vary between individuals. This was highlighted by C, who commented:

“I worked with someone who used to call me ‘mate’ and say we’re friends and I’d say ‘we aren’t friends, we are work colleagues’ and he would get very offended. It doesn’t mean I dislike you but the people I call friends are people that really have the same values as me and I can call on in the middle of the night. I am really choosy” (C)

The common theme from these interviews was that there is a significant difference between friendship and developing a good working relationship. This fits with Ingram and Zou’s (2008) views on business friendships.

I had built a personal relationship with the interviewees, which included meeting the course leader for lunch outside work, but she did not see the working relationship as friendship, and this was echoed by the interviewees:

“No, friendship is much more about people I socialise with outside of work. Some of them are work colleagues but it’s doing non-work things with them” (D)

D’s views fits with Kingshott and Pecotich, (2007) who consider friendship to involve social interaction outside the workplace. This helps to clarify the difference between personal and business or agentic friendship (Price and Arnould, 1999). E highlighted the voluntary nature of friendship which does not extend to business relationships/

“When people leave, I very rarely keep in touch or see them again” (E)

D and B, both saw friendship as developing from a business relationship but not being integral to it.

“People may become friends, but it isn’t the basis of the relationship” (D)

“You may form a friendship as a product of the Relational Capital that was produced as part of this partnership, depending on how things are going and how things become. Look at our relationship, we have become friends.” (B)

Friendship within a business relationship was potentially seen to be problematic.

“I think friendship within the workplace can be quite detrimental to a partnership. You open up to bias and doing things because it’s your friend, not because it’s the best thing to do. And can be unethical, you may make dodgy decisions”. (D)

“...if you were friends that went out drinking etc and if there is a problem it would be more difficult to deal with.” (C)

“It’s like managers being friends with their staff. It can cause problems.” (A)

These views contrast with Kale *et al.*, (2000) who see friendship as being one way of improving access to information.

As friendship was not seen as the basis of the relationship, it was important to understand what this basis was. The interviewees felt that it was mutual respect. Kale *et al.* (2000) saw this as a separate component of RC.

“The relationship between the liaison manager and the college is crucial. We don’t have to like each other but there has to be mutual respect.” (E)

(Although not the official title in OBBS, the college staff referred to the academic link person as the liaison manager)

This respect is based on expertise and professional competency and, as such, equates to trust. Once again, this highlights the importance of trust in a relationship:

“I have worked on several Fds, and the relationship was fantastic. We trusted each other’s judgment and it would be of good quality. We respected their knowledge. It wasn’t personal, it was fair.” (E)

“...respect based on expertise and competence” (C)

B highlighted just how important the individual is in building the relationship:

“I think the calibre of people and whether they are the right people in this alliance is very important. Because, based on their knowhow and expertise, the mutual trust will develop. I cannot trust a liaison manager’s opinion if I know that they aren’t up to the job and have told me wrong things before.” (B)

D summed up the qualities required for a successful relationship:

“it’s about professionalism, trust, communication rather than friendship.” (D)

The interviewees suggested that relationships are built by communication and without it no exchange of any kind would take place.

“Communication is the blood stream for all of this to happen” (C)

“Communication overarches everything” (D)

Open and honest communication is at the heart of success, once again demonstrating the role trust plays.

“What is important in partnership is that you can communicate efficiently, openly and honestly, so whether things are good or bad you can voice your opinion.” (B)

While friendship was not seen as relevant, personal interaction is seen as a cornerstone, mostly because communication cannot work without it, and this leads to the development of the other components. As already stated, communication is seen as a given as it underpins all human interaction and is not being discussed separately in this research,

8.4.8 Power balance

Although most literature relating to partnership and RC discusses power balance within a relationship, initially I decided not to discuss it as, in my view, the agreements governing the partnership between OBU and colleges provide for an equal relationship. This was echoed by the interviewees from OBU:

“It is an equal relationship” (D)

“...whereas ours is a more flexible, equal relationship” (A)

The college interviewees, however, saw OBU as holding positional power (Huxham and Beech, 2008), as it was the validating body and also held the key to the resources, including student numbers:

“You are more important in the relationship and in the partnership than others” (B)

“...Oxford Brookes because it’s your programme and it’s you I’m looking to for approval and if you say it’s right then it is.” (C)

“...the important partner who gives us the work” (E)

These differences of opinion show that it is important to explore the power balance and, in particular, how power is exercised in practice. The section on trust, above, showed that although there were control mechanisms in place, these were rarely enforced due to the levels of trust between those involved.

8.5 Conclusion

The interviews concluded by asking the interviewees to rank the components of RC in order of importance. All interviewees commented that it was not possible to do this as they were interrelated. One respondent summarised this well:

“They are interrelated. Communication overarches everything and culture is first because without the culture you’d be struggling in all the other areas. The culture of the place and the people in it would determine who you would work with and form a partnership with.” (B)

Partnerships exist for mutual benefit and are therefore founded on reciprocity. RC consists as a number of interrelated components - trust, commitment, reciprocity - held together by communication and supported by shared culture, which is developed through personal interaction and as a result of the power balance. Mutual respect is seen to be necessary to build trust and is therefore not regarded as an element in its own right.

8.6 Reflection on the process

The reflexive nature of the research recognises my personal involvement in the study and my influence on it. The personal relationship that the author had with the respondents meant that all interviews were discussed in a friendly, open atmosphere and that the respondents answered openly and honestly, with all stating that this honesty was key to a successful relationship. The college respondents all confided that they were able to answer frankly due to the personal relationship between us (Robson, 2011). This was most evident in the discussions on friendship when the personal relationship was discussed to help to define the meaning of the term in this context.

The use of the interview prompt restricted the nature of the interviews and confined the scope of the discussions to those areas seen as important by me, the researcher. This was discussed in the section on data analysis, (Section 6.9.2).

As discussed above the intention was that the interviews would end with the interviewees ranking the components of RC in order of importance. This was to identify whether greater emphasis should be given to some aspects in future interviews. However, this proved impractical as the components of RC are interrelated, with one interviewee commenting *“they fit together so they can’t be ranked”*. This experience highlighted to me that trying to use a quantitative technique in qualitative research was flawed though this is a mistake often made by qualitative researchers, Ketokivi and Choi (2014). This along with the initial interview guide being too prescriptive, highlighted the need to review the interview guide and move to a less prescribed approach.

8.7 Implications for this study

In line with the Critical Realist stance taken, my views and beliefs influence the research. The initial literature review did not examine power balance as, due to the nature of the formal agreements supporting the partnerships, the assumption was made that the partners had equal power. However, this was not the interviewees' interpretation, and therefore this topic needs to be further explored through the literature and in subsequent interviews demonstrating the iterative nature of the research.

The Associated College Partnership is built on shared objectives and values. I interpreted this as meaning that the organisations also had a shared culture. This was not reinforced by the findings, in this case, and while respondents agreed that a common culture was built, the findings demonstrated the need to explore further the relationship between values and culture in the literature and the following cases.

The need to revisit the literature in the light of the findings of the interviews illustrates the importance of systematic combining to this research (Dubois and Gadde, 2002) and is in line with an abductive strategy.

This case also identified issues regarding data collection which need to be addressed in future cases. While retaining a semi-structured approach, the interview prompt needs to be less prescriptive, with more emphasis being given to interviewees' views on the nature of partnership and less on working through each component of Relational Capital. The section on ranking the components will also be scrapped. The revised interview prompt is included in Appendix 4.

These issues led to me to refocus the research and move away from a prescriptive approach of seeking to apply RC to HE partnerships, to looking beyond RC to identify what makes a successful partnership, to using RC as a lens through which to view partnership accepting that there may be other mechanisms at work in line with an abductive strategy. The iterative nature of CR research means that these insights informed the revised research objectives, literature review and approach to data collection discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 9

The Management View

9.1 Introduction

The context section and the literature review highlight the need to look at partnership from an organisational perspective as well as at operational level (Provan and Milward, 2008). While not strictly a case, (Yin, 2014), this set of interviews with senior management examines the views of those with responsibility at organisational and policy level in both OBU and the partner college and for the purpose of this research is referred to as the management case. Four people were interviewed: two from OBU and two from the college. Interviewees A and B had been interviewed for the OBBS case but were interviewed in their central management roles using the second interview guide, (Appendix 4). This moved the questioning away from looking particularly at RC to exploring in depth the interviewees views on partnership working, at what makes it successful, as well as experience of working in this partnership. All interviewees had experience of partnerships with other organisations and brought these insights into the discussion. Three of the interviewees were also members of the ACP steering group and could therefore provide insights into overall policy and strategy as well as this relationship. They had also had direct involvement in developing the Liaison Manager job description, the key role in maintaining and supporting OBU partnerships. This role will be explored in Chapter 10.

As discussed in Chapter 8, I had a close working relationship with Interviewees A and B. I knew the other interviewees but had not worked with them. This had the

advantage of helping to reduce interviewer bias, as the interviews with F and G could be used to verify and question the findings of A and B. At the time of interview, both B and G had responsibilities for FE as well as HE, but now focus solely on the college HE provision.

9.2 The Interviewees

Interviewee	Role
A	Member of OBU UK partnership team. Developed OBBS partnership with B. Career in academic management. Left OBU shortly after being interviewed
B	College course leader for both Fd and BA and Department Head. Over 20 years of experience of teaching in FE. Involved in developing the FD and BA top-up. Experience of working with other universities. Teaches on BA top-up. Joined college SMT during the course of the research
F	OBU UK partnership team. Experience of partnership working with other universities.
G	Member of college SMT. Lifelong career in FE.

Figure 24 Profiles of the management interviewees

These findings first explore views on the context of HE in FE, as discussed in Chapter 2. They focus on the three key areas affecting partnership development as identified by Parry (2013): purpose and identity; funding and quality; and partnership and its dependencies, while recognising the importance of Robinson *et al'* s., (2006) five key criteria recognised as important in promoting successful partnerships:

- staff interest and ownership of their role;
- a culture of clear and open communication;
- clear messages from senior managers;
- recognition of the time partnerships require;
- clarity of review of quality and standards.

The findings then go on to examine other issues raised by the participants before summarising the management view.

9.3 The nature of partnership

All interviews started with a definition of partnership and highlighted the need for common goals and shared benefits:

“two or more organisations working collaboratively towards a shared end” (G)

“I think a good partnership delivers benefits, mutual benefits” (A)

“a common understanding and desire to achieve common goals, with all parties focused on the same ends” (F)

F's response was not surprising since she was responsible for developing partnerships within the ACP to meet the university strategic objectives. This was also

A's focus, and he also saw this as requiring good relationships at operational level. This, once again, stresses the need for studying partnership at different levels (Provan and Milward, 2008). It is what is meant by a good working relationship, which is the focus of this research.

“So operationally there has to be good working relationships to deliver the strategic objectives.” (a)

In line with Robinson *et al.*, (2006) and Parry (2013), B, who has a quality role, line manages staff and teaches HE, put the emphasis on quality, but took this beyond quality procedures to thinking about how this impacts both the staff and student experience. This view fits with the mission statements of both organisations, once again illustrating the need for partnership to meet common goals.

“so, the quality of provision has to be excellent, the quality of teaching, how you enhance staff capability, how you develop staff, how you develop an environment for staff and students which is one of care and commitment. That's what makes a good partnership.” (B)

The elements of successful partnership identified above are in line with those identified in the literature review and context sections, and demonstrate the need for organisational as well as operational alignment, in line with Provan and Milward (2008).

These issues are discussed further using Parry's (2013) key areas.

9.4 Purpose and identity

In common with the OBBS case study, the management interviewees agreed that sharing common goals and values was vital to successful partnerships, with A stating that when looking for a partner they had to have a “*strategic fit*”. This was echoed by G, who said:

“We work with other partners but with Brookes we feel there is more in common”. (G)

“We understand each other”. (F)

This common understanding is a theme throughout this case and is a demonstration of the close alignment of goals and purpose between the two organisations.

However, there is a danger that, as senior management are so focused on the commonalities between the two organisations and achieving their shared vision, the distinctiveness between the two may be lost, along with the unique skills and focus of each individual programme. This is explored further in the Early Years and Healthcare case studies.

As discussed in Chapter 2, partnership working can be seen as a way of combatting market forces to improve accessibility for students (Cardini, 2006), and this is a consideration for both organisations.

“having the foundation degrees means we can retain our students; they don’t need to go elsewhere” (G)

“It allows us to widen our target market. Many of the students wouldn’t come to Oxford.” (F)

This demonstrates the mutuality of the arrangement and the common goals.

However, a transactional relationship in which OBU transferred resources and student numbers could also deliver this, and as, in most cases, the college is delivering a programme developed by Oxford Brookes and being run on campus, can this be described a collaboration as defined by O'Flynn, (2009)?

The answer lies in how responsibilities for operational activities are divided and the fact that the partnership involves parts of the organisations working together for a purpose but does not require the total integration of the organisations. This is highlighted by A and G, with B once again providing a more operational view:

"The whole relationship requires input from both parties" (A)

"Yes, we own the student numbers, the processes and the funding but the college is responsible for marketing the programme, recruitment, managing the staff and day-to-day operations." (F)

"Both parties have to play their part. It stems back to what we were saying at the beginning about the FE and HE environment coming together and managing that tension". (G)

"While the module descriptions may be standard and we often have access to materials, the delivery is our responsibility and relies on the expertise of our staff. Things are adapted to meet to the needs of our students." (B)

It is the motivation to work together for common good and the sharing and division of responsibilities, backed by a clear contract and supported by the operations manuals, which makes this partnership collaborative. The practicalities of this

division will be explored in the Healthcare and Education cases and the interview with a Liaison Manager.

Having established the nature of the collaboration, it is important to look at how the partnership helps the organisations to achieve common goals and is of mutual benefit.

While there are differences in the mission statements of the two organisations, they share a common basis, in that both organisations refer to providing high quality education and leading and supporting economic development. (To ensure confidentiality it is not possible to include the college mission statement here but a sample of mission statements of members of the ACP is included in Chapter 2). These commonalities come from the two organisations having similar roots and sharing the aim of developing students with good employability skills. This means that there is a heavy emphasis on applied knowledge in the degree programmes. This fits with Webster (2017) and reinforces Biesta's (2000) view that universities may be losing their distinctiveness by focusing more on employability. B commented on how the relationship with Oxford Brookes contrasts directly with a partnership with a Russell Group university and provides a better student experience:

"The emphasis in Brookes assessment is the application of knowledge. The students like this, as they can use their experience, but with our other partner there is more emphasis on academic concepts even though the degree is in social work. Students struggle with this. As many of them are working, they want to see how this will help them directly. You do this." (B)

The different emphases between two universities is at the heart of the debate developing an HE culture in FE (Feather, 2016). The commonality between Oxford

Brookes and the college has a direct impact on developing a common culture and suggest that the HE culture is one in which students are developed to be more employable. This will be explored further in the Education and Healthcare cases and form an important part of the discussion.

Both organisations recognise that, while education is a competitive environment, they are not competing directly for students.

“The students we are recruiting wouldn’t consider going to university and doing a degree. Many of our students wouldn’t even consider going to somewhere else in the area. They’ve been with us since Level 2 and trust us.”
(G)

“We would challenge the idea of the colleges being in direct competition as they are different types of students, a different qualification and a different market. And those students wouldn’t come to Brookes.” (F)

The competitive environment, in this case, is for the development of new courses, with the competition for Oxford Brookes being other universities. OBU accepts this and, again, the flexibility helps to reinforce the collaborative approach.

“Brookes is our preferred partner but they don’t always have the ability to move quickly enough or the expertise” (G)

“We want all the colleges to work with us where they have programmes which are within our areas of expertise, but this can’t always be the case.” (F)

This approach shows that while the organisations are working in partnership, they are involved in a range of different arrangements, and that a partnership needs to be

considered on its own merits, reinforcing the dynamic nature of partnership. They form and re-form depending on the environment. This is highlighted by OBU and the college now putting more emphasis on developing degree apprenticeships rather than Fds. The collaborative and flexible nature of the partnership means that the controls in place need to be flexible and it is important to look at how this works.

9.5 Power and trust

Chapter 2 identified that one of the problems of partnerships between universities and colleges of HE can be a power imbalance. OBU is the degree awarding body, sets the legal and operational framework and is also the gatekeeper of the finance. Huxham and Beech (2008) would see this as power arising from resources and positioned at a macro level. However, what is more important is how the power is exerted at the micro level. The partnership works because there is a framework of support in place to enable the college to take control of the delivery of the degree. This framework is the quality system which will be discussed later.

“We’ve always seen it as equal. It is an equal understanding” (A)

“Because if you are in a college and you want to validate a degree which we’ve cowritten or I’ve given you or you’ve given me then you are entering into an agreement. You are employing the staff and overseeing the delivery, recruitment etc but it’s got to be a partnership. I don’t interpret it as Brookes imposing, I see it as us working together to get the best outcome for the student.” (G)

“Ultimately, I’m responsible, but that doesn’t mean I am going to impose my will on it. In order to get the best out of the situation we’ve got to move together and listen to each other.” (F)

“You have the power to compel but it isn’t used like that. We are partners, we look at how best to do things within the agreement we have. Being part of the steering groups means we are involved in setting those boundaries.” (G)

“The contract sets out the areas that are important to us and the boundaries we can’t cross. In essence it is quite an unequal partnership. If you look at the partnership between us and one college, the power is unevenly distributed. We have the right to pull a qualification, set the rules etc, and the QAA stuff, but the contract gives all the responsibility for recruitment, marketing, delivery to the college and the college has the control over what it looks like on the ground. We aren’t controlling the staff, the hours they teach, the terms and conditions, staff turnover, facilities etc. We may set expectations, but we don’t control them.” (F)

These quotations show just how aligned the thinking is between the management teams of each organisation. Within this context, OBU’s positional power is used to enable - and in many ways is replaced by - trust (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008).

Interestingly, and in the true nature of collaboration, OBU seems reluctant to exert power through control.

“If we come in and don’t understand that and start imposing it is not going to work.” (A)

“As the partnership has grown, we have put more procedures in place, but these are mostly based on developing a level playing field. We work much more on trust. As we have common aims, we expect our partners to do the right thing” (F)

“yes, it is our degree, and we technically hold the power but if the situation is such that if we need to exert power or refer to the legal agreement then the trust has gone and probably so has the relationship” (A)

and F’s views fit directly with Morgan and Hunt’s (1994) definition of trust as discussed in the literature review.

“we conceptualize trust as existing when one party has confidence in an exchange partners reliability and integrity” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p.23)

This could be seen as calculative trust (Coleman, 1990), on which the concept of Social Capital is based and from which RC develops. It arises from the due diligence carried out in the development of the partnership.

“We know they have the expertise so rely on them to do it” (F)

However, while this type of trust may form the basis of the partnership the dynamic influences on the partnership mean that the nature of the trust may change with time. Skandrani (2011) would suggest that trust is developed over time as the partnership develops and is built by those actively engaging in the day-to-day operations of the partnership as they develop norms of behaviour, stressing the role of interpersonal relationships. This was raised by both parties:

“We’ve worked together for some time, so the controls are less obvious. It’s different with a new partner” (F)

“with the new partners we’ve got now I know them a bit, but trust will need to be built up and tested over the years” (A)

“some of the things we take for granted with Brookes...” (G)

“It’s what happens at operational level that is more important. The Liaison Manager is key” (A)

“As you get used to working with someone, you develop good practice between you” (B)

“The Liaison Manager is key. Things work well when we work well with the Liaison Manager.” (H)

The role of the Liaison Manager is explored further in Chapter 10.

Trust is a feature of partnership which was raised by all interviewees, both prompted and unprompted, but the interviewees also cautioned against relying solely on trust.

“some of the problems occur because we trusted them to get on with it” (A)

“We assumed they’d do the right thing.” (F)

Both these comments referred to a partnership, in which I had been involved, which was being closed as the college had failed to deliver as expected, leading to student complaints.

This highlights the delicate balance between managing a partnership based on trust and exerting control, and the importance of having the right people involved to do this.

9.6 Culture

As discussed in Chapter 2 and Section 5.2 much is written about the need to develop an HE ethos in FE and the challenges that this creates. Chapter 2 identified that an HE ethos was characterised by teaching based on research, promoting more independent learning and the emphasis that knowledge was contestable. However, this raises tensions in FE colleges due to the experience of teaching staff and the resources available. There are also challenges around the expectations of the students, many of whom have chosen the college due to its familiarity.

“Many of our students have been with us since Level 2 so we need to show this is different.” (H)

In developing a culture, it is important that outward symbols of the culture are in place (Johnson Scholes and Whittington, (2008). In line with other colleges developing HE provision (Dhillon and Bentley, 2016), the college has invested heavily in dedicated facilities for HE and is branded as a University Centre, demonstrating its role in the community. To reinforce the relationship, and as a reminder that those studying at, HE level are OBU students with OBU support, OBU staff go to the college for enrolment and students are taken to OBU for induction sessions. Although only a small gesture, students are given OBU lanyards when they receive their student cards. This provides a symbol within the college that they are also OBU students. This is further reinforced when many of them buy OBU

hoodies and sweatshirts. This demonstrates that the students see themselves as being part of OBU and helps to reinforce the message the college is sending that they are now university students. The college holds its own formal graduation ceremony, but students have the option to receive their degrees at the OBU ceremonies in Oxford and many students take this up.

“it’s important that students realise they are Brookes students” (G)

“Simple things like students having Brookes lanyards and being able to buy Brookes hoodies all help” (B)

“they love going to Oxford for graduation” (B)

“Families see it as important that they graduate at Brookes. They have a real degree.” (G)

While these are the outward symbols of HE and the partnership, the important thing is how this works in practice. The students are often taking the same modules with the same assessments as those on campus. The tensions lie not within the content of the degrees, but in differences in how they are delivered and the resources and staff available to deliver them. OBU has tried to mitigate some of these differences by providing materials and, in many programmes, materials are also shared between colleges. It is at this stage that some of the tensions arise in building an HE ethos in FE. This will be explored further in the operational case studies, while this section aims to highlight the issues from the management perspective.

“The intention is that we have dedicated HE staff and we do have specialist managers but our main business is FE and due to the greater numbers, it isn’t always possible for staff to specialise.” (G)

“We’ve got to accept that, although the results are the same, the student’s experience is different, but then so are the students.” (F)

“It is the difference which is key to developing the correct ethos. We need to create a situation where we support non-traditional learners to have the confidence to become independent learners.” (G)

These comments would suggest that the success of the partnership in delivering HE is achieved not by trying to replicate the University’s culture, but by accepting differences and developing a culture within a college which recognises the need for encouraging scholarship and independent learning while providing an appropriate level of support. How this works in practice is explored in the studies which follow.

9.7 Funding

The differences in funding mechanisms were discussed in Chapter 2. Although Parry (2013) saw attitudes to funding and resources being key, the interviewees made little reference to funding or the impact of lower fees during their interviews, although F commented.

“...and we support them and retain 25% of the fee to do so. The role of the Liaison Manager is key in providing this support.” (F)

This suggests that, from an OBU point of view, the funding mechanism places obligations on the university rather than the college.

The other area raised by A and F was the viability of courses which, in some instances, are operating on very small numbers. OBU does not see these as cost-

effective, but the college wishes to retain them. This, perhaps, reveals one difference in the culture of the organisations – their attitude to resourcing:

“It gets difficult when we want to close a course due to low numbers but the college wishes to retain it, but then their USP is often small class sizes so to them it’s worth it.” (F)

This, again, shows the freedom within the partnership for the college to work towards its own aims, which are not necessarily shared by OBU, and is a good example of collaboration.

However, OBU does retain some control and courses which are not financially viable will not be maintained in the long term.

“We may allow course to continue in the short-term, but if the college can’t show there is a market, then they have to go.” (F)

9.8 Quality

In discussing quality, a distinction needs to be made between the quality of education provision and the quality systems which lead to this. This research is not discussing the quality of teaching, which is usually measured by the outputs in terms of degree results, NSS and TEF scores. Results based on these measures would suggest that, in some instances, college students are receiving a higher quality education than those on campus, with the college having received a TEF gold in 2017, suggesting that, despite the difficulties of developing an HE ethos, the college is effectively delivering HE level education. This is often attributed to the smaller class sizes and the ability of the college to be more responsive to student needs and

this will be explored further in the other case studies. This research, however, is more concerned with the quality processes in place which underpin the partnership and form the basis of the control mechanisms which were discussed earlier.

The quality procedures set in place by the university are in line with the QAA requirements and form the basis of the control mechanism. However, the college saw itself as having a key role to play in developing this mechanism, including the development of the Liaison Manager job description. This, again, shows the degree of collaboration; at management level, the college sees itself as part of the quality or control mechanism.

“The steering group (ACP) is becoming more of a quality committee, so we have input into how things are done. It’s a partnership.” (G)

The day-to-day responsibility for quality control lies with the Liaison Manager and, as such, can be a matter of personal interpretation. This can be a cause for concern, raised more often by OBU staff than those at the college. One issue seems to be the different approaches between faculties at OBU. Several Liaison Managers were interviewed for the operational case studies and so this will be explored further.

“What I’m seeing is different interpretations of how things work. So what I’m seeing is differences in how Liaison Managers see their role in supporting the colleges. If Brookes want to continue partnerships, there are some key things and key messages - some consistent things we should have.” (A)

“The Liaison Manager role is published, and clear but different faculties work in different ways. If the college has several programmes and four faculties and is getting mixed messages, we have a problem... Liaison Managers should

give a consistent message and work more in tune with one another. That kind of consistency would be good, but I can see why it doesn't happen.” (F)

“What we need from Brookes is clear consistent messages and we don't always get that. Being on the steering group, I know what should be done, but the Liaison Manager often works differently. Brookes staff seem to have a lot of freedom and that doesn't always work” (G)

These comments show that, although there is common agreement and commitment at senior level (Robinson *et al.*, 2006), this is not always delivered at operational level. Often, the reason for this is the freedom enjoyed by OBU staff. A discussion on academic freedom is beyond the scope of this research, but these comments highlight the difference in culture and approach between the two organisations and the dynamic nature of each partnership.

9.9 Governance

Colleges are often criticised for lacking experience in HE provision, as it is an adjunct to their main purpose. However, the college has demonstrated its commitment by having dedicated staff and governors with HE experience, although HE provision is only a small part of the remit. It is the long-term commitment of the college to providing HE which helps to cement the relationship.

“The college is committed to providing HE. Working with Brookes helps us do this. We wouldn't want to go it alone at this stage” (G)

While the governing bodies of both organisations have responsibility for the partnership, OBU responsibilities are discharged through the ACP steering group,

and it is membership of this group which gives the college ownership of policies and equality in the relationship.

9.10 Interpersonal relationships

The literature review highlights the role that interpersonal relationships play, especially in building trust, and this has been reinforced by comments about the role of the Liaison Manager. The staff interviewed also highlighted the need for personal relationships to support and reinforce the partnership.

“The Vice Chancellor makes a point of getting to know the principals of all the colleges we work with. It’s important they build a relationship.” (A)

“The steering group provides a good opportunity for us to get to know all those involved” (G)

“Building personal working relationships is essential” (F)

“If there is a problem, it’s easier if you can pick up the phone to someone you know”. (B)

Kale *et al.* (2000), in defining RC, take this as far as saying that the relationship between individuals develops as friendship. While interviewees all recognised the need for good working relationships, none felt that this went as far as developing friendships.

“It isn’t a friendship, it’s a working relationship based on respect.” A)

“We develop a working relationship and may occasionally socialise, but I wouldn’t say they are my friends”. (F)

“People may become friends, but it isn’t the basis of the relationship, respect is.” (B)

While mutual respect formed the basis of good working relationships between individuals, which impacts on the partnership, all recognised that the partnership has to be based on the organisational relationship, as individuals may change. However, participants recognised that this is still about the people:

“You need commitment from the top but relationships at all levels, so there is continuity” (A)

“if no one in the institutions had effective working relationships with each other, then the organisational objectives won’t be met” (G)

“it is great to have a personal relationship but when one of those people leaves, what is left behind in terms of how things run and if a lot of how things run is unspoken?” B)

“It is about the organisations but also about the people. What is an organisation without the people?” (F)

9.11 Summary

While the management view is that there must be common goals and shared values, managers recognise that there are differences between students studying at university and those in the colleges and that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot work.

They all see the need for flexibility within the system and the need to operate within the spirit of the contract rather than adhering strictly to the letter of the law. The legal contract exists, but for the majority of the time the partnership works on trust. At times, this has led to problems; the issue is getting the balance right. The success of the partnership depends on the commitment of those involved and developing a good working relationship, with the role of the Liaison Manager being key to this.

When asked what makes a good partnership, there was unanimous agreement that it depends on commitment, shared goals and flexibility, supported by a policy and quality framework. It is how this works in practice that will be discussed in the operational case studies. This fits with the five criteria highlighted by Robinson *et al.*, (2006)

The essence of a good partnership is best summed up by this quote:

“in some of the colleges, the staff turnover can be really high, so to work in practice you have to have those personal relationships, but you also need the institutional buy-in and structure as well. There needs to be some procedures and working practices to maintain it over a period of time.” (F)

9.12 Reflection

One of the main themes from this set of interviews was the level of agreement on key issues between the interviewees, demonstrating the shared objectives and values but also that both OBU and the college see this is a collaborative arrangement with each having their part to play. These views fit with my experience of supporting the OBBS partnership so I did not challenge them which, on reflection,

may have brought out more of the nuances of the relationship. As a result of this no new areas for investigation were identified in this study.

The main difference between the OBU interviewees (A and F) and those from the college (B and G) was their personal knowledge of the students. The OBU staff views were perhaps more corporate with the emphasis on meeting strategic objectives. Although both A and F were committed to the ACP and partnership development as a means of widening participation the impression given was that this was due to their role. In contrast B and G were focused on helping students and used examples of students to illustrate points. Their commitment to achieving the college goals seemed to come from their experience of students. It will be interesting to discover in the following studies the relationship between personal and organisational commitment.

Chapter 10

The Liaison Manager

10.1 Introduction

Both the OBBS and Senior Management case studies highlighted the importance of the liaison manager in building and maintaining the relationship between the college and the university. The role descriptor is included as Appendix 5 and links closely to the role of a boundary spanner as set out by Wilson, (2013).

Although an interview with a single person cannot be classified as a case, it was important to gain the views of a liaison manager as this role is central to the successful management of the partnership. This “case” gives a unique insight into the role of the liaison manager and also provides a link between the senior management and operational views provided by the next two case studies. The interviewee was known to me though we had never worked together. We had however, built a good rapport through meeting at several ACP events such as graduation ceremonies and ACP conferences but had never socialised outside work. The interview took place after the management interviews, so the issues raised there were explored further with the interviewee.

The chapter is arranged in the following order. It starts by exploring what the interviewee understands by a successful partnership before looking at attitudes to quality which arose directly from her definition of partnership. It then explores commitment, power, culture and friendship. The chapter then summarises the key issues raised before I reflect on the interview and the findings,

10.2 The Interviewee

Interviewee	Role
H	Liaison Manager. Former member ACP steering group. Taught in FE college before joining OBU

Figure 25 Profile of the liaison manager

This case gives a unique insight into the role of the liaison manager and also provides a link between the senior management and operational views provided by the next two case studies.

10.3 Successful partnerships

Interviewee H was the only person interviewed who saw it as important to differentiate between a successful partnership in terms of output and in terms of building a good working relationship, which is the focus of this study. She began by looking at outputs.

“A successful partnership is one that gives significant value added to the student in terms of degree results.” (H)

From this perspective the majority of OBU’s partnerships are successful though some take more staff input to achieve this success. The interviewee recognised that successful working relationship can be viewed from a variety of perspectives,

“so, what is good in one person’s eyes and I see that as a Liaison Manager you may be looking for different things. And sitting on the ACP steering group

there are all sorts of different constituencies and different ways of viewing success.”

It is this personal interaction and interpretation which is driving this research. For some a good working relationship is one where you are left alone to do what you want with little interference from others. However, this would result in a transactional relationship, not the collaboration identified, in the management view, as being the essence of OBU's relationship with its partners. She recognised this was different from a good working relationship which is focused on the processes involved in achieving them and must be focused on the developing right student experience. This fits with the research aims which seeks to examine partnership processes rather than outcomes. (Provan and Siddow, 2008, Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2008, Langley et al, 2013). She saw a good relationship being one of collaboration where the partners are working together, supporting each other to achieve a successful outcome for the student.

“Good partnerships create a supportive and caring environment for students.

The staff are committed to providing high quality teaching.”

Her definition echoed that of G in the Management case study and how this is achieved is important to this study.

She felt that the ACP could be regarded as a successful partnership as it achieved its objectives in providing an opportunity for mostly non-traditional learners to benefit from higher education and therefore widen participation. She expected this view had been put forward by senior management but interestingly those interviewed for the management study concentrated on the relationship between the organisations. The reasons for this were not explored at the time but may be because partnerships

which had not achieved successful outputs would be closed and therefore having processes in place to avoid this was more important to senior management,

10.4 Quality

The emphasis on quality of provision emphasised by H is in line with the need for maintaining appropriate quality standards and fits with one of the key aspects of the role of liaison manager (See Appendix 5) as well as both Parry (2013) and Robinson *et al.*, (2006). As already discussed, terminology is open to interpretation and so it is important to understand what the interviewee means by quality. This exploration starts with examining the quality procedures which is the aspect of quality referred to by Parry (2013), before looking at what is meant by quality of provision and quality of teaching.

10.4.1 Quality systems and procedures

As outlined in Chapter 7 [the Operations Manual](#), sets out the procedures to be followed (and it is the role of the liaison manager to ensure these are adhered to.) In this role they are using their skills as a reticulist (Wilson, 2013) but also taking on their hierarchical role (Nederland *et al.*, 2018) as in this instance they may have to use their powers to compel. It is the delicate balance between enabler and enforcer which makes the role of the liaison manager so important. The interviewee saw the attitude and experience of the liaison manager being key to how well the procedures worked. It is these procedures which support and direct the relationship being developed.

“The job description is based around the key elements of the Annual Review but how this works in practice depends on the individual and varies between

faculties This causes the problems for the college who are being asked to do things differently and at different times depending on the contacts. The college needs consistency from Brookes and isn't getting it".

She saw this as a tension in OBU between the need for the centre to set out policies and procedures while allowing the faculties academic freedom. There is no consistent approach to how OBU staff are allocated to the role or the experience they are expected to have and often depends more on the Head of Departments' attitude to the partnership and Fds. The word allocated was chosen carefully, as there is no formal application process for the role with some faculties asking for "expressions of interest" and others appointing those they think would be suitable.

"It depends on who the liaison manager is and why they want the role. For some it's a development opportunity while others want to share expertise.

Good liaison managers need to understand the systems. If you've never been involved in doing the annual review, you shouldn't be advising the college on how to do it".

She summarised the situation as being that there are appropriate systems in place but there can be too much flexibility in their interpretation as there is over-reliance on an individual and when that person changes or doesn't have the required skills there is an impact on the entire of the relationship. This also highlighted the different approaches in the faculties raised by interviewees F and G and which can lead to the college receiving mixed messages when clarity is required (Robinson *et al.*, 2006). The success of the relationship, however, relies on the liaison manager, once again stressing the importance of individuals. Quality is maintained in that the appropriate processes are followed but there can be variation within this and just because annual

reviews are completed on time and there is a moderation process in places for agreeing marksheets does not necessarily mean that the quality of provision is good or that there is a good relationship between the organisations.

“The liaison manager can make or break the partnership but there are few checks on what they do and how they do it”.

The lack of checks on the liaison manager shows just how much the entire relationship is based on trust stemming from professional expertise. (Skandrani, 2011)

10.4.2 Quality of provision

The interviewee saw the quality of provision as closely linked to the commitment of those involved and the culture of the organisation and is focused round ensuring a good student experience which is linked both to the allocation of resources and the quality of teaching (Parry, 2013). Whereas many see the quality framework and operations manual as controls she saw them as enablers to support the delivery of high quality education through the partnership. A discussion of the quality of teaching is beyond the scope of this research but commitment is at the heart of partnership.

10.5 Commitment

The interviewee saw two facets to commitment- organisational and that of the staff to their role.

She agreed that both the organisations are committed to working together as this helps both meet their objectives, but the relationship needs to be dynamic due to the

nature of the market. So although at organisational and strategic level there is consistency at operational level the relationship forms and reforms as programmes close and new ones are developed. This flexibility however has not affected the importance of the two organisations to each other. Regardless, for those working at operational level this commitment was not always seen to be at the forefront within the college.

“But there are these conflicts within FE, and it goes with swings and balances doesn’t it? When the college has an FE OFSTED review the switch of emphasis is to FE and when there is an HE review it shifts there. There is a constant movement of priority.”

This problem was acknowledged by G, who in her role of Head of HE wanted to give priority to HE, but this was not always possible as FE covers the majority of the college’s operations. The need for the college to give priority to its core business of FE impacts the ability of the staff to deliver high quality HE which the interviewee saw as key to a good partnership.

“There are committed and passionate staff but there is sometimes an FE model imposed on teaching HE which restrains and restricts what they can do in the HE environment and that restraint comes from income but I also think it comes from an institutional culture”.

Culture will be explored in greater detail below. As outlined in Chapter 2, the FE restraints on those teaching HE often arise from the nature of the FE employment contract and the amount of contact time. Although some staff were initially recruited to teach only, HE they have FE contracts and the numbers involved mean that they are often drawn in to teaching FE as well so have to constantly change approaches.

The high level of contact time coupled with students who often need more support puts a lot of pressure on the staff and this makes it difficult for them to deliver to the standard they would like (Parry, 2017). While this may be the case there is no evidence that this has an adverse effect on the quality of the student experience which highlights that the commitment of the staff cannot be questioned and will be explored further in the remaining case studies.

The commitment of the college is demonstrated by the involvement of the senior management.

“I have a lot of contact with the Head of HE and she meets regularly with the course lead. This makes a difference. It doesn’t happen in other colleges. It’s a public demonstration of her personal commitment. However, the college could give more support in terms of the hours available for the job.”

The latter sentence refers to the hours available for managing the programme for course leaders. The demonstrable personal commitment of those involved forms a firm basis for a successful working relationship provided the other aspects are in place. However, due to the nature of education this commitment needs to be long term and that can be difficult to maintain at operational level.

“You have real good staff who are passionate and who start with us to get these things moving and then they lead them. It all works smoothly and when they leave the course dissolves. I’ve seen that happen recently and the course slips away.”

This highlights the need for long term commitment on both sides and the problems of being over-reliant on individuals and will be explored further in the operational case studies.

While the commitment is there, developing an appropriate collaborative culture is essential for success. This can only develop if the power dynamics support collaboration and as identified above the liaison manager needs to tread a delicate path between support and control.

10.6 Power

H saw the partnership as being one of equals as it is of mutual benefit and a reciprocal arrangement. She echoed F's view that although the degree belongs to OBU the degree would not exist if the college did not provide the students. However, is this more about collaboration than power?

"I see it as us working together to get the best outcome for the student but Brookes is the responsible partner and responsible for the quality of the awards. It's Brookes name and reputation but we are all in it together. In order to get the best out of the situation we've got to move together and listen to each other"

This once again stresses the collaborative nature of the partnership. However, the interviewee felt that although the partnership was equal in regard to day to day operations, the expertise of the college was not always recognised in the development of new programmes and in a bid to maintain quality standards OBU tended to use a standard model rather than using the college expertise to develop a

more flexible delivery model which may better meet the needs of a different cohort, with campus based courses often being replicated in the college.

“Don’t just churn out the same 3 year degree. Use the college expertise more to develop a more flexible mode of delivery which better meets the needs of a different type of cohort”.

This lack of recognition of the college expertise reinforces the view raised by B and F in the management view study and demonstrates that Brookes sees itself as having expert power (Huxham and Beech, 2008), which could mitigate against a collaborative relationship This will be further explored in the remaining cases.

10.7 Culture

Once again, the impact of culture on the relationship was seen as important with H highlighting the different approaches to research,

“We have scholarship time built in there is an expectation on us to do research and the impact that has on my ability to deliver at a certain level is significant, but they don’t have that. They may have 5 days a year for development and some to pursue further qualifications but it’s like HE is research driven and how are you embedding that into your teaching and the HE culture into your environment when that isn’t at the core of what you are doing as an institution and I know some of the institutions are trying to address that and there are research for at some of the colleges and that is a really good start and I was doing some of that as PLSE to bring research into the coal face level”

However, although the interviewee saw that the power was shared equally in the partnership this attitude to culture suggests that she sees the HE approach as being the correct one and that the college needs to adapt to fit with the approach on campus. It also contradicts the interviewee's view that one failing is that OBU should recognise the college's expertise more. This would reinforce the view that there is an imbalance of power, and the partners needs to adapt to that of Brookes. This approach fails to recognise Schein's (2010) view that the culture in a partnership may differ from that of the individual organisations and is developed based on the experiences of those involved in the partnership and to meet the dynamics of that partnership. The bigger problem for FE staff is that they need to constantly change their approaches between HE and FE (Feather, 2017), which would suggest that it is they that are more flexible with a breadth of expertise which Brookes could learn from. This approach to scholarship also fails to take into account its wider role in applying knowledge which is a core strength of FE (Lee and Simmons, 2012). It is also a rather traditional view as increasingly universities are separating the role of the researcher from that of teaching (McAllister, 2016; Webster, 2017).

Tensions will arise in any partnership where there is a difference in approaches and attitudes between those involved and this is an area which will be explored further though the operational case studies.

As culture is developed by the individuals working in a partnership, interpersonal relationships form the key. The interviewee saw this as one of the barriers to building a successful partnership, as, although there are good working relationships at senior management level the responsibility at operational level lies with the liaison manager and for most of the time they are expected to perform the role with little support.

There is an over-reliance on the liaison manager to make it work and it is difficult to find the right person.

“On a day to day basis that person is Brookes and it is essential that they share Brookes vision and are committed to the partnership. The liaison manager needs to have experience of Brookes’ system but also understand FE”.

However, as outlined above, there is variation between faculties in appointing staff to the role. Some see it as a development opportunity which may result in enthusiasm for the role but can cause problems if the person has little experience of Brookes quality systems. Other faculties appoint senior staff who may have the expertise but may not always have the time available. She also saw this variation in approach as causing problems for the college who are not getting a consistent message. There may be common procedures, but they are not interpreted in the same way.

Staff turnover also plays a major role in how the culture is developed. Most of the staff in the college are initially recruited to teach FE and those with appropriate qualifications are then expected to teach HE alongside this. Often there will only be one person with this expertise so if they leave it can be difficult to continue courses, which also means that the relationship often needs to be rebuilt. The impact of staff turnover will be explored further in the operational case studies.

As culture is developed by the attitudes and values of those involved it is by its very nature dynamic. There is a need to move away from the view that within the partnership the college needs to develop a culture in line with a traditional view of HE culture. Rather, it is necessary to form a partnership which embraces the commitment of the staff and uses their experience to build an approach based on

developing students to both challenge and to apply knowledge. How this can be done will be explored through the other case studies and the discussion.

In line with Robinson *et al.*, (2006) the interviewee saw clear and open communication as being key. She saw this demonstrated by as not only visiting regularly but also being open and accessible,

“You need to build a relationship which is open and honest with clear ground rules”.

She saw this openness as being clear about roles and responsibilities and also about availability. Although her approach to developing a HE culture may have suggested that she saw herself as having expert power she felt it important that part of the role of the liaison manager was to facilitate colleges within the ACP to develop relationships with each other so they could share their expertise and experience. Although the role means that she is the “official” expert she saw herself very much as an enabler.

“It’s about opening channels of communication so expertise can be shared”.

Again, the impact of this on the partnership will be examined in the other case studies.

10.8 Friendship

As Kale *et al.*, (2000) saw as a key component of RC and interviewees in the OBBS case had been adamant that friendship has no role to play the interview moved on to look at this aspect.

She saw friendship as being something that may develop because of the working relationship but that it was important to keep things professional.

“Part of the role is the enforcer so it’s important to be professional and maintain some distance”

She felt it important however, that there were occasions to get to know each other more informally and she used graduation ceremonies and the annual ACP conference as examples.

While she felt that good relationships were being built between OBU and college staff to deliver the degrees and between senior management of both organisations there was a lack of communication between them and that although the colleges are part of the ACP steering group and involved in developing policy and procedures the practicalities of some issues were not always explored. One practical example of this being that although both colleges use Moodle, they use different versions, so staff and college based students need to use both to access OBU information. This hinders good communication and creates confusion.

10.9 Summary

Kale *et al*, (2009) stress the need for someone to coordinate partnerships to maintain and develop RC and in this study this role is filled by the liaison manager who can be described as a Boundary Spanner. Boundary Spanning therefore needs to be explored in the literature review and the role of the liaison manager in the remaining cases. The key themes emerging from the interview are the need for commitment, consistency and a shared culture based on the importance of scholarship. The interview recognised the constraints on the college and felt that OBU needed to

adapt to the needs of the college and the student demographic more, OBU had chosen a partner with expertise and a good reputation and thus could perhaps recognise these more. There was a danger, that to ensure quality, flexibility was being lost. The keys to a successful relationship, however, are best summed up by the interviewee.

“It takes care, commitment, expertise, flexibility and being reasonable”.

10.10 Reflection

This interview was more wide-ranging than most of the others I carried out and so it has been more difficult to condense the essence of the points made. The over-riding impression gained from this interview was the passion that the interviewee had for her subject and for widening participation. She is dedicated to ensuring that through the ACP more people could achieve a degree. Once again demonstrating the level of personal commitment displayed by those involved. This will be explored further in the discussion.

Analysis of the data collected in this interview highlighted the multifaceted nature of the role and the fine line the liaison manager treads between control and support. This coincided with me reducing my involvement with the OBBS case and working with the D on the role descriptor and timetabled hours for the OBBS academic link. As set out in Chapter 8 this role does not include responsibility for the Annual Review a key part of the liaison manager role. These two together led me to start thinking beyond the framework of partnership theory and RC to the liaison manager as a boundary spanner demonstrating the abductive nature of the research. As a result, the literature review was updated to critique literature on boundary spanning.

This provided an opportunity, in the discussion, to evaluate the liaison manager role in terms of boundary spanning theory and, in particular Williams', (2013) view of the four roles of the boundary spanner and how management exhibit boundary spanning leadership, (BSL), (Prysor and Henley, 2018). The other key theme from this interview was the traditional differences in attitude to knowledge between colleges of FE and universities with those teaching HE in FE not being active researchers. This also needs to be explored more through the literature.

Chapter 11

Early Years Education

11.1 Introduction

These interviews were carried out after that with the liaison manager using the second interview schedule and demonstrating the staged nature of the data collection process, in line with an embedded case design (Yin, 2014). There were 4 participants. 2 from each organisation. The partnership had been in operation for several years and had recently been through a periodic review, for which I had been on the panel. Although I had met two of the interviewees on that occasion, I did not have a relationship with them and the remaining two were unknown to me. The management case study highlighted the important role the liaison manager plays in building and maintaining the partnership and 2 of the interviewees had experience of the liaison manager role both in this partnership and in others. None of those interviewed has been involved in setting up the programme so were more focused on maintaining the relationship than developing it, but all had experience of working with other partners. Interviewee L had studied a Fd at the college several years earlier and therefore also had experience from the student side which added to the discussion. L and M were interviewed together which helped develop some of themes discussed. There had been 3 liaison managers over the last 3 years and the college staff were able to compare and contrast approaches and contribute this to the discussion. Unfortunately, one of the people who had held this role did not wish to participate. Due to the changes in liaison manager, the college interviewees saw the constancy of the relationship coming more from the ACP and relationships with

the other colleges involved than directly from their relationship with OBU. Based on the findings of the previous cases, I specifically asked participants to comment on the role of senior management during the discussion on power. This provided new insights into power distribution. The interviewees were also specifically asked to outline what makes a successful partnership whereas in the previous interviews this had been part of the general discussion on partnership.

The chapter is organised in the following way. The chapter first looks at the nature of partnership before discussing culture, trust, commitment, power, the role of senior management and features of successful partnerships. The chapter ends with a summary of the key findings and a reflection on the process.

11.2 The interviewees

J	Former Education Liaison Manager. Long career of teaching in education and developing education partnerships both at OBU and elsewhere.
K	Current Education Liaison Manager. Long career at OBU and working with ACP but mostly at PG level.
L	College Education course leader. Taught on the Fd for several years before becoming course leader 2 years ago. Also led Fds in partnership with other universities. Had been and Fd student at the college. Teaches HE only.

M	College lecturer. Taught on the Fd for a number of years. Experience in FE teaching but now concentrates on HE.

Figure 26 Profile of the Education interviewees

11.3 The nature of partnership

The interviews all started with a discussion on the meaning of partnership, with all the participants stressing the importance of collaboration, showing the agreement between the management and operational view.

“It’s more about you are part of our community and family and we broadly share the same values. And I do think that the word values is a hackneyed thing, and everybody says it but if you don’t have a number of values you share you can’t work together.” (J)

I’ve always worked in that sort of partnership and valued it as a 2-way process. The university provides the theoretical basis, and the college puts it into practice. It is a very simple relationship, but it works in my view. (K)

“It needs to be reciprocal”. (L)

*“Everybody has a fair say, everybody is working together to the same goal.”
(M)*

Reciprocity and the need for common goals forms the basis of all partnerships as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 and reinforced by the management and liaison manager cases. This shared understanding of the nature of the partnership is important if the shared goals are to be achieved. The need for shared values forms the basis of developing a common culture (Alvesson, 2013) and is also the basis of trust. K's view highlights that a relationship needs to be reciprocal but in line with Hoppner and Griffith (2000) the inputs do not need to be the same or equal. This approach that the university provides theoretical input and the college the application fits the view of Feather (2010), Lee and Simmons (2012) and Hobley (2017) about the nature of scholarship in FE, but also shows how partnerships develop to share resources. will be explored later in the culture section of this chapter.

11.4 Culture

The importance of shared values which form the basis of developing a common culture was demonstrated in the interviewees' definitions of partnership and by the reciprocal nature of the relationship. Hoppner and Griffith (2000) see reciprocity as being a social norm thus contributing to the development of the partnership culture (Alvesson, 2012). The interviewees saw this as being partly demonstrated in their approach to assessment and developing quality standards.

"We come together to set standards and norms for assessment which feeds into how we teach." (L)

"We work together to set standards as part of the quality procedures." (K)

"We have to develop a common approach, or it wouldn't work." (J)

This emphasis on developing quality processes and shared standards has perhaps replaced the emphasis on support for day to day teaching and suggests that norms change and develop as the partnership develops and once again demonstrates the dynamic nature of partnership and provides another dimension to developing an HE culture in FE, one of a shared view of quality.

The liaison manager study in line with the literature saw developing a common culture being constrained by those involved at college level teaching in both FE and HE and having different attitudes to scholarship but this was not reflected in this case. L and M taught HE only and both were being supported to study at a higher level as their previous head of department had been committed to developing research- led approach. This contradicts the view that college staff do not have time for research. (Feather, 2016). This was supported by K who saw a good balance between research and practice.

“They are deeply committed to research and scholarship and they are both doing doctorates. It’s the whole research and practice and they are becoming like the old polytechnics. They do research to improve practice.” (K)

“Their strengths lie in applying that knowledge”. (K)

However, they felt that their ability to develop an HE culture based on scholarship was affected by senior management and the issue is about both time and attitude.

“The previous head was an expert in the field and wanted us to be research led but the new head of department puts the emphasis on FE and doesn’t see research as being so important.” (L)

This once again shows the dynamic nature of the culture and how it is influenced by those involved and develops as those people change.

This case showed that those involved shared an attitude to knowledge not usually found in HE (Fletcher, 2017) suggesting that the differences between teaching HE in a university and an FE college are narrowing. While agreement on the nature of scholarship and the need to develop quality standards is important in developing a common culture for the partnership, which may be different from that of the parent organisations (Alvesson, 2001; Schein 2010) one aspect which impacts on this is the different profile of the student body with college based HE students tending to need greater support. As discussed above this is not recognised in the resources available.

11.5 Trust

No partnership can exist without trust with Morgan and Hunt (1994) highlighting the interrelationship between trust and commitment. However, trust was not a word used by the college interviewees though they did talk about OBU expecting them to do the right thing and OBU relying on their experience which equates to trust. This is reinforced by the OBU interviewees who saw trust as being built by open communication and being based on expertise and experience,

“You’ve got to build the trust and you do that by being open and honest” (J)

“Trust comes from experience and expertise”. (K)

The college staff said they sometimes feel unsupported which is an example of trust not always being viewed as a positive

“Because we trust them, we leave them to get on with it so we can concentrate on other things” (L).

As trust is a value and becomes a social norm it has a major impact on developing culture.

11.6 Commitment

Due to the nature of education the partnership needs to be long term. The nature of the discussion on commitment with the OBU staff focused on the willingness of both organisations to engage in a long term relationship and the need for partnerships to be sustainable. L commented that the level of intensity of the relationship may vary over time, but that this did not impact on the basic relationship and that it was important to develop this flexibility to keep the relationship dynamic.

Although Robinson *et al.*, (2006) see the time partnership requires and staff ownership of the role as being distinct the college interviewees saw these as the same thing. They were more concerned about the time required to build and maintain a relationship than about the long term nature of the partnership and how the time available impacted on their ability to do the job well. Although unlike in the Business and HSS studies the staff only taught HE, they still had standard FE contracts and there was only nominal time allocated for the additional responsibilities of HE teaching, and the need to follow quality procedures. The staff also felt that the time available did not recognise the level of pastoral support required by the students typically studying in a college.

“We’ve got to give a lot more pastoral support and its building in that time” (P)

“We can’t do it in official office hours we have to be more accessible, and we need the university to recognise that and look at what we can do within the hours available” (N)

The issue here seems not to be the commitment of staff but the size of the role and the lack of staffing resources. This apparent lack of resources is counter to Connolly *et al.*, (2007) and Butcher *et al.*, (2011) who see the need for extra resources to provide appropriate support essential and brings into question senior management commitment. It is this lower resource allocation which makes it cheaper to deliver HE in FE. The impact of this on the partnership will be explored further in the discussion.

Although the college staff were committed to the role, they didn’t feel they always got the support they required from the liaison manager.

“We’re left to get on with it”. (L)

“It’s assumed we know what we are doing so we are left alone.” (M)

This is perhaps explained by the trust Brookes staff have in their ability to deliver and different interpretations of the role of liaison manager will be discussed further later in this section.

“The college staff have the expertise so they can be left to get on with it” (J)

“I’m here to support them with policies and procedures but they are the subject experts” (K)

The college staff felt that this apparent lack of support was partly as the liaison manager role was an adjunct to university staff’s other responsibilities and wasn’t always given priority. As the staff had worked with 3 different liaison manners during

the course of the partnership, they also felt that part of this was due to personal interpretations of the role.

“Supporting us is only part their role. And isn’t always given priority”. (L)

“It depends on the person. Some are more interested in what we do than others. We used to get lots of visits including guest lectures but now it’s only for quality meetings” (J)

The college staff agreed that while visits were limited, OBU staff were always quick to respond to email and phone calls and an advantage of the ACP was that they could discuss issues with the other colleges. They also praised the support given by admin staff and in retrospect it would probably have been useful to interview admin staff.

“We can always get help by email or phone”. (J)

“The advantage of the ACP is that we can get advice from other colleges who may have dealt with the same problem”. (L)

“The Brookes admin staff are amazing they often sort things out for us.” (L)

The did however, feel that the Head of HE was very supportive and did her best to ensure that they had as much time as possible.

Interestingly, in the recent periodic review of the programmes The Head of HE had asked if a condition could be the need for specific staff development days so that she had a stronger case to argue for the appropriate resources. (Author’s comment)

OBU interviewees also expressed concerns about the time available for college staff to deliver their role and the time they had available to support them. There was a view that an increasing emphasis on standardisation and quality procedures had changed the nature of the job,

“The college staff are under a lot of pressure. The amount of contact time gives them little time to do the rest of the job”.

“It’s amazing how much they achieve in the time available.”

“In an ideal world I’d visit the college more but I don’t have the time. I look after 3 colleges and the hours available mean I have to prioritise the quality procedures side”. (J)

“I’ve been doing this job a long time and I used to spend more time with the colleges and seeing what they do but now it’s all about quality control”. (K)

This highlights the need to look at the resources available to the partnership but also suggests a change in emphasis from support to control mechanisms which would seem to detract from the view that as trust builds with experience control can be relaxed. However, as explained by F in the management study, the greater emphasis on standardisation is a response to the growing number of partnerships and trying to deal with a greater range of expertise. This will be explored further in the discussion section.

11.7 Power

Although they knew that the college was represented on the ACP steering group, they saw the imposition of standard procedures being a way in which OBU exerts its power.

“Most of the time we work together, But with procedures its Brookes in charge. We aren’t consulted.” (L)

There were, however, areas where the college staff felt the university needed to exert more power to help maintain standards.

“At the moment we have shortage of staff, so library hours reduced which is no good to our students who are here at night. There doesn’t seem to be enough of the university demanding certain things because we are dealing with their students”. (L)

“Essentially Brookes need to get the colleges to dedicate more time to HE. And see what roles are in the HE context” (L)

This highlights the problem of maintaining an appropriate balance of power and will be explored in the next case.

11.8 The role of senior management

All interviewees saw the senior management teams of their organisations as being committed to the partnership. However, the college staff felt that although the Head of HE was committed and supportive the new principal saw HE as an income stream and did not fully understand the different pressures.

“The new principal is committed to HE as he sees it as a good income stream but doesn’t really understand its nature.” (L)

This had an impact on the ability to deliver high quality education. This is an interesting view of the college management as the restructuring undergone since the arrival of the new principal had created senior management roles dedicated to HE.

They also felt that the ACP steering groups didn’t always understand the operational implications of decisions.

“They are committed and want to see an increase in students numbers and partnerships but don’t understand how this works on the ground” (L)

This is an interesting view of the role of the steering groups since the college is represented on it on it by the Dean of HE, (G), who said in her interview that she felt ownership of policies and procedures as she contributed to their development. This suggest that the college management do not understand how HE works in practice, but this does not fit with the liaison manager view, (K) who was impressed by the level of interest shown by the G. This mismatch will be explored further in the Healthcare interviews.

Increasing standardisation to ensure quality procedures was seen as one example of a lack of understanding and as outlined above, has had a negative impact on the ability of the liaison manager to provide operational support.

“We use different version of Moodle and that causes problems, or we have to have thing in 2 different places. There’s also a problem with common deadlines. They don’t take into account that most of your student also work, that isn’t good for the student experience.” (L)

This highlights the gap between management policy and the resource commitment required which is reinforced by these comments.

“Our Head of School is FE focused and wants us to fit in the FE mould not the HE mould” (M)

“The Head of HE understands what is required and we get lots of support, but we are pulled in different directions” (L)

The commitment of senior management is essential if the partnership is to succeed. This mismatch in policy and practice is contrary to Robinson *et al*'s., (2006) view that there needs to be clear messages from senior management. This is an area which will be explored in detail in the discussion.

Based on these comments the staff commitment to the partnership is based on the staff ownership of their roles and more from the commitment of the individuals involved to do the best for their students rather than from the commitment of resources including time by the organisations.

11.9 Key features of a successful partnership

The interviews all ended by asking the participants to explain what they would look for in an ideal partner.

“A partnership that acknowledges the expertise on both sides. And the difference between the university and the college. Shares the knowledge and draws us in. There needs to be more involvement of the colleges in decision making.”

“The expertise of the staff in the colleges. It works because they have the academic skills but they understand what students need. One of the problems is the colleges not realising they need different resources from FE”.

“Joined up thinking and getting on with it. It’s a can do attitude. Its character and personality at the end of the day”.

Broadly we have to have mutually flexible objectives... Secondly you have to build up the trust.

“I would like them to be transparent, receptive to our knowledge, understand our students and our experience. Receptive to our ideas, value our knowledge have the knowledge and understanding of our students needs and backgrounds. And value the diversity of how we are all different and need to work in different ways.”

11.10 Summary

The interviewees all saw the partnership as being collaborative in that they shared knowledge and expertise to achieve common goals, but there was flexibility in the relationship which allows them to work with others. Although OBU could be regarded as the dominant partner in that the partnership is subject to OBU regulations it was seen as being one of equals with both parties bringing different expertise. It was the recognition of this expertise which was key to the successful working relationship.

The liaison manager is seen as important in developing and maintaining the relationship and is seen as the expert in OBU’s processes but they do not need to be

a subject specialist. Where this is the case, it better allows the college staff to demonstrate their knowledge and the staff feel that it is a more equal relationship. The attitude and approach of the liaison manager is key to how collaborative the partnership is and aligns with Wegemer and Renick 's (2021) relational influence.

While all interviewees saw the need for appropriate quality procedures, they felt that increasing standardisation, especially of common deadlines across the ACP, did not always reflect the needs of the students.

The respondents felt that although the senior management of both organisations were committed to the partnership in strategic terms, they did not fully understand the impact of some decisions at operational level and did not always commit the resources necessary. This was an issue both for the university in terms of time allocated to liaison managers and for the college in terms of staffing levels, timetabling and support services.

The partnership is successful in that it supports students to achieve degrees, but this is due more to the commitment of the staff than the systems and resources in place to support them.

One area that was not raised by the interviewees was the importance of personal relationships. There was an obvious close relationship between the two college staff but little commentary on the relationship between OBU and colleges staff. This may be because the frequent changes in liaison manager meant that there had not been time for relationships to be developed and the college staff did comment that they had good relationships with staff in other colleges in the ACP. Another reason may be that the current liaison manager, (K) saw her role as being focused on quality procedures suggesting that this is a more transactional relationship than a

collaborative one and that those involved had more specific roles. However, K had a high level of trust in L and M suggesting that this is credibility not identification based trust (Coleman, 2000)

11.11 Reflection

This was the first set of interviews in which none of the interviewees were personally known to me, though I had been impressed by the commitment of K and L during the periodic review of the programme. This study does not discuss interpersonal relationships because none of the interviewees raised it. As Kale *et al.*, (2000), include friendship in their definition of RC this was remiss of me, especially as the personal relationship seemed to lack the warmth obvious in the other interviews. On reflection and when rereading the transcripts, the lack of close personal relationships is apparent between college and OBU staff. This may have been the result of changes in staffing as there had not been time to build relationship as well as personality traits. L and M obviously had a good working relationship, and their rapport was obvious during the interviews.

One of the key issues of this case was the shared attitude to knowledge and hence culture expressed. The interviews recognised the need for research but in line with Hobley *et al.* (2017,) saw an HE culture as being built on teaching students to contest and apply new knowledge. This approach to developing an HE culture needs to be strengthened in the literature review and explored further with the remaining interviewees.

Chapter 12

Healthcare

12.1 Introduction

The interviews for this case were the last to be conducted using the 2nd interview schedule. It provided an opportunity to explore in greater depth the nature of partnership and what was required to run a successful partnership. As three of the interviewees had been involved in developing the partnership this case also provided an opportunity to look at the basis of partnership development as well as how it was being maintained, providing new insight into partnership.

Four interviews were carried out with 2 respondents from each organisation. None of the interviewees were known to the interviewer. The interviews took place during the summer, and this coupled with staff changes meant that none of the staff teaching on the course were available for interview. The previous liaison manager also declined to be interviewed.

The chapter is structured in the following way:

It first discusses the motivation for the partnership and how it was developed. It then discusses, culture. trust. commitment, power and inter-personal relationships/friendship and communication, before examining how the role of the liaison manager and senior management influence these. The chapter then moves onto explore what makes a successful partnership before summarising the key

issues raised which will inform the discussion and ends with a reflection of the interview process and the lessons learnt.

12.2 The interviewees

Interviewee	Role
N	OBU Department Head.
P	Healthcare Liaison Manager
Q	College Department Head. Background in nursing. Worked with P in setting up the Fd and had taught on it for the first 2 years before taking up her current role.
R	College Healthcare Course Lead. Recruited to teach HE but now also teaches FE.

Figure 27 Profile of healthcare interviewees

12.3 Partnership development

To explain her understanding of the nature of partnership Q explained the journey that had been undertaken in developing the Healthcare partnership. This section uses her narrative as its basis and supplements this with the views of N and P who were also involved from the beginning before looking at what is required to maintain the partnership using the interviews of P and R. Unlike the previous cases this section interweaves comments on culture, trust, commitment etc., to show how important they were at the beginning of the partnership, demonstrating their

interrelationship. Later sections in this chapter will examine each component of RC in more detail.

The partnership was developed to meet market need and the college had sought out OBU to provide access to the resources they needed to meet this need. The main attraction was the nature of the Fd on offer which provided the practical application of knowledge, (Lea and Simmons, 2012), once again demonstrating a shared approach to knowledge and forming the basis of developing a common culture.

“We had been offered Foundation degrees before by universities nearer to us to run Foundation degrees in partnership with them, but they didn’t fill the gap to provide what we thought was needed in the way Brookes did. We wanted the practical side” (S)

The choice of partner on both sides was also based on reputation and experience demonstrating that calculative trust was present from the beginning (Cullen *et al.*, 2000)

“The college represents Brookes in the area so the partner has to be someone we know we can trust to enhance that reputation. Past experience showed us this was a partner who would do that”. (Q)

“We were already working with other colleges when they came to us. We knew this was an organisation the university already worked with but more importantly they really wanted to do things the way we did. We were on the same wavelength from the start” (Q)

As in the education study the common background of the staff involved also helped to reinforce the shared values and approaches and formed the basis of trust.

“We kept the team quite small We all had nursing in common which meant we had a common understanding of what was right” (Q)

There was also a shared commitment to make things work which underpinned the development stages of the programme.

“commitment to achieve the same thing.” (Q)

“They are committed to achieving the same outcomes as us.” (N)

This commitment was not just about attitudes to outcomes but also the resourcing of the partnership both financially and in terms of staff time, which is seen as crucial by Connolly, et al., (2007) and Butcher, et al., (2011).

“They were prepared to put resources into a skills lab right from the beginning.....They committed the resources right from the start by dedicating staff time exclusively to the programme” (N)

“Brookes were really supportive they put in a lot of time at the beginning to get things up and running quickly.” (Q)

It is this commitment from both sides which helped to cement the relationship in the beginning and demonstrates that it is a partnership not a transactional relationship, (Mohr and Spekman, 1994)

“rather than us feeling that we were having to give all the time the partnership for me meant that they were equally providing and wanted to work with us rather than be given stuff which was really important for us. So, I would say that was important from the start” (Q)

Although there was already trust between the two organisations the commitment of the individuals involved helped to generate identification - based trust (Fukuyama, 2005) between them from an early stage. Initially due to open and honest communication but also from the respect shown. This helps to demonstrate the role respect plays in developing trust (Bhagat, 2009). Unfortunately, I did not explore Q's meaning of respect during the interview which would have provided greater insight into this hackneyed term.

“The way they interact with us demonstrates to me that they really respect the way we want to work.” (Q)

As the partnership has developed the trust between those involved has increased as a direct result of them working together, based on a common understanding of what is required.

“everything they are doing is business like and professional” (Q)

However, this working relationship had taken time to build, and the length of time and effort required cannot be underestimated (Connolly, 2007). Interviewee A, in the management study, also stressed the time taken to build a relationship emphasising the long-term nature of education partnerships. At the time of the interviews the partnership had been running for six years demonstrating the long-term commitment of both the college and OBU. This effort needs to be put in at both operational and organisational levels to ensure continuity. The role of senior management in supporting the partnership is discussed in Section 12.9

“One of the things is time. Investing time in it and the time that it takes and one of the things I’ve found with other providers is that it takes longer to build

it up than it does to knock it down. One shouldn't underestimate the amount of time it takes to build up a working relationship and the difficulty is if you invest a lot of time building up a relationship with a couple of individuals when they leave all of that time invested has to some extent gone. So, it useful to have investment in time at multiple levels, so that if people do leave hopefully there is someone there you achieve a relationship with". (Q)

"We had things in place for validation quite quickly but it took a lot of time to build working relationships and to get to understand what was really required". (Q)

This demonstrates that working together to validate a degree programme is only the beginning of the partnership.

What was required to develop a good working relationship is shown by the interviewees' definition of partnership.

"The standards need to be the same and there needs to be an environment where both sides feel able to share good practice, concerns and take constructive criticism and be honest". (N)

"Knowing the other partner will do their best they can to support them" (P)

"Working together to achieve the same ends." (Q)

"It's working towards the same goals. You don't necessarily have to do exactly the same thing but the end results needs to be the same". (R)

This emphasis on commitment and shared goals is in line with the literature (Cullen *et al.*, 2010) and the definitions of other interviewees as is the view that the

outcomes need to be the same but the path to achieving them may vary.

Demonstrating that reciprocity does not need to be equal but present (Hoppner *et al.*, 2015). How the path to achieving common goals flexibly while maintaining quality standards will be explored further below.

This working environment is focused on achieving shared goals and is built in mutual support, honest and open communication.

“You need to establish a relationship with people and have that communication. You don’t know what everyone’s like. The people make the organisation.....If you didn’t have that it wouldn’t work especially in the early stages it gives you the confidence to ask the questions and if you didn’t have that it would impact on what you are delivering and could impact on the way the partnership is working.....That gives us clear guidance but if you didn’t have that approachability or felt comfortable in talking to that person it would breakdown and then you might go off on a tangent and you might get it wrong and you don’t want that.” (Q)

“You need to be open, approachable and friendly.” (P).

What is meant by good communication and being friendly and approachable are discussed later in this chapter.

Collaborative partnership is based on equality (Lotia and Hardy, 2008; Chicksand, 2015) and although the management views were that it is a partnership of equals this was not the view of college staff in the OBBS study. The perception of a power imbalance was also found in the education study. It was therefore important to discuss attitudes to power here.

The views of both N and P fit closely with those of F in the management study, stressing the equality and symbiotic nature of the partnership,

“It is a mistake to think the power is all in our hands. They have access to the students and without them the degree wouldn’t exist” (N)

“It’s the college who gives us access in that area. There are a number of other partners they could choose” (P)

Q agreed, demonstrating that when the partnership was set up it was seen as one of equals and a true collaboration.

“It’s a mutual relationship we need each other”. (Q)

12.4 Culture

Throughout this thesis developing a common culture has been seen as necessary to underpin a successful partnership. To date the study has identified that the level of commitment and trust exhibited in the partnership is based on mutual respect and shared values due to the shared professional backgrounds of those involved.

Bendermacher *et al.*, (2017) and Gaus *et al.*, (2017) stressed the influence of academic discipline. This would suggest that the partnership has a shared culture based on backgrounds, shared values and discipline which fits with Alvesson, (2015) and Schein, (2010) who see partnership culture being developed by those involved and different from those of the participatory organisations.

“This course is different from others in that we need to adhere to professional standards. If we don’t ensure correct standards someone could die” (P).

“This course differs from others run by Brookes in that we share the same professional standards and approaches” (N).

“Somethings are a given for us that wouldn’t be for other programmes” (Q),

“I think the culture in wanting to get the best for the students is exactly the same” (N)

“our underlying culture is exactly the same. In terms of wanting to help staff to do a good job and wanting to give the best student experience” (P)

While developing and maintaining professional standards has a major influence on the way the partnership works the culture existing in the partnership cannot be divorced from the influences of the culture of the two organisations involved. This is embodied in the tensions of delivering HE in FE. In this case these tensions arose from two main areas: the difference in attitude to scholarship between the organisations discussed earlier in this thesis and the different nature of the students.

Unlike most course leaders, in the college, R had a PhD and felt that his skills were not fully utilised. The tensions of delivering both HE and FE and attitudes to scholarship therefore do create difficulties for those involved. However, he also stressed the importance the college places on scholarly activity suggesting that the college has the right attitude in theory but does not facilitate the practice by allocating time (Feather, 2017), once again showing a mismatch between policy and practice.

“We are encouraged to pursue scholarly activity through CPD, but the time allocation isn’t sufficient. If I was exclusively HE I would have more time for

scholarship and research and collaboration with others with similar expertise.
In FE the focus is not on scholarly activity” (R).

“As an academic you are trained to look at things in depth but in FE you have to ameliorate that and think more about your audience which is good for personal development but doesn’t intellectually challenge in the same way” (R).

“I think possible the biggest difference in the university sector is that we are here for pedagogic advancement, and we are here for research whereas FE don’t see themselves like that.” (N)

“They do provide support for staff to pursue higher qualifications but research isn’t built in.” (P)

“They are very good at applying knowledge but not given the time to develop it,” (N)

N’s comments fit with the concept that the college’s strength lies in the application of knowledge (Lea and Simmons, 2012). As discussed above by Q, one of the reasons for the college developing this partnership with OBU was the applied nature of the Fd. demonstrating that in this case the college and OBU share an approach to knowledge development.

OBU had offered Q a secondment to the university to enable him to pursue his research interests, demonstrating the respect they had for him. This had been agreed by the college, but time constraints and the demands of his FE teaching meant that it had proved impractical. This once again highlights the conflict at

management level between the desire to be more HE focused and the availability of resources to support staff to pursue scholarly activity, which echoes Feather (2017).

The other major area of difference between HE in the college and on campus is the nature of the student body. Most students on the FD are mature and come from non-traditional educational backgrounds. Initially most were funded by local health trusts. However, in the light of cuts to healthcare budgets they are mostly self-funding as they see this as a way of achieving career progression. The students therefore are highly motivated but do not enter the college with the academic skills required for success.

“Most haven’t been in education for some time and although they are good in practice, they are fearful of the academic side. They need a lot of support” (Q).

“They need more support than I think the university realises that but there is nothing in the procedures and processes that recognises it” (R).

“The students need a lot of support to achieve the right standards and it’s difficult to do this in the time available” (P).

“The staff are really committed to supporting the students but can’t do all they do in the time allocated” (P).

“The support for the students is key and the staff have to have the time to do that.” (N)

This shows that it is the personal commitment of staff to developing an appropriate culture rather than the processes involved which is important and why the partnership works well for the students.

This was best summarised by N.

“actually I think the culture in wanting to get the best for the students is exactly the same.”

12.5 Trust

The importance of trust to partnership success was discussed in the literature review (Section 5.3). All interviewees, unprompted, spoke about the importance of trust in the relationship from the outset. The existing trust, based on reputation and experience, (Skandrani et al, 2011), between the two organisations is one of the reasons the partnership was originally developed, (Section 12.1).

One interviewee took this one stage further.

“the 5 or 6 years we have been working with the partnership has been very much based on that element of trust. I would think because they are at more of a distance than the local college we work with we have to trust that they are getting on with things” (P)

This is a good example of how trust develops over time. The trust comes not only from organisational reputation but also from the competence of individuals involved (Bhagat, 2009), their common experiences and shared values, with P commenting

that this shared experience and the level of trust in some ways compensated for the lack of time available to fulfil the role:

“I don’t always have time to be as thorough as I would like but it works because we trust their professionalism to do the right thing” (P)

“You just know and get a sense that everything they are doing is business like and professional” (N).

“Trust is a lot and with the course lead I trust him implicitly. He is very professional at all times.” (P)

This trust arises from the recognition of the professionalism of those involved which results in the level of mutual respect.

The level of trust between the organisations based on experience can at times mean that assumptions are made about the abilities of new staff who can be left feeling unsupported.

“There was an assumption at the beginning that I knew how to do things so I was left alone quite a bit to work things out. There is the manual but that isn’t quite how things work in practice”. (R)

This echoed the comments of the college staff in the Early Years case who also felt unsupported whereas the liaison managers saw this approach as trusting their judgment to do the right thing. While trust should reduce the need for checks and controls, is always relying on trust rather than checking the right thing to do? This begs the question can there be too much trust? (Skandrani *et al.*, 2011). The

problem of over-relying on trust was discussed in the management case, where a course had been closed as checks were not made, due the level of trust and the assumption that they would do “the right thing”. This will be explored further in the discussion,

R however, commented that he did not think this apparent lack of support would have happened with the current liaison manager suggesting that this was not a trust issue but the interpretation of the role by the liaison manager. Once again highlighting the impact individuals have on a relationship.

12.6 Commitment

Commitment and trust are interdependent (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) The level of commitment at both personal and organisational level was discussed in Section 12.3. The willingness of both organisations at policy level to commit to a long-term project is not in doubt. N and Q who had been responsible for setting up the partnership, in line with Hammersley Fletcher (2006) stressed that committing resources in terms of time during the early stages of development as essential for the partnership to flourish. As the relationship often rests in the hands of a few individuals it is essential that the commitment and relationship building exists at multiple levels to ensure continuity.

While both parties are willing to commit resources to start the partnership the problems lie in the commitment of adequate resources in the longer term. This is illustrated by the college staff no longer exclusively working on HE.

“The college was great they dedicated staff exclusively to the Fd “(R)

“The staff only used to work on the Fd but now do FE as well” (Q)

“HE isn’t given enough emphasis and resources” (T)

The problems of teaching both HE and FE will be explored later.

As in the other cases, staff commitment to the role is important. Both the college interviewees stressed the importance of having the right staff fitting with Robinson *et al*’s., (2006) requirement for staff to own the role.

“We’ve kept the team small, so the staff are really focused on what is required”. (R)

“We have a lot of nurses working here and I thought they would be good but they had other priorities and didn’t focus enough on the blend of theory and practice so we have gone back to a smaller team”. (Q)

Interviewees from both organisations commented on the lack of time available to fulfil their roles properly. Once again suggesting a mismatch between organisational policy and resource allocation and highlighting the level of personal commitment exhibited by all those involved. For the first time the liaison manager talked about not having enough time,

“If you look at the liaison manager job description it says that I should do peer observations, but I don’t have time and don’t do it. I would really like to go out and do a bit of teaching to see what the students are like but don’t have time to do that. If you ask me if I’m doing a good job the answer is probably no. I’m doing the very basic and I think that is sad. I think I could do much more given a bit more time. no one has ever looked at how long it actually takes.

Those writing the JD don't understand what a good liaison manager needs to do..... There's time to do the quality process things but not to get behind how things are working in practice". (P)

This is interesting as the role descriptor (Appendix 5) was written by a liaison manager and shows how the role is open to interpretation. It emphasises that there is more to developing and maintaining a good partnership than ensuring adherence to quality procedures. This will be explored further in the discussion.

Although initially the staff had only worked on the programme this was no longer the case as FE is the main priority of the college.

"With FE the volume and numbers are there. We are big on HE but it is dwarfed in comparison and I think most staff would say that. HE is sometimes an addition not an integral part." (R)

The result of this is the time pressures experienced by the staff. These time pressures are exacerbated by the nature of the student body which will be explored later when looking at the tension of teaching HE in FE.

"FE is very fast paced and there is more volume but HE needs more time in order to deliver quality". (P)

"The extra duties of HE are just an add on. We don't get the time" (R)

These comments reflect those of the staff involved in the education partnership and once again show the gap between the staff commitment to the role and the resources available to enable them to do this as well as they would like. While this

will be explored further in the discussion the perceived lack of time may lie more in the individuals involved and their commitment to their subject and profession.

“I think that anyone who really cares will always say they don’t have time to do it properly” (P)

12.7 Power

The manager’s perception of the equality of the partnership was discussed in Section 12.3. The collaborative nature of the partnership and the college’s role in allocating resources are discussed in Chapter 7 and the management case, Chapter 9. However, all interviewees commented on the need for more resources, especially in terms of time. As in the Early Years case, R felt that OBU did have positional power (Huxham and Beech, 2008), and that this power should be used to ensure that sufficient resources were allocated. This links to the problems of delivering HE in FE which will be discussed in greater detail below.

“Teaching HE students is more demanding. It takes longer to prepare and support, and this isn’t recognised. The university should make sure that sufficient resources are allocated. They are Brookes students”. (R)

Whether it is appropriate in a collaborative partnership for one party to dictate the allocation of resources to another is an area for discussion.

12.8 Interpersonal relationships

“You need to be open, approachable and friendly” (P).

The need to build personal relationships based on approachability, openness and friendliness led to a discussion on the importance of friendship. This is seen as an element of RC but not seen as appropriate in either the OBBS or management case. These interviewees shared the same views and saw the need to be friendly but none of them saw this as meaning the same as friendship:

“I don’t think I’d call it friendship I’d call it professional respect. It depends on how wide a definition you have of friendship. People are friendly to each other when they meet but I wouldn’t call that a friendship”, (Q)

“Friendship I see as being outside work. In work it is important that one has a professional relationship with people. I have friends in work, and they are people I see outside work but we wouldn’t socialise in work as friends. When we are in work, we are working colleagues. I try and keep a close distance I wouldn’t call anything that is a working relationship in business a friendship” (N)

“you might get on with people and you may be friendly towards them but that isn’t the same as being their friend”. (P)

“You may develop friendships with work colleagues but it isn’t important for the work”. (R)

“When we all get together, I take time to make sure that I chat to most people to find out who they are and find out what’s going on for them and that sort of thing, so it is important to be friendly to maintain communication but not to have friendships”, (N)

Being friendly means showing respect and taking an interest in colleagues as people with a life outside work. (Q)

Meaning it when you say How are you? (R)

These comments echo those expressed in both the OBBS and management cases and reflect the differences between personal and business friendship discussed in the literature (Price and Arnould, 1999; Beetles and Harris, 2010) and highlights the need to maintain some distance in the relationship to maintain professional standards and transparency.

What is seen as appropriate by the interviewees is a friendly relationship based on professional respect, once again linking back to trust (Murphy *et al.*, 2007). The difference between friendship and friendliness and the importance of respect will be explored further in the discussion.

12.9 Communication

Communication forms the basis of any relationship and as discussed in Chapter 5 a discussion of the literature on communication in partnership is beyond the scope of this research. However, it is interesting to explore what is meant by clear and open communication in the context of this research as the interviewees referred to it on more than one occasion, in line with Robinson *et al.*, (2006). Clear and open communication was seen as important and often linked with the emphasis on a quick and honest responses in unambiguous language. The quotes below occurred throughout the transcripts and are not allocated to individuals,

“Giving clear advice”.

“Not using jargon explaining in terms we understand”.

“Responding quickly”

“Being available by email or phone”.

“Being open and honest”.

Due to their other commitments providing a speedy response to queries was something P found difficult.

“We can’t always respond as quickly as the college would like and this can cause problems. It important to let them know when we are available and respond as soon as possible.” (P)

As this partnership is part of the ACP network the liaison manager felt that it was important that the colleges also communicated with each other so there wasn’t a single source of information. The course leader interview had found this approach useful;

“There are 3 colleges involved so they can also get advice from each other” (P).

“Sometimes the other colleges have the same problem, so I also talk to them about things” (R)

These comments suggest that what is important is having access to support when needed rather than communication being the key. These sentiments were echoed in both the OBBS and Early Years cases.

12.10 The role of the liaison manager

Throughout this study it has been clear that the resources available are a constraining factor on the partnership, but the personal commitment of the staff involved ensures that these constraints are overcome. This highlights how important the people involved are in maintaining a partnership and also the difficulty of separating interpersonal relationships from organisational ones.

The personal commitment and involvement of the senior management team was discussed above. This section looks more at the working relationship developed by those managing the partnership day to day. The role of the liaison manager is key to this.

“The liaison manager is key. If you have someone who is keen and responds quickly it works well” (Q).

“The liaison manager acts as the hub. We turn to them all the time and they need to understand the processes”. (R)

Things work well if the liaison manager understands us (Q)

It's important that you have the right liaison manager. if you didn't have that approachability or felt comfortable in talking to that person it would breakdown

The course leader highlighted how the dynamic of the relationship changes with a change in personnel.

“It depends on the liaison manager, where you have an individual who is more meticulous and has attention to detail or who is more supportive it makes your role a bit easier but if the manager is a bit more distant and they just leave

you it is more difficult. It works for an established course leader but not for a new one. We built a good relationship over time and she was fine but it wasn't so at the beginning but that may be because I expected more" (R)

"The previous liaison manager was much more focused on procedures but this one understands what it's like. She works more closely with us to find the right approach". (Q)

"It's more collaborative now. We are working together" (R)

This is interesting as the liaison manager herself, felt that she did not have sufficient time to do much more than ensure quality processes are followed. This difference in interpretation of how someone approaches the role is perhaps more about attitude.

"She knew her stuff and was quick to deal with queries but was quite formal. Now the liaison manager is much more open and friendly" (R).

"We need to go beyond the procedures and look at what it's like in the classroom", (P)

This may stem from the current liaison manager's trust in the course leader.

I work with a number of colleges and so it's interesting to see the differences. The course leader is very switched on so you can build a more open relationship" (P)

12.11 The role of senior management

While there appears to be a difference in organisational commitment and resource allocation all interviewees commented on the commitment of the college's senior management.

“The commitment for senior management is great. They are prepared to put in the resources They are committed right from the beginning to develop the skills lab” (N).

“You can see from the building they are investing in us” (Q).

..... “(Head of HE) takes a keen interest. She always makes time to meet with me and the course leader when I visit”. (P)

“on a fairly regular basis the course lead will meet with their line manager so she has a good understanding of the course Not day to day operational stuff but an overview and he needs to know he can make decision as the course lead but she will support him” (P)

“she made a point of meeting me to discuss progress when I went over. That was really helpful as then you have Brookes, college management and the person running the course discussing the issues. She created an environment where you could speak freely and she could understand the situation. That supported me as well as the course leader. And it shows the college’s commitment and that she is on our side. It’s important it isn’t just seen as a money making exercise. They are committed to achieving the same outcomes as us” (R)

“Management realised they needed to take their staff out of FE and purely put them on teaching HE and it gave them a lot more support and time, so they were able to better support students the college wants HE to flourish” (Q)

“As a new course leader I go a lot of help from my manager here and the head of HE. It isn’t just a tick box exercise they make a point of meeting with me to find out how things are going?” (T)

There were fears that a change in the senior leadership may affect this commitment, highlighting the role of the individual which will be explored later in this case.

“The previous principal was brilliant and time will tell whether the new person will, if their legacy will be the same for after somebody has left it takes a number of years for you to see a difference with a new person and I hope that the new person carries on the same legacy. It will be a shame if that was built up by the previous person wasn’t carried on. I haven’t any evidence for this at all but when leadership changes sometime things don’t continue.” (N)

These fears were unfounded as borne out by the comments of an interviewee a couple of months later.

“The new principal has a real focus on HE. The facilities are also great, big and light etc and it is important. It is a welcoming accessible campus” (Q)

As discussed in Chapter 2 the college has made major investments in HE facilities and designated itself as a University Centre. This comment, however, highlights the difficulty of separating organisational relationships from those of the individuals involved as discussed below.

While senior management was seen as being supportive, there was a feeling that that there is a lack of understanding at this level of the tensions of teaching HE in FE.

“I don’t think they understand each other at a deeper level” (Q)

“There are all those little things that course leaders do / the background that aren’t understood at senior level or the intricacies aren’t realised until someone leaves” (R)

“Sometimes they don’t take into account the colleges and the conditions in which those processes must be carried out” (Q)

“the faculty tries to be flexible and help and support but there needs to be more flexibility in the system” (R)

“I don’t think there is recognition in FE colleges of the amount of support that HE students need both academically and probably pastoral” (P)

It is perhaps this perceived lack of understanding which results in the mismatch between policy and resource commitments and which will be examined in the discussion.

12.12 Features of a good partnership

Having looked at how the partnership works in practice the interview moved on to discuss what the interviewees saw as important features in a new partner and what they felt made successful partnership.

As expected, there was a strong emphasis on shared goals and values both from the leadership and the staff involved in running the project.

“Leadership commitment” (Q)

“Commitment to achieve the same thing and what is the best way of doing that” (P)

“Shared objectives and values” (S)

“Wanting to achieve the same thing” (R)

“The staff being onboard” (N)

Stemming from this they identified the need to create an environment of mutual respect which results in an open and honest working relationship and the need to recognise the expertise of those involved.

“Respect the way we want to work” (Q)

“Recognizing each other’s expertise” (P)

“There needs to be an environment where both sides feel able to share good practice, concerns and take constructive criticism and be honest. Knowing the other partner will do their best they can to support them”. (N)

While there is a need to maintain standards the system needs to be sufficiently flexible to meet local needs. As highlighted in the Early Years study and raised by F, in the management study, there has been a move to more standardised procedures, to provide a level playing field throughout the ACP which may mitigate against providing the flexibility desired. This does, however, provide a consistent message which G, in the management study, saw as important.

“Providing colleges enough flexibility while maintaining standards.” (N)

“Having a quality system which reflects local needs” (R)

The main issue is the need to recognise the tension of teaching HE in FE and to make sure adequate resources are provided.

“You need to commit the resources” (N)

“I think the people and the resources in terms of having the resources they need to teach” (Q)

“I think that they, (management), need to have an understanding of HE and the difference between HE and FE and that can become quite muddled in an FE college” (P)

“Recognition of the difference between FE and HE and the different needs of the students. I think sometimes they think it's the same but the teaching is a higher level and the content harder but there needs to be that recognition that it is different and the students on the course are different types of learners. The lecturers need a lot of support and more time” (R)

12.13 Summary

In line with the previous cases, the interviewees see partnership as being based on working together to achieve the same goals. To achieve this, you need long term commitment at all levels. While partnership development is policy for both organisations this is not always demonstrated in resource allocation, with both the liaison manager and the college staff feeling that they need more time to fulfil their roles adequately. There was a feeling that the lack of resources results from a lack of understanding at organisational level of the differences between FE and HE especially in meeting the needs of the student body and the staff. This can be

further exacerbated by the standardisation of quality systems although there is some flexibility in the system which allows adaption for local needs.

As the partnership is for mutual benefit there was not thought to be a power imbalance as both parties share a common culture based on professionalism and the desire to provide the right student experience and because they are dependent on each other for the success of the partnership and recognise each other's expertise. This common culture is supported by a shared understanding of the need for scholarship though the lack of resources available for this in the college leads to intellectual frustration.

The success of the partnership is heavily reliant on the commitment of the staff and having the right people in post is key stressing the importance of the interpersonal relationships. While these relationships need to be open and honest and conducted in a friendly manner the basis of the relationship is professional respect not friendship This fits with Ingram and Zou (2008) and their view of business friendship.

The main tensions in the partnership are caused by the challenges of meeting the demands of HE within a FE in environment, with a student body that requires more support than resources allow. This means that there needs to be more flexibility in the quality systems in place.

12.14 Reflection

This was the last set of interviews, all with people I did not know. This meant we had no preconceived ideas of each other before the interviews though I was struck by our instant rapport probably which probably existed because we were all committed to partnership working. This led to the conversation being open and frank about what

worked well and what did not, and, in many ways, this set of interviews provided richer insights than some of the others even though I knew several of the previous interviewees. As these were the last interviews, I was able to explore more deeply the issues which had been raised by other interviewees. It was unfortunate that it was only possible to interview one member of college staff teaching on the programme as the views of more college staff would have enriched the college perspective and it did mean that there was perhaps a greater emphasis on management in these interviews, which as discussed in the section on power, (Section 12.7), may have led to the focus being on equality. One thing that shone through in the interviews was the deep professional and personal respect the interviewees had for each other, and this underpinned everything they did. They were also all committed to improving the quality of healthcare. This case is a true example of people working together in an atmosphere of trust and respect to achieve the common goal of providing high quality education in order to improve professional standards.

The emphasise on friendliness not friendship highlights the need to strengthen this section of the literature review. Due to the time elapsed since the literature was first developed it also needs to be reviewed for currency.

Chapter 13

Cross-case Comparison

13.1 Introduction

This section compares and contrasts the key findings for each of the cases discussed in Chapters 8 to 12 to identify the key issues to be explored in the discussion section. Each section contains a table which highlights the key words and phrases used by the interviewees when discussing the topic. These are then depicted in word clouds developed from the coding in Nvivo which summarises the key words so that the more important features are clearly depicted before discussing their significance. The chapter is laid out as follows:

13.2 Definition of partnership –

13.3 Role of senior management

13.4 Role of the liaison manager

13.5 Culture – Tensions of teaching HE in FE

13.6 Commitment and trust

13.7 Power

13.8 Interpersonal relationships

These issues would be described by Provan and Sidow (2008) as process indicators and were found to be the key components of partnership success in this research.

13.2 Definitions of partnership

When discussing the nature of partnership interviewees used the words partnership and relationship interchangeably. The table below identifies some of the key words used in defining partnership in each of the cases.

OBBS	Management	Liaison Manager	HSS	HLS
open and honest	strategic relationships	shared vision	reciprocal.	same goals
shared values	working collaboratively	working together to get the best outcome for the student.	same goal	same standards need to
flexible	shared end	it is an equal understanding.	same values.	share good practice, concerns. take constructive criticism and be honest.
mutual respect	mutual benefits	it takes care, commitment, expertise, flexibility and being reasonable	a 2-way process	working together
working together	time and a lot of work to develop.			same outcomes
common goal	input from both parties"			
	quality of provision has to be excellent.			

Figure 28 Key phrases used to describe partnership.



Figure 29 Definitions of partnership

This summary of the key features of partnership show that partnerships are based on shared values and goals and involve organisations sharing expertise in order to achieve a common goal. The mutuality of the relationship and the interdependence of the two organisations required to achieve the relationship outcomes demonstrate that the relationship had moved beyond one which is transactional to becoming a partnership. Although not specifically raised in the interviews the fact that each partnership is governed by a separate legal agreement and managed separately demonstrates that the two organisations remain independent and are thus working together for a specific purpose. This fits with Brinkerhoff's (2002a) definition of public sector partnership which builds on Mohr and Spekman's (1994) definition. The need for both parties to be involved show the collaborative nature of the partnership (Lotia and Hardy, 2008)

13.3 The role of senior management

These partnerships help both organisations meet their strategic goals and therefore the role of the organisations in developing the partnership is explored. The organisational or senior management view is summarised below:

OBBS	Management	Liaison Manager	HSS	HLS
commit resources	partner identification	resources	committed	resources
recognise differences between HE and FE	common strategic goals	public demonstration of their support	understand how this works on the ground	takes a keen interest
develop quality framework	long term view	setting standards	support	understanding of the course
	committing the resources		pulled in different directions	an overview
	personal and organisational relationships		wants us to fit in the FE mould	HE to flourish
	operational framework		more resources	flexibility
	clear consistent messages			recognition of the amount of support that HE students need
	support			
	buy in			

Figure 30 The role of senior management

13.4 The role of the liaison manager

The key link between Oxford Brookes and the college is provided by the liaison manager, who is the boundary spanner (Williams, 2013). Although this support is provided differently by OBBS the same functions are carried out and therefore the views of OBBS on the role are included.

OBBS	Management	Liaison Manager	HSS	HLS
clear advice	consistent message	consistency	working closely	the hub.
availability	support	subject expertise	common approach	support
clear communication	maintain quality	experience of quality systems	quality control	understand the processes.
subject knowledge		interest in and commitment to HE in FE	expertise	on the same wavelength
understand the processes		understanding	time	common approach
time to provide the proper support			availability	availability

Figure 32 Key features of the role of liaison manager



Figure 33 Liaison manager priorities

The liaison manager role descriptor (Appendix 5) sets out the role. although there is room for personal interpretation. The level of advice and support depends on the liaison manager's expertise and commitment to the role. This led to inconsistencies and confusion in the college. There was a general consensus among the operational staff that the liaison manager did not have sufficient time to carry out the role properly., once again highlighting the need for the commitment of appropriate resources,

13.5 Culture

The definition of partnership identifies the need for shared values on which culture is based (Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 2010). However, there are some differences between the cultures of the organisation and there is a need to build a common

culture in the partnership that may be different from that of the two organisations
(Alvesson, 2013)

OBBS	Management	Liaison Manager	HSS	HLS
sharing values and beliefs without the shared culture you'd be struggling in all the other areas FE culture is different from university. we may have a very different culture make sure as much as possible it bonds with Brookes' culture. culture changes as people change. and it becomes a shared culture. helping students to achieve the best	shared values shared ethos develop an environment of care and commitment they are Brookes Students it is the difference which is key to developing the correct ethos the emphasis is on the application of knowledge.	HE is research driven and how are you embedding that into your teaching and the HE culture into your environment when that isn't at the core of what you are doing as an institution	develop a common approach. committed to research. they do research to improve practice. their strengths lie in applying that knowledge	we share the same professional standards and approaches. to get the best for the students is exactly the same the biggest difference in the university sector is that we are here for pedagogic advancement and we are here for research whereas FE don't see themselves like that they are very good at applying knowledge but not given the time to develop it

Figure 34 The nature of culture

13.6 Trust and commitment

Although Kale *et al.*'s (2000) definition of Relational Capital identifies commitment and trust as separate elements, Morgan and Hunt (1994) see them as being interdependent and the basis of all partnerships. The interviews identified both organisational and personal commitment to the partnership, with commitment being seen as the most important aspect. Past experience of commitment and expertise had led to the calculative trust which informed partner choice and it was the level of commitment which led to the identification- based trust being developed (Skandrani *et al.*, (2011).

OBBS	Management	Liaison Manager	HSS	HLS
we are committed with those partners, recognition of the good relationship you are in it for the long haul you can't have trust without commitment. what people say is what you get open and honest built up and tested over the years	the college is committed to providing HE you need commitment from the top care it's a long term relationship. build trust experience and expertise lot of time and a lot of work to develop assume they'll do the right thing	movement of priority there are committed and passionate staff support. recognise expertise	the new principal is committed to HE support to students We can't do it in official office hours. build the trust open and honest experience and expertise leave them to get on with it	they committed the resources right from the start time it takes to build up a working relationship HE isn't given enough emphasis and resources. we knew this was an organisation we could trust. they are getting on with things professionalism

Trust is a conclusion based on personal interaction, commitment balance of power, reciprocity of things				

Figure 36 Basis of trust and commitment



Figure 37 Important of trust and commitment

All parties saw commitment as being for the long term and recognised that without commitment from the top the partnership would not work. However, the main focus of the college is on FE and although there is a policy commitment to HE and

members of the senior management team may be personally supportive this is not always matched in terms of the resources available. In line with Robinson *et al.*, (2006), the key driving force of the relationship was the personal commitment of the staff whose dedication to their students meant that they often put in extra hours to make the partnership work.

All involved saw the partnership as based on trust, initially as a result of past experience but also based on the expertise of those involved. This trust was developed and built over time. Although the partnership is governed by a quality framework the existence of trust reduces the needs for control and its influence on the power balance will be discussed later. There can, however, be an over reliance on trust and because of trust based on expertise the colleges can sometimes feel unsupported. There have also been problems when assumptions were made that the college could be trusted to do what was required when this was not the case.

13.7 Power

OBU is responsible for validating the programmes and for funding and can be seen as having both positional and resource-based power. However, the mutuality of the relationship, with the college having access to the students reduces the resource based power and those involved see it as an equal relationship. This is further underlined by the college being involved in developing the quality processes which form the control mechanism. The level of trust also reduces the need for OBU to wield its, power with a feeling that if coercive power needs to be exerted the partnership has failed. At operational level however, there was a feeling that OBU

could use both its positional and resource-based power more to ensure that the college committed more resources to the partnerships.

OBBS	Management	Liaison Manager	HSS	HLS
it is an equal relationship fit within our framework mutual benefit. do have power though the framework Brookes degree	it is an equal understanding working together to get the best outcome for the student college contributes to the framework it is our degree exert power or refer to the legal agreement then the trust has gone and probably so has the relationship You have the power to compel but it isn't used that like that. We are partners how best to do things within the agreement we have	it is an equal understanding both parties have to play their part. ultimately 'm responsible but that doesn't mean I am going to impose my will on it. we've got to move together and listen to each other.	most of the time we work together, But with procedures its Brookes in charge. We aren't consulted. the university could demand more we work together to set standards as part of the quality procedures	it is a mistake to think the power is all in our hands. they have access to the students and without them the degree wouldn't exist it's a mutual relationship we need each other. the university should make sure that sufficient resources are allocated. They are Brookes students

Figure 38 The power balance

13.8 Key issues for discussion

This research is focused on how partnerships are built and maintained. The partnership was seen to be collaborative as the two organisations were working together for a common goal by sharing expertise and resources. However, a partnership can only be successful if it builds a common culture based on shared power, trust and commitment at both organisational and operational levels. In order to do this those involved need to build relationships at both organisational and operational levels – this requires close interaction between the individuals involved which some would see as developing business friendships. The liaison manager acting as a boundary spanner is key in building and maintaining the partnership. The key areas for discussion in Chapter 14 are set out below.

Nature of partnership

The role of senior management

Culture

Power

Trust and commitment.

Interpersonal relationships

Role of the liaison manager/boundary spanning

Chapter 14

Discussion

14.1 Introduction

The core objective of this research has centred on what makes a good partnership, not in terms of outputs but in terms of developing good working relationships. To examine this, the research has used the concept of Relational Capital (RC) (Kale *et al.*, 2000) to explore the areas affecting partnership development and maintenance. Provan and Sydow (2008) see this as examining the process indicators. However, while this research is not a longitudinal study, most common in process research (Langley *et al.*, 2034), it examines how the process indicators combine to develop a successful working relationship. Fleetwood and Hesketh (2008) called this examining the black box problem.

The literature review discussed the definitions of partnership and RC before examining each of the elements of RC showing their interrelationship. It found that all partnerships are supported by the development of a common culture which forms the basis of the norms developed and underpins attitudes to trust, commitment, friendship etc. The findings section focused on the interviewees views of how the partnership was developed and maintained using the elements of RC to help structure the interviews.

This chapter reflects on the meanings of the findings and their relationship to the literature. It does this by looking at six main areas.

14.2 Partnership

14.3 Culture

14.4 Interpersonal relationships

14.5 Trust and commitment

14.6 Power

14.7 Boundary spanning

The first section examines the nature of the partnership and, in particular, looks at the power dynamics at play. It challenges the traditional view that collaborative partnerships are non-hierarchical (Lotia and Hardy, 2008), and identifies that in practice the imposition of a hierarchical operational framework can aid collaboration by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of those involved and the contribution they make to the partnership.

The chapter then moves on to examine the culture that is built within a partnership and discusses how, despite shared values and working practices, partnership culture is influenced by the individuals involved and may differ from that of the parent organisations. It also examines what is meant by developing an HE culture in FE making a theoretical contribution by bringing clarification to this concept.

The third section looks at the nature of the interpersonal relationships developed in the partnership and discusses the difference between personal and business or agentic friendship. In doing so it contributes to the understanding of the nature of personal relationships in business.

The fourth section discusses trust and commitment which are key to any partnership success (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It highlights the mismatch between policy

commitment at organisational level and the allocation of resources. It identifies that the partnership works due to personal commitment and questions the viability of partnership in the long term when there is so much reliance on the personal contributions of individual actors in the partnership.

The chapter ends by examining the role of boundary spanners in coordinating the activities within the partnership. It, therefore, contributes to research into Boundary Spanning Leadership (BSL) within HE, an under researched area, and also looks at the role boundary spanning plays in developing Relational Capital when most research has looked at its role in developing Intellectual and Social Capital, (e.g., Chau et al, 2017; Bordogna,2019).

14.2 Partnership

This research is focused on the process of building and maintaining a successful partnership, so it is important first to discuss what is meant by partnership, how it works and the implications of this. This section starts by exploring the nature of the partnership at organisational level (Provan and Milward, 2008) before looking at the operational level in doing so it explores the key features of the partnership and, in particular, explores the power balance which exists in the partnership.

14.2.1 The organisational relationship

The partnership under investigation was entered into by both parties to widen participation in HE demonstrating the mutuality required in any partnership (Mohr and Spekman,1994). As set out in the cases OBU and the college are committed to working together to widen participation in HE. This commitment is manifested by the two organisations entering into a range of agreements to develop programmes of

study in different faculties. Due to their nature, partnerships in education require a long term commitment, (Robinson *et al.*, 2006; Ambrose *et al.*, 2010; Chicksand, 2015) and one aspect which supports the longevity of the partnership is the dynamic nature of the overarching partnership between the two organisations, (Brinkerhoff, 2002b), with operational partnerships being ended and redeveloped to better meet market and student needs. This is shown by new agreements being entered to work together in different ways as there has been a move away from Foundation Degrees to Degree Apprenticeships as the market has changed. While Cardini (2006) suggests that partnership development is one way of combatting market forces and reducing competition, in this case, it is a way of meeting market needs (Elliott, 2017). However, the combined reputations of OBU and the college are a strong marketing tool and in line with many other educational and commercial partnerships are also a way of combatting competition.

The attitudinal commitment of both parties to the overarching goal (Morgan and Hunt, 2004; Khojer *et al.*, 2010), is demonstrated by the level of resources both parties commit to making the relationship work. (Robinson *et al.*, 2006). The commitment to the partnership at organisational level is demonstrated by the college in having a dedicated Dean of HE and the level of expenditure on providing dedicated facilities for HE. OBU's commitment is demonstrated by the development of the ACP and the commitment of staffing resources, especially in supporting the liaison managers. This long-term commitment demonstrates both parties understanding that partnerships need time to develop, (Robinson *et al.*, 2006). While, both organisations demonstrate commitment to the partnership in terms of resources concerns were expressed at the level of these resources with both liaison managers and college staff complaining about a lack of time. While developing a network such

as the ACP may not be relevant to many organisations those developing partnerships do need to consider the support network. This will be discussed further in the section on Boundary Spanning Leadership.

The main message here is that for organisations to maintain a long term partnership they not only need to share common goals but also be prepared to commit resources, be flexible and adapt the nature of the relationship as market needs change.

14.2.2 The partnership at operational level

One of the key themes arising from the OBBS, Early Years Education and Healthcare case studies was the level of commonality with all having similar definitions and seeing partnership as built on a shared culture and mutual respect which facilitated the trust and commitment required. These definitions fit neatly with the definitions found in the literature and, in particular, Brinkerhoff (2002a).

14.3 Culture

As discussed in the literature review, (Section 5.2), culture is derived from the shared values and goals of those involved in a partnership and as such is the glue which holds the partnership together as it governs both attitudes and behaviour (Asaieh and Jusoh, 2015). As culture is built on shared values, I initially assumed that the organisations shared a common culture and as explained in the OBBS case did not initially discuss culture with the interviewees. This assumption can be seen as valid as both organisations have a moralist culture with a rights based approach to stakeholders, (Jones et al, 2007). In that the organisations act with the best interest of the stakeholders involved in pursuing their mission of providing high quality

education. However, in line with all complex organisations and, in particular, those which encompass people from different disciplines, subcultures develop within the organisation based on professional cultures and identities (Bendermacher, *et al.*, 2017). This fits with the findings which showed that not only do the two organisations have different cultures but also that each partnership had developed its own culture though Becher (1994) would see them all as having soft applied cultures. The basis of this culture being to provide a supportive environment which facilitated student learning,

In the OBBS case, staff recognised that the two organisations had different cultures but also saw several similarities, especially in the support given to students and colleagues. They saw the partnership having a culture built on a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and a common focus of supporting students. Attitudes to knowledge were not discussed in the OBBS case. In Early Years Education, the attitude to the importance of knowledge development was shared by both college and OBU staff and there was a strong emphasis on academic standards, though all stressed the importance of students being able to critically apply knowledge (Feather, 2010; Lea and Simmons, 2012). The Healthcare partnership put the emphasis on shared professional standards which was unsurprising due the nature of the profession and the risks involved in making mistakes. There were also examples of how the culture had changed with changes in personnel though Alvesson (2010), would argue that it is the development of a partnership culture which mitigates against personnel changes. In the Healthcare case it was seen that when the liaison manager was focused on process and quality the culture of the partnership was more task orientated and less collaborative but a change in liaison

manager had meant a move to a more collaborative culture where the emphasis was on finding ways to solve problems rather than focusing on the process.

It is the personal interactions of those involved in each partnership which builds the shared values and norms that determines the culture of the partnership (Huxham and Venger, 2005; Schein, 2010). This was expressed in the OBBS case where interviewees recognized that they had developed ways of working and approaches which draw on the two cultures. Common working practices had been adopted which were focused on the success of the partnership and differed from approaches used in the two separate organisations.

This section now explores the key influences on the development of partnership culture. It will then go on to discuss what is meant by developing an HE culture in FE (Lea and Simmons, 2013; Elliott, 2017).

The culture of the partnership at all levels is underpinned by the need to provide high quality education in a supportive learning environment. In its simplest form culture is defined as “the way we do things around here” (Alvesson, 2010), and to this end the outward symbols are important. Interviewees stressed the importance of students joining the HE cohort recognising that it is different from FE and feeling part of OBU. To this end the college has invested heavily in facilities for HE students and simple things like providing them with OBU lanyards and OBU staff completing enrolment further develops both the symbolism and physical attributes of a common culture.

At operational level the culture is underpinned by the personal commitment of staff who can be seen to operate a more altruistic culture than at organisational level (Jones *et al*, 2007) with student needs always given priority. This is not something that can be taught or developed but is inherent in the nature of those involved in

teaching HE in FE and is about dedication to student welfare more than anything else. The partnership therefore is characterised by the personal commitment and dedication of the staff and demonstrates the importance of shared values and goals. However, this reliance on personal traits may work in the short-term but would not mitigate against changing personnel and the findings has shown that the partnership has continued for several years despite changing personnel. This brings into focus the role played by the operational practices developed within the partnership which are governed by the quality framework in place and set out in the operational manual. Parry, (2013) stresses the role quality plays in partnership and in this case, it governs the basic operations and thus provides the framework within which the culture is developed (Alvesson, 2010).

The framework which was developed by OBU sets out the standards and processes which must be followed to provide “high quality education”. Agreement on standards is achieved by the involvement of staff through away days, shared moderation and discussion with the liaison manager.

It is perhaps in developing a common culture that the liaison manager in facilitating the away days and moderation procedures is most important. This will be discussed further in the section on boundary spanning,

Although the quality procedures are imposed by OBU in order to ensure consistency and to fulfil its requirements as the validating body the involvement of college staff through the ACP steering group in developing these frameworks shows the college is involved in developing the basis of the culture. i.e., the working practices,

The development of a common understanding of standards was seen as key in the Early Years study with interviewees stressing the need for students to understand

that their degree has the same value as those studying on campus thus further reinforcing that the culture of the partnership is different from that of the college.

The Early Years study saw this linking directly to partnership development and how resources and expertise are shared. It is the sharing of resources and the recognition of expertise which builds trust and respect,

Within the Early Years Education partnership, the college staff are seen the subject experts and the OBU staff saw their role as advising them on process and developing good working practices. This approach is why the partnership works it's a true demonstration of collaboration and engenders trust and respect. Having a common understanding of roles, builds good working practices and hence a culture of partnership.

The culture of the partnership can be described as creating a supportive environment which enables students to reach their potential. This culture is based on the commitment and dedication of the staff involved whose loyalty lies with the students, and hence ensures the maintenance of RC. It is supported by clear policies and procedures to provide a standard basic environment.

14.3.1 HE culture in FE

Discussion in the education literature on HE partnerships such as Lea and Simmons, (2013) and Elliott, (2017), stresses the need to develop an HE culture in FE and although there seems to be no standard definition this is seen to revolve around the attitude to knowledge and the debate around what is meant by "embedding research into teaching" and goes beyond the development of a creative supportive teaching environment as discussed above. This section examines how this is done within the

partnership, thus contributing to the understanding of what is meant by an HE culture in FE and showing how this can be done.

The literature review discussed how the traditional difference between HE and FE cultures is that HE staff tend to be more interested in the creation of knowledge through research and FE's focus is on applying knowledge. This difference was particularly highlighted in the interviews with Healthcare staff. The difference was not seen as a barrier to developing a common culture but an area of difference which must be recognised and accepted which fits with Weare *et al.* (2014). However, although colleges staff do not have much time available for traditional research, more than one of the interviewees was engaged in reading for a PhD and the college does hold research conferences, so staff and students are involved in knowledge dissemination. As an increasing number of HE staff are not involved in research this approach to research and knowledge dissemination is often similar to that on campus (McCallister, 2017; Webster, 2017).

One of the important points raised in the findings by those involved in Early Years was that the college may not be actively involved in developing new knowledge but they are involved in applying it. This fits with Hobley (2017) and Feather (2010) and also fits with the need to show the impact of research which is increasingly becoming a feature of university research and is one of the ways in which it is measured.

While there may be differences in the approach to research between OBU and college staff it is seen as important that students develop appropriate research skills and that the teaching is informed by research. However, due to the nature of the subjects being taught, this informing is more about the application of current thinking

to practical situations rather than developing new knowledge, which is equally important (Lea and Simmons, 2012).

What is perhaps more important in building HE culture is not the type of research being done but the learning environment created. An HE culture in FE is developed not necessarily by active involvement in new research but by teaching students to become critical consumers of information and by looking at how that research can be applied to improve the vocational practice of the students. In doing so it is developing a strong ethos in applying new knowledge, one of the key functions of universities.

14.4 Interpersonal relationships

The interviews showed that initially the partnership was developed based on organisational reputation (Brinkerhoff, 2002a; Parry, 2013) and calculative trust (Lewicki and Bunker, 2002). While the operations manuals and legal agreements provide the basis of the working relationship it is the personal interaction of those involved which builds the knowledge or identification-based trust necessary for the development of a long term relationship (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996; Fukuyama, 1995) and which led to the development of partnerships in new areas. Kale *et al.*, (2000) go further and see friendship as being the key to success as it can be an antecedent, component of and output of RC, (Fig 3).

This section discusses how the personal relationships required are developed and looks at the role friendship plays in the partnership. In doing so it discusses the difference between personal and agentic or business friendship (Rawlins, 1992; Price and Arnould, 1999; Ingram and Xi, 2008). It identifies that the personal relationships built do not have the level of intimacy required for personal friendship (Price and Arnould, 1999) nor is this required for a successful working relationship.

This section is therefore contributing to the literature on the role of friendship in a business relationship.

While Kale *et al.*, (2000) include friendship in the definition of RC, this was not seen by the interviewees as appropriate in public sector partnerships such as that under investigation due to the level of transparency and the due diligence required. At organisational level the partnership was originally built based on reputation, expertise and market forces and although, as the relationship developed personal knowledge did play a role in developing new partnership, such as the one in Healthcare, the decision to form the new partnership was still based on market forces. The need to go beyond personal knowledge was exemplified in the Early Years case as despite the college having a very good working relationship with OBU and OBU being the preferred partner they had developed a partnership with another university as that university had more expertise in the field and could progress more quickly. This again stresses the importance not only of the market but also of being able to access expertise in partnership development rather than organisational or personal relationships.

While initially professional respect forms the basis of the partnership it is maintained by clear, open, and honest communication and regular interaction both through the procedures involved in managing the partnership and also through meetings such as the ACP conference, staff development days and even the time spent together for moderation purposes. As set out in the introduction to the literature review communication was not covered there, as it forms the basis of all interaction and is already a widely researched topic to which I could bring no new insights. However, the interviewees did talk about the importance of good communication and saw the

key features as developing a clear understanding of availability, providing timely and clear responses to queries and keeping all parties informed of developments. This need not rely on one person and the support staff play an important role as does the quality framework. In retrospect it would have benefited the study if administrative staff had also been interviewed. This is an area for future research. This interaction does not constitute friendship (Price and Arnould 1999).

One of the key issues arising from the interviews was that in order to maintain good working relationships staff needed to be friendly. On the surface this fits with Andersson-Cedereholm and Gyimothy, (2010), who suggest successful business relationships are long-term and harmonic (with the friendship developed supporting this harmony). However, the interviewees stressed the difference between friendship and friendliness which fits with Rawlins, (1992); Price and Arnould, (1999) and Ingram and Xi, (2008), who all discuss the difference between personal and business friendship. The key differences are the level of intimacy, reciprocity, the voluntary nature and the durability of the relationship.

There was consensus among the interviewees that the relationships developed lacked the intimacy required for personal friendship. Some personal information was shared to facilitate “friendly exchanges” and enable the interviewees to discuss work related problems and seek advice, but not on a personal level. Interviewees felt that it was important to be aware of personal circumstances and how they impact on a colleague’s work role, but not to become intimately involved with them.

The instrumentality and reciprocal nature of the relationship developed mitigates against friendship. The interviewees built a relationship with co-workers to help them do their job not because they wanted to spend time in their company whereas, true

friendship does not have a particular purpose. Personal friendships are not formed for a particular reason whereas the relationship under investigation is developed specifically to ensure the effective management of the partnership. They are also not reciprocal (Ingram and Xi, 2008)

Lastly the relationship developed usually only lasted for the time of the partnership (Rawlins, 1992). There were, however, examples of the business relationship developed turning into personal friendship, but interviewees saw this as a different relationship and were keen to separate the personal relationship from the business one.

Ranke and Tusche (2010) see one benefit of friendship being that it can provide access to information which would not normally be available. Although there was evidence that information on good practice developed in other partnerships was shared and the personal relationship may have sped up the process, there was no evidence of the relationship providing access to information that would otherwise not be available. Some interviewees saw gaining access to information via friendship as unethical and felt it mitigated against a transparent relationship.

What is under discussion here is not the need for close working relationship built on respect, trust and open communication but whether this constitutes friendship. The interviewees saw this as friendliness in that they showed interest in partners personal lives but did not share intimate details. Ingram and Xi (2008) see this as business friendship.

While personal intimate relationships were seen to have no part to play in operating the partnership and in some cases were thought of as being potentially detrimental the interviewees provided examples of business relationship becoming personal

friendships (Anderson-Cederholm and Gyimothy, 2010) which fits with Kale *et al.*'s (2000) view that friendship is an output of RC.

The key issue is that while the interviewees do not see personal friendship as having a role to play in a business relationship, the social interaction involved in building the relationship is based on mutual trust and it is at the heart of how identification-based trust is developed (Lewicki, and Bunker, 1990). Ingram and Xi, (2000) see this as business friendship.

14.5 Commitment and trust

As commitment and trust are the foundation of all partnerships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), there is an argument that there is no need to discuss approaches to these key elements. However, what is important in this research is not their existence but how they are developed and maintained. In particular, what came from the interviews was the way in which trust develops and changes during the course of the partnership and the level of personal commitment.

14.5.1 Commitment

Commitment was one of the most commonly used words used in the interviews. The long term nature of educational partnership means that both parties must be committed to a long term relationship. The college's commitment is also shown in its investment in providing suitable HE facilities. One failing by both sides, however, was the provision of suitable resources in terms of time with both college and OBU staff saying they did not have sufficient time to do their jobs. The emphasis in the interviews was on personal commitment. This attitudinal commitment (Khojer *et al.*,

2010) is the basis of culture and is strongly linked to the way in which trust is developed as discussed below. The personal commitment of the staff involved is what makes the partnership successful and ensures a successful outcome for the students. (Eden and Huxham, 2001; Skandrani, 2011). In the absence of this commitment, the partnership would not be able to achieve the quality standards it sets. This personal commitment compensates for the mismatch between stated policy and resource allocation, especially in terms of workload hours, with staff carrying out many of the duties in their own time. It is not surprising therefore, that staff teaching HE in FE have little time for research. This over-reliance on personal commitment is not sustainable in the long term. It is this attitudinal commitment which may be curbed by the increased emphasis on process and procedures and which in the longer term could endanger the collaborative nature of the partnership. The problems of basing a relationship on personal rather than organisational commitment can lead to quality problems and also makes the partnership vulnerable. Getting the balance right here is vital and this will be explored further in the discussion on power.

14.5.2 Trust

Although the partnership had been in existence for some time at the time of the interviews both the current and previous Heads of UK Partnerships confirmed that initially the partnership was based on credibility trust. (Cullen *et al.*, 2000). As the partnership involves the transfer of resources in terms of student numbers, funding and course materials Coleman, (1990) and Skandrani, (2011) would also support this. This type of trust, also known as calculative trust (Skandrani, 2011) is most common at the beginning of a partnership especially when there are policies and

procedures in place to direct the operations. However, partnership working is dynamic and as behaviour influences the nature of trust what is important is how trust changes as the relationship develops. This trust based on reputation and process is not sufficient to sustain a partnership in the long term and Lewicki and Bunker, (1999) see trust building in stages as the level of personal interaction grows. This knowledge based trust formed the basis of the partnership with Healthcare, with both parties entering the partnership with the same view.

The close working relationship through the development process meant that identification-based trust was soon developed based on a shared background and common values and beliefs (Fukuyma, 1995) and reinforces the link between trust and culture.

While identification-based trust may be the strongest form of trust, as it is built between individuals it can be damaged with a change of personnel. This is mitigated by trust being built at various levels and as the partnership has developed even at senior management level trust is now knowledge-based. There is also now evidence that successful business relationship may not need to build identification-based trust as this level of personal interaction may not be required (Lewicki and Bunker, 1999).

As discussed above, the research identified several problems resulting from the over-reliance on attitudinal commitment and identification-based trust. One major problem being that personal commitment compensates for the lack of resources but the over-reliance on trust is seen in assumptions about the skills and understanding of those involved which can be seen in the difference in approaches between liaison managers. College staff, in some instances were left feeling unsupported as the liaison manager trusted them to have the right skills and experience to do the job,

even though little time had been spent explaining processes and procedures. If the relationship is to be built on personal traits what mechanisms are in place to ensure that those involved have the right traits? This will be explored further in the section on boundary spanning,

Although this had not happened, in the partnership under investigation, interviewees gave examples of over-reliance on trust leading to relationship breakdown. In these cases, basic process had not been followed destroying even calculative trust and reinforcing that personal integrity is at the heart of trust and without it relationships cannot exist.

In line with Lewicki and Bunker, (1999) trust is built as the relationship between those involved develops. It is initially based on organisational and personal reputation, but as common working practices are developed trust moves through the stages from calculative to knowledge-based and, in some cases, identification-based trust which reinforces the development of a common culture. In the absence of trust partnerships will fail.

14.6 Power

A constant theme from the interviews with senior management was the equality of the partnership demonstrating its collaborative nature (O'Flynn, 2009; Chicksand, 2015). While Lotia and Hardy (2008) would see true collaboration as not being governed by the market, it is naïve to suggest that business relationships are not shaped by the market. What is more interesting in this case and stems from Lotia and Hardy's (2008) definition of collaboration is the level of hierarchical control and power is exerted (Huxham and Beech, 2008). Both parties can be said to hold

positional power (Huxham and Beech, 2008), with OBU validating the degrees and providing funding and the college providing access to the students and managing the individual partnerships on a day to day basis. The college also has the option to choose partners, which is not open to OBU if they want to access students in that area. This suggests that neither party is dominant and that the positional power of both organisations is enabling (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008) and reinforces the reciprocal nature of the partnership and the equality.

One area in which OBU could be said to exert positional power is in the imposition of the quality framework, though the findings showed that through the ACP steering group the college was involved in developing the framework meaning it is co-created not imposed an important aspect in maintaining a successful partnership (Dhillon, 2013), and developing a common culture (Schien, 2010), which was discussed earlier in this chapter, (Section 14.3). This is an interesting view as the framework is that used by OBU on campus, but this perception stresses the importance of involving partners in discussion even if they do not have a major impact on the outcome. The feeling of involvement also stems from OBU's procedures being similar to those already in place in the college, so they are not seen as additional controls. It is this involvement in developing the control mechanisms which helps develop credibility or calculative trust (Coleman, 1990; Skandrani, 2011) into the knowledge-based trust vital for the long term health of a partnership (Lewicki and Bunker, 1999).

While normally, you would expect to see a lessening of control as the partnership develops the stricter imposition of the quality framework and the increased standardisation of procedures gave the impression of increased control and use of

OBU's positional power and suggested that trust could have decreased. However, the equality of the relationship at organisational level coupled with the use of a framework to provide more guidance and support at operational level actually seeks to solidify the relationship and strengthen ties between the two organisations, by providing the consistency which senior managers and the liaison manager said were important and leaving less to the interpretation of liaison managers.

14.6.1 Perception of power at operational level

While at senior management level the partnership was seen as one of equals and as collaborative in nature this view was not always reflected at operational level with both OBU and college interviewees feeling that the quality framework and associated procedures had been imposed and did not fully reflect the different nature of the students in the college and their needs. The interviewees felt the reduction in flexibility could damage the aim of achieving high quality education for all, thus moving the partnership away from its mission. On reflection, this should have been explored further. Nederhand *et al.*, (2019) would typify this top down imposition of procedures as a hierarchical approach which suggest that there is a power imbalance which mitigates against collaboration. Cuganesan *et al.*, (2017) see this as a natural tension in public sector partnerships where there is a need to improve information sharing and participation while safeguarding the structures of the organisation concerned. These tensions were reflected by some interviewees who saw the organisation as not trusting them, whereas the management view was that they were providing consistency and support. This perceived procedure driven approach mitigates against the development of an HE culture based on academic freedom (Gaus et al, 2017), and suggests that the liaison manager is moving away from the role of boundary spanner to that of gatekeeper (Haas, 2015), thus changing

the nature of the relationship. While this may be appropriate for a transactional relationship (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008), this partnership is meant to be based on collaboration. The emphasis suggests a more hierarchical relationship suggesting again a perceived mismatch at operational level between policy and practice.

However, the liaison managers, who often worked with a number of colleges, saw the importance of having standard reference points to ensure consistency and maintain the integrity of an OBU degree. It was the college staff who felt that controls were being imposed thus reducing trust and seemed to be unaware that the Dean of HE was involved in developing the quality framework. This disconnect seemed to arise from a lack of awareness of the role of the ACP steering group. It is debateable whether better communication of the rationale for standardisation would have alleviated concerns but does suggest a need to find ways in which partnership staff feel ownership of processes.

Although the use of more standardised procedures meant staff felt that controls were being increased without their input, mitigating against collaboration and reducing trust, they felt that the level of collaboration had increased in other areas as the partnerships had developed. While the assessments, module descriptions and programme specifications had originally been written by OBU staff the college staff had taken ownership of modules. They were now responsible for developing new assessments updating module descriptions and as programme reviews became due were taking the lead in developing the programme, thus helping to develop the required knowledge-based trust (Lewicki and Bunker, 1999). Although it happened after the interviews, the college staff had been instrumental in the move to develop a

degree apprenticeship with OBBS. This recognition and reliance on the skills and experience demonstrates collaboration. The Early Years Education case also demonstrated the collaborative nature of the partnership. Here the liaison manager saw the college staff as subject experts and her role was to provide guidance and support on policies and procedures, demonstrating a true sharing of expertise, (Brinkerhoff, 2002a)

This raises the interesting question of whether it is possible for collaboration to exist within a hierarchical framework with parties having ownership in some aspects of the partnership but controls being imposed in others. While Lotia and Hardy (2008) would argue against this, other authors such as Huxham and Vengen, (2005); Sandfort and Brinton Milward, (2008); Douglas, (2009) do not see control mechanisms as mitigating against collaboration, Rice (2018) would stress the importance of clear procedures so that all parties understand the role they can play. The implications of this will be discussed further in the conclusion.

14.7 Boundary spanning

The literature review discussed how boundary spanning is becoming increasingly important in managing partnerships especially when the partnership is part of a network, such as the ACP, as in the partnership under investigation (Williams, 2013).

At organisational level the Head of UK Partnerships for OBU and the Dean of HE for the college are the boundary spanning leaders, (BSL). They not only need to develop and maintain the partnership under investigation but must also integrate partnership working into the management and activities of the individual organisations thus showing both horizontal and vertical integration (Pryor and

Henley,2018). At operational level the liaison managers have a boundary spanning role to ensure a collaborative environment is developed.

This section starts by discussing how the Head of UK Partnerships and the Dean of HE demonstrate BSL. In doing so it is building on the work of Pryor and Henley, (2018) and contributing to research on BSL in the education sector which has been under-researched. It then moves on to look at how the liaison manager fulfils the role of a boundary spanner and the implications of this using Williams (2013) framework. This is followed by a discussion of how boundary spanning can help develop Relational Capital (RC) when most research e.g., (Bordogna, 2019; Chau, 2017) looks at its role in developing Social and Intellectual Capital. The section ends by examining Wegemer and Renick's, (2021) boundary spanning model and its relevance to this research.

14.7.1 Boundary spanning leadership

The findings identified that the ACP supports all 6 aspects of BSL, (buffering, reflecting, connecting, mobilising, weaving and transforming), originally set out by Lee *et al.*, (2014) as it engages staff at all levels in discussing and reviewing the workings of the partnership across the boundaries of the ACP network. The use of external speakers at the ACP conference also provides a way of weaving and transforming activities. Transformation is also seen in the way the partnership has moved to developing Degree Apprenticeships as the market need has moved away from Foundation Degrees. (HESA, 2023)

While the ACP works well for the partnership under investigation this approach is not automatically transferable to other organisations. However, what is important for

others to consider is how to provide opportunities for those involved at all levels to meet together to exchange views and share good practice. This interaction is key in building identification-based trust and is a good example of reflecting and mobilising (Lee *et al.*, 2014)

While there is good evidence of BSL being practised to support partnership working what was not evidenced in the interviews was the backward integration into each organisation (Pryor and Henley, 2018). There was perhaps a greater dialogue between staff in different college members of the ACP than between them and university faculties or college departments. This reinforces the silo affect often found in universities and is an example of the need to integrate horizontally. Siloing leads to some of the differences in practice and different interpretations in policy which cause confusion and suggest a lack of understanding of operational issues. To resolve this there needs to be better use of the BSL characteristic of weaving. This would also help senior management to better understand the impact of partnership working on each faculty and to develop processes to improve cross-faculty working.

The findings show that there is evidence of BSL, and this enables better coordination of activities, but further research is required to look at leadership, in particular, and the barriers to adopting a BSL style within the partnership.

14.7.2 The liaison manager as boundary spanner

The Liaison Manager is key to maintaining the partnership and building relationships once the partnership starts and as such acts as a boundary spanner (Williams, 2013). McLaughlin *et al.*, (2009) would label them as '*relational capitalists*', in that

their role is to build and maintain RC, seen as the glue binding a partnership (Shaw 2003; Kale *et al.*, 2000)

Williams (2013) identified 4 key roles fulfilled by boundary spanners, which require a complex set of skills and experience. This section looks at how these roles are fulfilled by the liaison manager and the impact this has on the partnership. It then goes on to discuss how these fit with Wegemer and Renick's, (2021) role spectrums.

The diagram below shows how the elements of the OBU Liaison manager role descriptor align with Williams' (2013) roles.

OBU Role Descriptor	Williams (2013) Roles
Communication, Visits and Relationship Management - Regular communications with, and visits to, partner to ensure that the provisions of the Operations Manual are being implemented, and the programme is being delivered as approved. - Meet with students and staff (separately, as appropriate) during visits - Complete full and timely visit reports within one month of return	Reticulist Interpreter, Communicator
Problem Identification and Resolution - Work with partner to resolve problems and issues with the delivery and management of the programme/s, as they arise - Escalate any issues that cannot be resolved promptly, and at the earliest possible stage, in the first instance via the relevant School/Faculty Sub-Group. Ensure that FAESC is notified of any potential breaches in meeting expectations relating to academic quality and/or standards	Entrepreneur
Student Admissions - Regularly monitor/audit admissions decisions and procedures (involvement as outlined in the operations manual) - Ensure student records are accurate and up to date, in both partner and University systems	Coordinator
Annual Review Cycle/Risk Register - Take part in the Annual Programme Review and carry out an annual review of the programme documentation and resources supporting programme delivery. - Ensure the Operations Manual is kept up to date (at least once per year, through the Annual Review process). Update the Risk Register and Risk Improvement Plan, as appropriate. Ensure programme documentation is logged with APQO annually, and provide regular reports on the quality of provision to Faculty AESC/QLIC	Reticulist Coordinator
Regulations Provide advice to partner staff on the implementation of new University policies	Interpreter Communicator

and regulations applying to the programme.	
Assessment/Awards • Coordinate the transfer of data from the partner to the University for the production of awards certificates and transcripts, and for the preparation of funding and other statutory returns. • Coordinate nominations for External Examiners, and ensure they are briefed on their role. Work with the partner to ensure that External Examiners are provided with sufficient information to carry out their role. • Ensure all draft assignment briefs and examination papers are approved by the appropriate Brookes staff and External Examiner prior to issue to students. • Ensure External Examiner Reports are forwarded to the partner and coordinate response to the External Examiner. • Where appropriately qualified and trained, chair Examination Committees and/or attend as a permanent member. • Attend Programme Committees. • Maintain oversight of the process and decision making in cases of Exceptional Circumstances	Reticulist Communicator/Coordinator
Student Experience • Monitor quality of teaching through peer teaching observation if appropriately qualified (please note there is no formal requirement to produce a written evaluation of this activity) • Monitor collection and analysis of student feedback by the partner • Ensure students participate in appropriate committees and forums • Ensure all new members of teaching staff at the partner institution are formally approved via appropriate channels at the University • Monitor the ongoing suitability of, and student access to, learning resources • Assure the quality of work placements (if relevant) • Carry out a formal site visit if partner teaching premises change or evolve and complete appropriate report.	Coordinator
Programme Change/Evaluation • Provide advice on any minor/major changes required to any aspect of programme delivery and coordinate the approval process, as necessary.	Coordinator

• Coordinate preparations for Approval and Re-validation events, and other QA exercises; and attend meetings with university panels, as required. • With the support of the relevant Faculty and APQO (for UK partners) and Brookes Global (for International Partners), monitor changes in statutory regulations that may affect any aspect of programme delivery	
Marketing Material Ensure all publicly available marketing and other material about the partnership and programme of study is correct and up to date, and accurately represents the relationship with the University, the delivery of the programme and the awards available. This includes a regular check of web presence.	Coordinator
Financial Data Maintain an awareness of key financial data associated with the programme/s, including required minimum student numbers and fee levels. Report any concerns to the Head of Finance and Planning and/or the ADSD	Coordinator

Figure 42 Liaison manager role descriptor and Williams, (2013) roles

14.7.2.1 Reticulist

This role is key in understanding and managing relationships (Williams, 2013), especially in building interpersonal relationship which this research has identified as being key to the long term success of the partnership and was discussed earlier in the chapter. At organisational level this role is fulfilled by the Head of UK partnerships and the Dean of HE, but it also has an important part to ensuring success at operational level. Its importance is shown by the skills of the reticulist being required in 3 aspects of the liaison manager role. This highlights the need for someone with suitable interpersonal skills to build what has been identified as a “friendly working relationship”.

The findings showed that the relationship was not as harmonious when the liaison manager put the emphasis on process rather than relationships and did not show an interest in the complexity of the environment in which they were working. The role needs someone who not only understands policies and procedures but also the pressures of delivering HE in FE and can find the solution to complex problems as discussed below.

14.7.2.2 Entrepreneur

It could be argued that the entrepreneurial role is fulfilled by the Head of UK partnerships and those involved in developing new partnerships. However, with the increased emphasis on process and standardisation of procedures, the liaison manager needs entrepreneurial skills, in order to find creative solutions to problems, while acting within the quality framework and maintaining the quality of provision. This requires excellent understanding of OBU processes and also how they apply to the partner and requires the person to be able to communicate well and adapt to the difference emphases in FE colleges.

This role therefore cannot be separate from that of Interpreter/Communicator discussed below.

14.7.2.3 Interpreter/Communicator

On the face of it, this is the key role as it underpins all activities the liaison manager undertakes. As communication forms the basis of all relationship it is interesting that this is seen by Williams (2013) as a distinct role. In discussing the role of the liaison manager, the skill lies in understanding the implications of teaching HE in FE and looking at the implications of adapting on-campus approaches to those in the college. This was highlighted in the Healthcare interviews when good practice from on-campus courses had been adapted to better meet the needs of a more diverse student body who were putting these practices into use in their working lives.

14.7.2.4 Coordinator

This role features heavily in the role descriptor and is central to the role of the liaison manager. This is a collaborative partnership which requires planning and coordination based on effective communication. In the absence of this the partnership would fail.

14.7.2.5 Influences on the role of boundary spanner

Wegemer and Renick (2021) identified the organisational, cultural, relational and historical influences on the role of the BS and how these affect the focus the BS puts on aspects of their role. The importance of culture and its impact on all aspects of partnership are discussed above, (14.3). The historical influences have also been discussed in looking at how trust and commitment are built, (14.5). The organisational influences are seen by the need, at times, to balance the conflicting priorities of the partner organisations while maintaining the partnership. This was raised by the majority of interviewees and fits closely with Williams' (2013) views of the BS as both an entrepreneur and coordinator. The influence of the relational

aspect was demonstrated in both the Healthcare and the Early Years case studies with some liaison managers being more task and process focused and others more focused on how to best make the partnership works. The Healthcare study shows how this affects the culture and dynamic of the partnership. This also links closely to Wegemer and Renick's (2021), role spectrums.

This shows that both Williams, (2013) and Wegemer and Renick. (2021) provide useful frameworks for the evaluation of the role of BS and this will be explored further in the conclusion.

14.7.2.6 Filling the role of liaison manager

Despite the importance of the role there is no consistency in the way in which liaison managers are appointed nor in the level of experience or skills required meaning that the person fulfilling the role does not necessarily have all the skills required. This means that the partnerships develop in different ways and there are different emphases on what is important once again fitting with Wegemer and Renick (2021).

Part of the problem is that this is role carried out alongside other HE duties and is not a post in its own right. While this may provide flexibility and allows faculties to focus on specific local needs, the emphasis is more on the short term needs of the faculty and not on the longer term needs of the partnership.

The problems this causes were emphasised by the Dean of HE and the Head of UK who both wanted more consistency in the interpretation of policies and procedures to avoid problems.

14.7.3 Boundary spanning and relational capital.

This discussion has identified that by employing the traits of boundary spanners and the associated management techniques Senior Management and the Liaison Managers develop and orchestrate the elements of partnership. which must be in place to make it successful. The boundary spanning activities are key to building the relationship (Williams, 2013). McLaughlin (2009) would call boundary spanners “*relational capitalists*” (p.40) in that it is their role to ensure the at the elements of RC are working together to build collaborative relationships which are reciprocal and based on common goals, shared values and trust, (Kale *et al.*, 2000).

14.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to draw out the main themes from the findings and to discuss their meanings and implications in the context of existing literature in order to address Research Objective 3. This first section examined the nature of the collaborative partnership under investigation and discussed how collaboration can be achieved even within a hierarchical structure. It supported the literature that partnership needs to be studied at different levels but challenged conventional approaches in the literature that collaboration cannot take place within a hierarchy. It identified that if a collaborative partnership is operating within a procedural framework this can clarify roles and responsibilities and facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise. It also identified that within a multi-layered partnership, such as that under investigation there can be different degrees of collaboration at different levels each contributing to an equal sharing of resources and expertise.

The chapter then went on to consider how interpersonal relationships contribute to partnership development and in particular, discussed the role of friendship in a

business relationship. It identified that the main issue in the literature is understanding of what is meant by friendships and so clarifies the differences between personal and business or agentic friendship. The findings showed that there is a need to develop close and harmonious working relationships, but the purposefulness and time limited nature of the relationship built are role focused and can be maintained when personnel change, thus precluding personal friendship and making the relationship agentic. This section is therefore, providing more understanding of the nature of business relationship and clarifying the terminology used in the literature,

Partnerships develop their own culture, and this may differ from the organisational cultures of the parties involved. The third section of the discussion looked at how the culture was developed and the similarities and differences between the cultures developed in the individual partnership. It identified that although there were shared values and beliefs, and some “norms” could be prescribed by the organisation each partnership had developed its own culture which can be linked to the professional cultures and pedagogic practices dominant within that arrangement. It is this which enables partnership to survive personnel changes. However, the discussion also found that the partnership was heavily based on the personal commitment of those involved, even at organisational level and is reliant on new personnel demonstrating that commitment which is not a sound basis on which to develop a partnership.

Key to maintaining the partnership are boundary spanners. The discussion explored the boundary spanning leadership demonstrated at organisational level and how the liaison manager’s role in boundary spanning coordinates activities in order to

develop the culture and improve collaboration. In doing so it identified a number of traits which are required for the successful coordination of partnerships.

Chapter 15

Conclusion

15.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis has been to use the concept of Relational Capital as lens through which to explore the process of developing a successful partnership. In this case success is defined not in terms of outcomes but as developing a successful working relationship. This thesis sought to elaborate on current theories; those of partnership, Relational Capital and boundary spanning. Theory elaboration is a common objective of case research (Ketokivi and Choi, 2015). To achieve this, the research has used an embedded case style design to focus on the partnership between OBU and a partner college of FE through which it delivers Foundation Degrees, (Fds) and other HE qualifications. To provide context, Chapter 2 provided an overview of educational partnerships between HE institutions and colleges of FE. The literature review then examined the concept of partnership, Relational Capital, and the components of RC which Provan and Milward (2008) would call process indicators. How these components are built and maintained was the key focus of the data collection. Chapters 7-13 set out the findings of the embedded cases and identified the key features of a successful partnership. Chapter 14 discussed the significance of the findings in relation to current research.

This chapter reviews the objectives of the thesis:

1. To explore the context of HE-FE partnerships within the education sector;

2. To review the literature to explore the factors which contribute to partnership development and success;
3. Investigate experiences of partnership working in the HE sector and views on what contributes to partnership success from different perspectives.

It discusses how these objectives have been met and the conclusions that can be drawn. The thesis then outlines the scholarly contributions made before briefly outlining the practice implications, The chapter then acknowledges the limitations of this research and areas for future research. It ends by reflecting on the research process and the lessons learned.

15.2 Objective 1

The purpose of Objective 1 was to understand the context of partnership development in the HE sector as context is important when taking a Critical Realist, (CR), stance to research. Chapter 2 used both academic and practitioner literature to explore the landscape of HE in FE. It found that some 103 colleges of FE participate in the delivery of FE qualifications and 4% of students achieve HE qualifications by studying at a college of FE (HESA ,2022; Association of Colleges, 2023). Most colleges deliver HE in partnership with universities and although colleges can obtain degree awarding powers only 7 have done so to date. This is mostly due to the need to develop a critical mass of students studying HE whereas it is a minority activity for most colleges. The colleges also need to demonstrate appropriate experience in successfully delivering degree programmes (Allen and Parry, 2022). As colleges do not tend to have awarding powers, they are dependent on universities for both numbers and the validation of degrees which suggests a power imbalance which mitigates against collaboration, but this oversimplifies the relationship. Colleges

provide the vital access to students, and often, credibility in that location, meaning the relationship is symbiotic.

Robinson *et al's*, (2006) advice on the key issues of partnership development still forms part of the QAA guidance for colleges and universities working together and these with Parry's (2013) key features of partnership success provided a framework to explore the issues which arise in partnership development in the sector. These were found to be culture, power distribution, and the management arrangements which were explored further through the literature review and data collection process. This is in line with other studies of public sector and educational partnerships e.g. (Shaw, 2003; Elliott, 2017; Dhillon, 2009; Ramadas et al, 2018)). The key being how partners adapt to and learn from each other.

Although the numbers of colleges providing HE and the number of students studying HE in colleges is decreasing this is mostly due to college mergers and degree apprenticeships not being as popular as anticipated (Allen and Parry, 2022), the HE in FE sector still provides import access to Higher Education for a range of students and is important in widening participation in HE.

While studying HE in FE cannot provides the same student experience as studying at university it provides a valuable way of achieving high quality education for those who would not traditionally attend university

15.3 Objective 2

Chapters 3-5 critically review the relevant literature to clarify terminology, crucial to the research and to identify the key factors which contribute to partnership success.

Based on the findings, Brinkerhoff's (2002a) definition of partnership in Chapter 3 was found to be most relevant to this study for although ambitious it recognises the longevity and dynamics of partnership, which must be a feature of partnership in the HE sector.

“a dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. Partnership encompasses mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability and transparency” (Brinkerhoff, 2002a p.216)

The partnership between OBU and the college is dynamic in that although the two organisations have worked together for some 20 years the programmes they run together have changed and developed as the market and student needs have changed. They are working together to meet the shared objectives of widening participation in HE. OBU provides student numbers, funding, validation and initially teaching materials. The college provides access to students, premises and the teaching expertise. Both parties remain autonomous with their core businesses lying outside the partnership and the ACP provides opportunities for both to be involved in decision making. The mutual respect is evident from the levels of trust and commitment exhibited. The public nature of policy documents, annual reviews etc. mean the relationship is transparent.

Chapter 3 went on to explore the nature of partnership and identified that the partnership under research was collaborative, as the two organisations were working

together to achieve a common goal through the sharing of expertise and resources (Lotia and Hardy, 2008). While collaboration would suggest power equality, OBU has positional power, in the ownership of student numbers and access to funding, However, the college provides access to the students, so each party has equal input. What is important is how the power distribution is managed, with both parties using their power to enable (Huxham and Beech, 2008)

Chapter 4 critically reviewed the literature on Relational Capital, (RC), which forms the theoretical lens through which this research was conducted. It identified three approaches to RC. RC as the relational aspect of Social Capital developed by Kale *et al.*, (2000). The economic view, typified by Edvinsson and Malone, (1997), which seeks to value the relationships which an organisation holds. The Intellectus Model, (Bueno *et al.*, 2014) which although developed from Naphiet and Ghosal, (1998), in direct contrast to Kale *et al.*, (2000,) saw Social Capital as flowing from RC and in common with Edvinsson and Malone, (1997) also seeks to value the external relationships organisations have with stakeholders. This study is concerned with how relationships are developed between individuals in a partnership and therefore adopted Kale *et al.*'s, (2000) approach which, although developed over 20 years ago, is still much used by researchers today and has found new avenues in investigating relationships built through social media, e.g., Aaltonen and Turkulainen, (2018); Kim *et al.*, (2021).

Chapter 4 then went on to explore the key components of RC which must be developed for RC to be built and the main focus of this research as set out in Figure 4.

RC is important in partnerships as the relationship norms developed., i.e., the culture, result in the parties involved wanting to support each other which generates a climate for information exchange and the sharing of good practice both of which are important in education partnerships (Abdullah et al 2011, Paolini et al, 2018,). The trust and respect developed mitigates against opportunism and reduce conflict which facilitates the sharing of information but also protects the core capabilities of the organisation which are key to developing competitive advantage. (Kale *et al.*, 2000; Ho and Wang, 2015). RC may reduce the need for formal control procedures and the negative power connotation linked with them (Robson, 2006)

The confidence garnered by successfully developing RC in one partnership develops confidence to work with other organisations and this was seen in this research with both parties developing partnerships with others and OBU's ACP being a good example of the development of a network with common goals.

While RC has many advantages the personal nature of the relationships formed can also be problematic as it can be subject to personnel changes. However, the norms developed, and the learning generated mitigate against this (Huggins, 2010).

Aaltonen and Turkulainen, (2018) suggested that due to the personal ties developed socialisation may become more important than achieving partnership goals thus reducing working capacity but this was not found in this research.

Chapter 4 ended by reviewing how RC had been researched and built an argument for the need for a qualitative study and in particular case research to explore how this phenomenon is built.

Chapter 4 therefore set out the case for RC as an important factor in successful partnership working and the need to examine how it is developed.

Chapter 5 built on the findings of Chapter 4 by critically reviewing the literature of the process indicators of RC. It found that they are interrelated and dependent on each other, with culture underpinning them all as this determines the norms of the relationship. However, the nature of these process indicators change over time as the relationship is developed. The chapter ended by developing a framework, (Figure 10), showing how the process indicators are interdependent and how they contribute to the development of RC within a partnership.

15.4 Objective 3

The initial aim of this objective was to use RC as a lens to investigate the nature of the partnership between OBU. This approach was suggested as appropriate by Kong, (2010) and is similar to that used by Dhillon, (2009,) in her study of the value of Social Capital to education partnerships. The context of the research is set out in Chapter 7. The first study carried out was the OBBS case study and the findings are reported in Chapter 8. This identified that using the antecedents of Relational Capital (RC) as a basis for the interview schedule was too restrictive. While interviewees were happy to discuss the topics included in the interview schedule (Appendix 3), it was not possible to discuss them as individual elements – they are interconnected. Interviewees wanted to tell me the stories of how the relationships had developed and what they saw as important rather than discuss the relevance of the antecedents of RC. The fundamental mistake that had been made was that in order to establish the relevance of RC to public sector partnerships I was trying to replicate positivist studies (e.g., Kale *et al.*, 2000; Sambasivan, 2011; Huang *et al.*, 2010, using a qualitative technique. This study acted more as a pilot and led to the development of a second interview schedule which was used for subsequent interviews, (Appendix

4). However, this case study did provide useful insights into partnership working and especially the importance of culture. Initially, based on the assumption that as both organisations had shared goals, similar missions and worked within the same quality framework, (i.e., had established common norms), I had naively felt that there was no need to discuss culture as there would also be a common culture. However, this case study showed that this was not the case, although there were some common traits in that both organisations developed a supportive environment for students, the partnership had developed its own culture which differed from that of the partner organisations. It also established that RC is based on a number of interrelated components, trust-commitment, mutual respect, power balance, held together by communication and supported by shared culture, which is developed through personal interaction based on mutual respect.

The common theme arising from all the interviews was the enthusiasm of those involved and their personal commitment to the partnership. All interviewees saw it as a way of widening participation in HE. The findings set out in Chapter 8-12 and summarised in Chapter 13 identified the following issues as being key to partnership success; Culture, Interpersonal Relationships, Trust and Commitment, Power and Boundary Spanning. These were discussed in terms of the literature in Chapter 14. The conclusion drawn against each of these topics is set out below.

15.4.1 Culture

For any partnership to be successful it needs to be based on shared goals and values and must build norms of working i.e., a common culture. This research has focused on the need for the two organisations to work together in the partnership but retain their own identities suggesting that the partnership culture is different from

those of the two organisations. It is this which ensures that longevity of the partnership (Alvesson, 2010). To further complicate matters the literature review, (Chapter 5) highlighted the cultural differences which arise in education partnerships due to different disciplinary approaches (Heidrich and Chandler, 2015). Despite disciplinary differences, the over-arching common trait was the shared commitment to creating a supportive learning environment for students which leads to respect and trust being built between the members of the partnership.

The operations manual and quality framework provided the norms to be adopted but each partnership had developed ways of working and approaches which drew the two cultures together. Common working practices had been adopted which were focused on the success of the partnership and differed from approaches used in the two separate organisations. This demonstrates that although policies and procedures are prescribed there is still room for flexibility. The common culture developed was one which focused on providing a supportive learning environment for the students. It is this which forms the basis of the HE culture discussed in the literature but not clearly defined.

This research saw an HE culture which used outwards symbols, in the form of study spaces, to differentiate itself from FE but more importantly supported students to contest knowledge and become independent learners. Whereas the traditional approach in HE is to develop new knowledge and HE culture is based on this, these partnerships were seeking not to add to knowledge but to explore the application of new knowledge. Thus, helping to demonstrate research impact.

15.4.2 Interpersonal relationships

Kale *et al.*, (2000) stress the importance of personal friendship in developing RC.

This research drew a distinction between personal and business friendship. It concluded that the voluntary nature of personal friendship coupled with the level of intimacy required is not necessary to build a successful working relationship.

Personal friendship was also seen as voluntary and did not require reciprocation whereas business friendship arose from the situation and the relationship is reciprocal. Interviewees also saw personal friendship as being potentially detrimental to a working relationship as this could lead to cronyism. Kale *et al.*, (2000) did not take this into account when discussing friendship. The debate was focused on the difference between friendship and friendliness. Interviewees saw the relationship as one in which it was important to demonstrate friendliness which is based on empathy and shows consideration for the views and feelings of others. Friendliness was demonstrated by showing an interest in the personal lives of colleagues but not expecting intimate details. What was seen as key to a good working relationship was mutual respect based on expertise and attitude. The shared commitment to the partnership and the welfare of students forms the basis of developing common attitudes and leads to the development of respect. Mutual respect is vital in developing empathy (Murphy *et al.*, 2007), and helps to build identification-based trust once again showing their interrelatedness. Although interviewees were adamant that friendship was not the basis of the relationship, all accepted that friendship could develop from a business relationship and there were numerous examples of this, including the relationship between me and some of the interviewees.

15.4.3 Trust and commitment

In line with Morgan and Hunt (1994), this research found that trust and commitment were key to partnership success with commitment being one of the most common traits mentioned by interviewees. Initially partnerships are based on reputation and experience and thus calculative trust and commitment. As personal relationships develop calculative trust develops into identification-based trust, which is stronger (Fukuyama, 1995). As behavioural commitment develops those involved become more committed both to the partnership and to the organisation facilitating the partnership. This was seen in this research.

Both personal and organisational commitment underpin the partnership under investigation, but the main insight gained was how much personal commitment was invested in the partnership at both senior management and operational level. Though basing a relationship on personal commitment makes it vulnerable to personnel change this personal commitment does inform organisational commitment and the links formed at all levels mitigate against problems caused by individuals leaving. However, the personal commitment often compensates for a lack of resources, and this is not sustainable in the long term. Personal commitment drives this partnership and without it the partnership will founder.

15.4.4 Power

The discussion, (Section 14.6) highlighted the equality of the relationship at organisational level with both parties having positional power (Huxham and Beech, 2008). Power is used to enable (Sandfort and Brinton Milward, 2008) and to reinforce the reciprocal nature of the partnership and the equality.

While some college staff saw OBU exerting its positional power by introducing more standardised procedures they seemed to be unaware that the ACP steering group developed the procedures and that the Dean of HE had an input. She felt she owned the procedures. The problem lay not in how power was exerted but in how decisions are communicated.

The import thing being the need for improved communication and transparency, so all involved understand how procedures are developed and why they are needed.

The findings show that collaboration comes from the parties involved having ownership of some aspects and understanding the rationales for decisions.

These findings contribute to understanding the tensions faced by organisations working together within a hierarchical structure and contribute to the need to look at the application of collaboration theory and recognise the need to be flexible for collaboration to be successful.

15.4.5 Boundary spanning

The literature review and the discussion examined how the complex nature of HE partnership requires the skills of a boundary spanner who understands the similarities and differences between the organisations so that a common culture can be built based on trust and commitment. The following sections look at how the management team exhibit boundary spanning leadership before drawing conclusions on how the liaison manager fulfils the role of boundary spanner. In doing so it draws heavily on the work of Williams, (2013); Pryor and Henley, (2018) and Wegemer and Renick, (2021).

15.4.5.1 Boundary spanning leadership

The findings identified that the ACP supports all 6 aspects of BSL, (buffering, reflecting, connecting, mobilising, weaving and transforming), originally set out by Lee *et al.*, (2014) as it engages staff at all levels in discussing and reviewing the workings of the partnership across the boundaries of the ACP network. Using Pryor and Henley's (2018) framework to analyse BSL practices this research summarise how BSL is applied in this partnership.

BSL Practice	Buffering	Reflecting	Connecting	Mobilizing	Weaving	Transforming
Example	Clear policies and procedures though the quality framework	Annual Review processes	ACP conferences Steering group dinners Participation in graduation ceremonies	Involvement of partners in programme development	Development of ACP Developing new partnerships	Development of Degree Apprenticeships to meet new challenges

Figure 43 BSL practices after Pryor and Henley, (2018)

15.4.5.2 The liaison manager as boundary spanner

This research highlighted the importance of the liaison manager in coordinating the partnership and therefore fulfilling the boundary spanning role. As highlighted in the discussion the emphasis in the role is on Williams' (2013) Interpreter/Communicator and Coordinator. However, liaison managers play a key role as reticulists in building interpersonal relationships which highlights the need for someone empathetic with skills in relationship building, Entrepreneurial traits are required to find solutions to

problems which meet the needs of students within the confines of the systems and procedures in place. Although not specifically explored during this research the Liaison Manager needs to exhibit and develop the skills discussed above to ensure a successful partnership.

15.5 The role of relational capital

As already discussed, the initial aim of this research was to explore if RC was relevant to education partnerships. What this research has found is that for a partnership to be successful it needs to have all the components of RC identified by Kale *et al.*, (2000) so RC is a relevant concept. However, this research challenged the view that friendship is key. I therefore suggest the following new definition of Relational Capital.

‘the level of trust, commitment and respect that arises out of close interaction at the individual level between partners’.

15.6 The research question

This research set out to answer the question, “How do relational dynamics influence HE-FE partnerships? It has been established that partnerships need to develop a common culture and it is the interplay between, trust, commitment, mutual respect and power which work together to make the partnership successful. Figure 10 provided a framework which showed the interrelated components of RC and how they contribute to partnership. This research identified a simpler framework set out below:

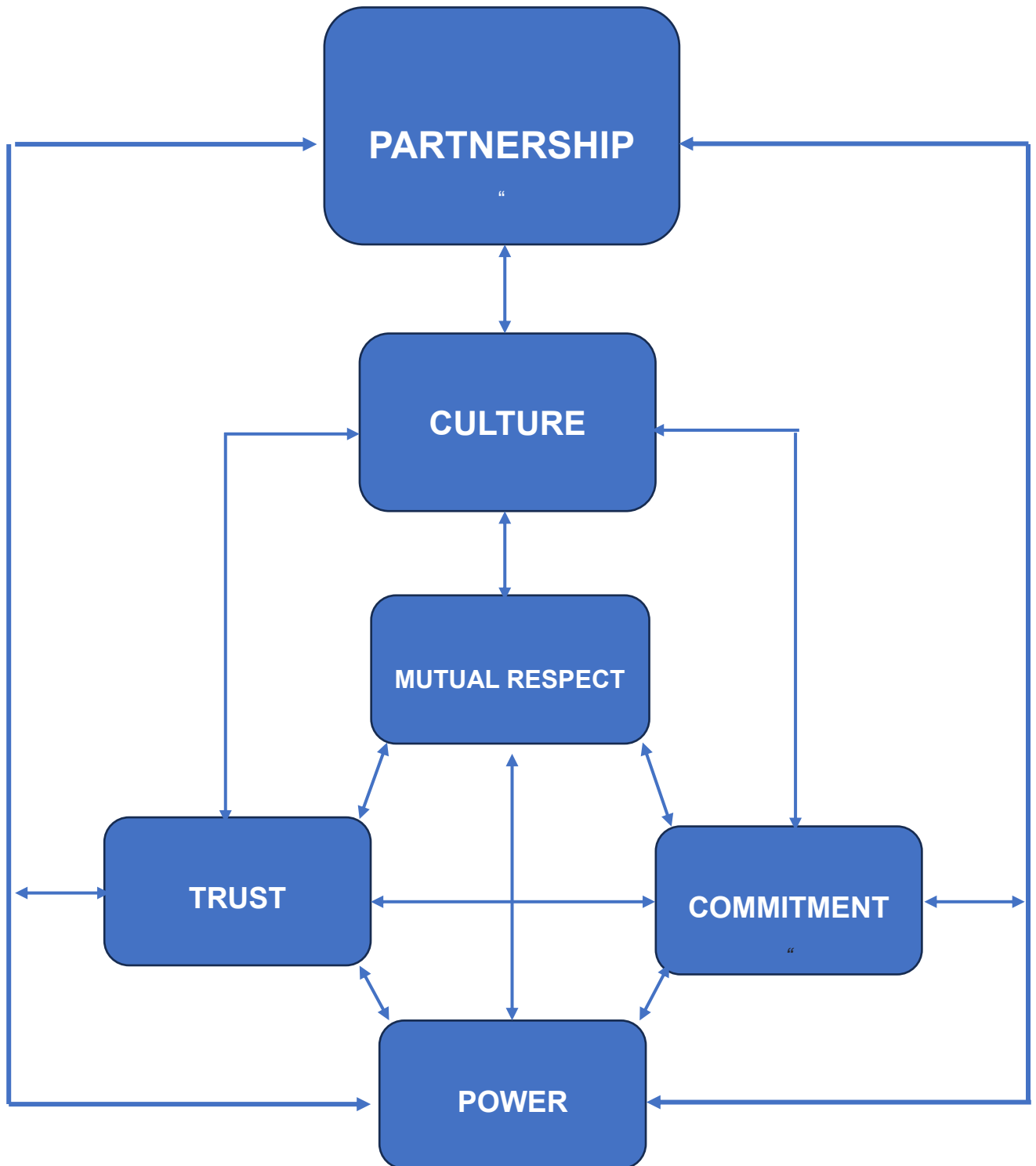


Figure 44 Relational dimensions of partnership

All aspects of partnership working depend on developing a common culture. The common values developed are based on the mutual respect exhibited which

underpins the trust and commitment to the partnership. It is this trust and commitment which determines how power is manifested. But all rely on the common values and process of the shared culture.

15.7 Contribution to theory

This research set out to explore the relevance of RC to educational partnerships and to understand what leads to a successful working relationship. In doing this it used a case based approach to elaborate on existing theory in 3 areas: Developing an HE culture: The role of friendship in Relational Capital; Boundary Spanning in HE partnerships.

15.7.1 Developing an HE culture

Chapter 2 stressed the need for partnerships delivering HE in FE to develop an HE culture. This was further explored in the literature Review in Chapter 5 though there is no clear definition.

This research examined how organisations can retain their own cultures but develop a different one for the purpose of the partnership. It is this which ensures the longevity of the partnership. The literature review saw HE culture as based on attitudes to the creation on knowledge and its contestability. This research acknowledges that carrying out research plays only a minor role in the work of FE staff teaching HE, but what is more important is the attitude to knowledge taught and developed by students. The need for critical enquiry was seen by interviewees as fundamental. Those involved in Early Years Education and Healthcare stressed the importance of this though their degrees are vocational. The traditional distinction between HE and other educational establishments that HE's role is to develop

knowledge while FE applies it was evident in the findings, with OBU staff being active researchers while college staff had practitioner backgrounds and did not have timetabled hours for research though some were reading for higher degrees. However, what is necessary is to develop a different attitude to knowledge which is reflected in the importance placed on the impact of research by the REF. This research found that what is important is that students are taught to contest knowledge and how research can be applied in the workplace. An HE culture therefore, is one where knowledge is seen as contestable, both students and staff recognise the importance of research in advancing knowledge and are able to apply new knowledge to their discipline.

15.7.2 The role of friendship in relational capital

This research builds on the work of Grayson, (2007); Kent, (2008) and others by clarifying the difference between business and personal friendship. It highlights that the level of intimacy and the voluntary nature of personal friendship are not necessary to develop a successful business relationship. While RC and the resulting trust is a way of avoiding exploitation, the use of friendship to gain access to information etc. can be seen as exploitative and thus damage the personal friendship.

This research suggests that Kale *et al's.*, (2000) inclusion of friendship as well as mutual respect in the definition of RC is superfluous and that personal friendship can be detrimental to a partnership. What is required is mutual respect based on the personal experience of colleagues' attitudes and commitment to achieving the partnership goals. It is this respect, not friendship, based on shared commitment which forms the basis of the shared culture developed.

15.7.3 Boundary spanning in HE partnerships

There is a wealth of literature on boundary spanning in the fields of organisational studies and business, but this topic is limited in public sector and in particular in education research. This research adds to the literature on the role of boundary spanning in education partnerships and looks at the role of boundary spanners in building RC. As discussed above the key to successful partnership is building a common culture. To do this the boundary spanner must be able to engender trust through their expertise and experience. They must also be empathetic to the context and share the same commitment to partnership working, Williams (2013) sets out 4 traits of boundary spanners, reticulist, entrepreneur, interpreter-communicator, and coordinator. This research found that the most important traits for the liaison manager are interpreter-communicator and coordinator. Wegemer and Renick's (2021) model for boundary spanning identifies the external influences that affect partnerships and how these influences the focus the boundary spanner puts on their role. This research builds on their work and combines it with that of Williams, (2013) to propose a model of boundary spanning, Figure 42.

The outer layer shows the influences on the partnership adapted from Wegemer and Renick, (2021) which are critiqued in the literature review, (Section 5.9) and their relationship to this research discussed in Section 14.7. At the core of the module are Williams', (2013) five functions of a boundary spanner demonstrating the extremes of the approaches which may be taken. This model will aid in the evaluation of boundary spanning activities in other partnerships and can act as a guide to managers when appointing boundary spanners.

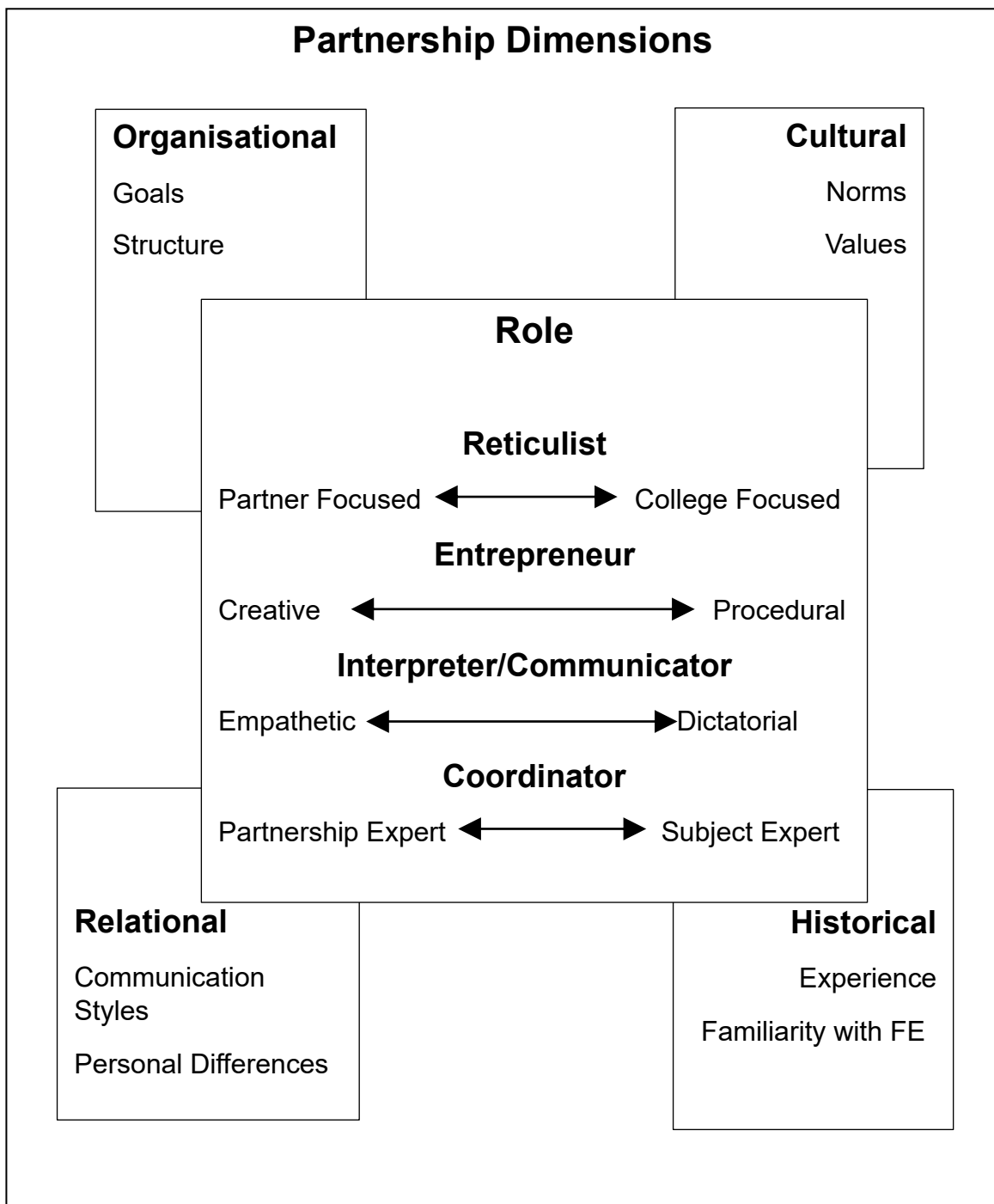


Figure 45 Boundary spanning model

15.8 Methodological contribution

The use of case research to examine constructs such as RC is well established in the literature review. Where this research differs is the use of an embedded case design style. This allows for multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon thus adding to the richness of the data collected.

15.9 Managerial implications

This research has highlighted the importance of the liaison manager in supporting and coordinating the activities of the partnership. It is therefore vital that the person fulfilling this role has the right experience and expertise. The liaison manager is a boundary spanner and so it is important that the person appointed to the role has or develops the skills required.

The research also identified the need for clear and open communications and more transparent decision making processes, so all involved understand the rationale for decisions. This would be improved by better application of boundary spanning leadership and in particular the horizontal integration of the lessons learned from the partnership into each organisation in line with Boundary Spanning Leadership.

The main issue is the level of resources allocated to the partnership and especially the lack of time allocated to college staff to support students. The provision of HE in FE is successful in widening participation but if students from more diverse backgrounds are to be supported through a degree, then the time required to do so needs to be funded.

15.10 Limitations of this research

To reduce contextual variation in the findings this research is based on a single embedded case design. This provided the opportunity to view the partnership from five different perspectives. The resulting data provided a rich picture of the way the partnership worked but more nuances may have been found if it had been possible to compare data from other partnerships within the ACP. This would suggest a multi-embedded case design. This would have provided an opportunity to compare cases where the working relationship was not seen to be as positive.

Initially this research sought to apply the concept of RC to an education partnership, but this was seen as naive and limiting as the research developed, so the research moved to using RC as a lens to examine the process of building and maintaining a partnership. Process research is best based on longitudinal studies and although the data was collected over a 24 month period and interviewees had varying length of experience the data collection did not particularly focus on temporal aspects.

While there are examples of temporal changes in the data collection this was not a particular focus and had it been so the findings would be strengthened. There was an opportunity to re-interview the two interviewees who changed role, but it would have been advantageous to re-interview all participants at the beginning and end of the study to see how their views changed as the partnership developed.

Data was only gathered from secondary sources and semi-structured interviews.

Observing the interactions for example by attending meetings etc. would have provided another avenue of information and provided me with an opportunity to see how closely the views of the interviewees represented practice.

While this research has discussed in detail the key components which must be in place for a partnership to be successful and the important role boundary spanning plays in developing and maintaining a partnership it does not focus on the skills that participants in partnerships need nor how they develop which could be expected of process research.

15.11 Areas for further research

To reduce contextual complexity this research focused on a single embedded case and looked at the relationships between two organisations only. A wider study which compared and contrasted OBU's relationships with other members of the ACP would have provided greater insights and more comparative data which could perhaps have been used for theory building.

While the research found the components of RC do contribute to partnership success when it is defined as a successful working relationship the benefits of RC to education partnership were not explored and it would be useful to do so in a further study.

This research briefly examined the role of boundary spanning in education partnerships and found that although the management team demonstrated the traits of boundary spanning leadership, (BSL), the horizontal integration of learning from the partnership was not explored. There is scope for further research on the impact of BSL on education and a need to examine how learning is integrated into practice.

Building on the need to examine BSL leadership in education there is also a need to look at how boundary spanning skills are developed and how more effective boundary spanning impacts on partnership performance.

15.12 Reflection on the research process

Critical Realism accepts the researcher's influence on the research, and I make no apologies that this research reflects my ideas and approaches. I chose the research topic, the literature presented in Chapters 3 to 5, the interviewees, and the data presented in the findings, and it is my interpretation of these findings which form the discussion and conclusion. I was guided by my reading of the literature and the feedback from my supervisors but essentially this work is mine. My intention throughout was that my research had strong theoretical underpinning and to this end I may have clung to the concept of RC too closely at times, but I hope I've provided a balanced view of the theories underpinning partnership development.

I came to this research in a unique position. I had over 20 years' experience of partnership working, an understanding of OBU's policies and systems and access to potential sources of information. This position gave me rich insights into the data I collected but there is no denying that another researcher may have taken a different view.

Having been involved in partnership working both in a previous organisation and with OBU I began this research journey with a simple idea. I wanted to understand why some partnerships develop a better working relationship than others. In doing this research therefore I was both a researcher and a practitioner. This had both positives and negatives. Being involved in partnership working helped me identify suitable participants and was helpful in building rapport with interviewees and understanding some of the benefits and challenges. It also meant that I understood the control mechanisms and quality procedures adopted so that during interviews I could focus on discussing the views of the interviewees and there was no need for

them to explain systems or hierarchies. However, it also meant that I had preconceived assumptions about the work and people involved. Interviewing colleagues may also have meant that they tried to be too helpful and provide the answers they thought I wanted to hear though the data analysis should have eliminated this. The benefit of my position was that I was able to share stories of the good and bad with the interviewees and build a rapport. I always got the impression that they felt I understood the ups and downs of the work we were doing. However, my approach was to always try to remain open, and to rely on data gathered only from the interview transcripts. I feel fortunate that the interviewees were confident in articulating their opinions on the both the benefits and shortfalls of the relationship.

My initial approach to research was also based on my background in both developing and teaching strategy which led me to think that the answer was Relational Capital. The reflection on the OBBS case study in Chapter 8 demonstrated that this was an over-simplistic approach and also highlighted that the components of RC are interrelated, and it is very difficult to isolate them. I hope that in Figure 44 I have helped the reader see the interconnected nature of RC and partnership. My experience in the OBBS study led to the broadening of my research objectives to move away from trying to apply the concept of RC to the partnership towards using it as a lens through which to view the research and provide the initial framework for data analysis. This demonstrates that throughout the research I was open to other possibilities and guided by both theory and the data.

While I was always committed to a qualitative case based study as this seemed to make sense when looking at value laden views, my initial research instrument perhaps, was too influenced by my background in science. I was too eager to

categorise things and put them in boxes. This was also shown in my initial exuberance for NVivo. I soon learned that the interrelatedness of the elements of RC means that they cannot be set into neat categories, and this has caused problems when structuring this thesis. How do you show that things are interrelated, while still giving the reader the sense that you understand how concepts such as culture are trust are developed and that one underpins the other? Figure 44 was difficult to develop.

Reflecting on my efforts to make sense of the data gathered in interviews for this research study, I recognise that a qualitative research strategy also has shortcomings. Words are messy, what is the best way to present findings? Would the reader really be as interested in these comments as I was? I found times when I longed for a spreadsheet and some nice numbers to analyse. Why didn't I do a quantitative study of the whole ACP and replicate Kale *et al.*'s (2000) work in a new context? During this doctoral journey, I have learnt that much as qualitative research can be messy and complicated it provides rich data and new insights into the topic. You learn from your interviewees, and they can take you down paths you had not considered. The consideration of boundary spanning is one which resulted from the interviews.

As a part time researcher, it can be difficult to get the right balance between research and other commitments and this has been a feature of my research journey. One of the main findings of this research was the level of personal commitment required to make the partnership work and support students to achieve success. I shared this commitment to fulfilling my paid role and to my students, so priority was given to work related problems rather than research. As the research

period also coincided with rather turbulent times in my department, which experienced a dramatic increase in student numbers and staff shortages the research was often put on the back burner. Alongside this illness, in my family curtailed my ability to research during my “leisure time”. These restrictions on my research time also meant that I was not able to engage with fellow doctoral students as much as I would have liked and learn from their experiences which would have been beneficial especially in the best way to present qualitative data. These interruptions made the research journey much longer and lonelier than expected. Completing this thesis has only been possible due to my retirement.

These interruptions had a number of unforeseen consequences. Gaps in carrying out research meant that sections were written at different times and so on each return I had to familiarise myself with progress and concepts and make sure there was a constant narrative.

I have however learned a number of lessons. Research is a long and lonely process, and it is important that researcher shares their experiences and does not give up. Despite the frustrations and hold ups I have enjoyed the research process and developing my own knowledge of partnership working in the education sector. I hope that readers too find it interesting, I have one regret that circumstances did not permit me to carry out this study full time. I would have loved to immerse myself in the research with fewer distractions. Completing this thesis during the first few months of retirement with no other distractions has been a privilege though it also means this is the end of my research journey.

I embarked on this research as I wanted to discover why some partners were easier to work with than others. I found the answer.

“Good partnerships involve likeminded people who are passionate about their role and committed to making it work”.

Part 6

References and Appendices

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet



How do relational dynamics influence public sector partnerships? A study of the Oxford Brookes University Associated College Partnership

Invitation:

You are being invited to take part in a research study, as an interviewee. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

Oxford Brookes University is seeking to widen participation in its undergraduate degree programme by expanding the number of places on its foundation degree programmes in partnership with Colleges of Further Education. If this strategy is to be successful it is essential that these partnerships are efficient and effective. So what is the best way of evaluating them?

The main aim of this research is to gain an understanding of what makes a successful partnership using the Associated College Partnership developed by Oxford Brookes University as a case study. The literature says that in the private sector strong Relational Capital (RC) is the key to a successful partnership but why is it seen as being so important? What is RC? What is its role in partnerships? Does the theory apply to public sector partnerships such as the ACP developed by Oxford Brookes University? The research aims to answer these questions.

You are being invited to participate in Phase 2 of the research. Phase 1 of the research examined whether the concept of relational capital was relevant to public sector partnerships. Phase 2 is developing this theme based on the findings of Phase 1. The next phase of the research will be to provide guidance on what makes a successful partnership.

Relational capital as used in this study has developed in the strategy literature from the Resource Based View of the firm (Barney 1981) and is regarded as the key way in which this knowledge exchange is built and maintained thus cementing partnerships. It is defined as:

'the level of mutual trust, respect and friendship that arises out of close interaction at the individual level between alliance partners' (Kale et al., 2000, p 218).

In Phase 2 of the research which is nearing its conclusion key personnel from both OBU and a partner college will be invited to participate in a one hour interview to explore their understanding of the nature of partnership and the relative importance its components. The

Why have I been invited to participate?

As a key member of the team involved in developing and delivering Foundation Degrees though the ACP your views will contribute significantly to helping shape this research programme. Colleagues from both OBU and the college have also been invited to participate.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. *It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.* Your participation or wish to decline this invitation will have no impact on your employment or role within the ACP.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I will interview you. It is expected that the interviews will take an hour; they will be audio recorded. The interviews will be transcribed as soon as possible after the interview and if you wish a transcript sent to you for comment and amendment if necessary. All information gathered will be anonymised.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The aim of the research is to provide guidance on what makes a successful partnership and as a result those developing partnerships to identify at an early stage the likely success of the partnership.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All the data collected will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. All research information will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project. Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research results will be published as part of a PhD thesis, used for academic articles and publications and dissemination at conferences. If you wish you will be sent a summary of the results.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is part of a PhD research project undertaken by Jacqueline O'Rourke and funded by Oxford Brookes University. The supervisors are: Mrs Aileen French and Dr Karen Handley, both at Oxford Brookes University. Contact details are set out below and all are happy to help answer questions or concerns about this research.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at Oxford Brookes University. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the Chair of the UREC on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

Jacqueline O'Rourke

July 2018

Contact details:

	e-mail	Telephone
Jacqui O'Rourke	jo'rourke@brookes.ac.uk	01865 485871
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Appendix 2 Consent Form

Research title:

How do relational dynamics influence public sector partnerships? A study of the Oxford Brookes University Associated College Partnership

Name, position and contact address of researcher:

Jacqueline O'Rourke
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Business
Oxford Brookes University.
Wheatley Campus,
OX33 1HX
United Kingdom.

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.

☐

Please initial box

Yes

No

I agree to the interview being audio recorded

☐☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 3 First Interview Guide

Interview checklist

Jacqueline O'Rourke.

May 2013.

An evaluation of the antecedents of relational capital: A study of the Oxford Brookes University Associated College Partnership.

This is part of my PhD research project.

1. Providing Context...

Informants will be given a brief explanation of the research project. This will briefly outline the research background and articulate its aims and the potential benefits for both the ACP and public sector partnerships. Care will be required to avoid leading the interviewees or putting particular thoughts or words 'into their heads'.

2. Respondent background. (Putting at ease)

The interviewees in the pilot study will be known to the interviewer and as they will have volunteered to participate little time should be required to put them at their ease. For comparative purposes partnerships not involving the Faculty of Business will be involved and it is hoped that it will also be possible to involve a partnership between a member of the ACP and another university. In these cases, time will be spent putting the interviewees at ease and finding out more about the participants background.

3. Overview of views on partnership

Tell me about what works well in partnerships: Feel free to talk about specific examples.

Prompts:

- What was important to you in developing the partnership?
- What makes a good partnership?
- How important are individuals in a successful partnership.

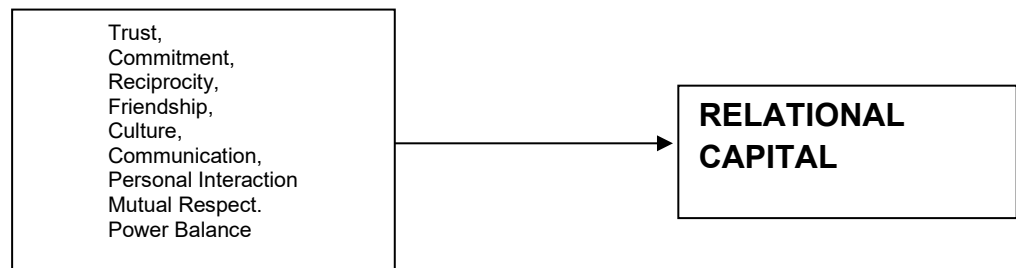
4. Relational Capital

What is your understanding of the phrase relational capital? (This may require prompting)

For the purposes of this study, I am using the following definition.

'the level of mutual trust, respect and friendship that arises out of close interaction at the individual level between alliance partners' (Kale et al, 2000, p 218).

A review of the literature has developed the following components of RC



Can you give me your understanding of each of these concepts. Please give examples.

5. Relative Importance of Components.

Interviewees will be asked to rank the components of RC in order of importance to a partnership and asked to explain their ranking.

Are there any other things which aren't on the list which you think are important?

6. Closing questions (have I missed anything and further leads?)

Is there anything else that you believe to be relevant to understanding RC that we have not covered here?

Is there anyone else you think may be interested to talk to me about this or who can contribute to this research project?

Relational Capital

The main components are listed below. What do each of these terms mean to you?

Trust,
Commitment,
Reciprocity,
Friendship,
Culture,
Communication,
Personal
Interaction
Mutual Respect.
Power Balance

How important do you think each of these terms are to the success of a partnership?
Please rank them in order of importance. 1 being the most important and 9 the least.
If you think something is unimportant you do not need to rank it.

	Ranking (1-9)
Trust	
Commitment	
Reciprocity	
Friendship	
Culture	
Communication	
Personal Interaction	
Mutual Respect	
Power Balance	

Appendix 4 Second Interview Guide

Revised Interview schedule

How do relational dynamics influence public sector partnerships? A study of the Oxford Brookes University Associated College Partnership

This is part of my PhD research project.

Providing Context...

Informants will be given a brief explanation of the research project. This will briefly outline the research background and articulate its aims and the potential benefits for both the ACP and public sector partnerships. Care will be required to avoid leading the interviewees or putting particular thoughts or words 'into their heads'.

Overview of interviewees experience

Can you tell me about your experience of working in partnerships- Feel free to talk about specific examples.

Prompts:

- What was important to you in developing the partnership?
- What do you look for in a new partner?

What makes a good partnership?

- What do you see as the keys to success in partnership working?
- Can you give an example of a partnership that worked well and one that didn't?
- How important are individuals to success of a good partnership.

Closing questions (have I missed anything)

Is there anything else that you believe to be relevant to understanding RC that we have not covered here?

Is there anyone else you think may be interested to talk to me about this or who can contribute to this research project?

Appendix 5 Liaison Manager Role Descriptor

Role Description

Title of role: LIAISON MANAGER

Date last reviewed: Approved by Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee on 9th February 2017

Updated (inclusion of references to Data Protection legislation) May 2018

Faculty: All

Department/School: Various

Grade of role: Senior Lecturer or above

Workload Allowance: As appropriate to partner and type of collaborative arrangement

Principal location of work: OBU Campus/es - will be required to visit partner organisation/s in the UK or abroad, as appropriate.

Immediate line manager: Line Manager for substantive post

Accountable to:

Associate Dean (Student Experience) and Associate Dean (Strategy and Development) within home Faculty.

Will be required to work closely with (as appropriate within home Faculty): Principal Lecturers

(Collaborative Provision); Faculty/School Head of International Partnerships; Principal Lecturers (Quality

Assurance and Validation), APQO Faculty link Quality Assurance Officer; Faculty Head of Finance and Planning

Qualifications required for post: Commensurate with Senior Lecturer or above

Overall purpose of post

The Liaison Manager is responsible for coordinating communications between Oxford Brookes University and a specified partner organisation (UK or International) on any issue relating to specific programme/s named in the Operations Manual, in order to ensure the provision of an excellent student experience, and to safeguard the academic standards and quality of any provision leading to an Oxford Brookes award or credit. This includes aspects such as University regulations and policies, programme delivery, learning support and administration. The Liaison Manager is responsible for ensuring that the programme is being delivered as approved by the University and that student records are accurate and up to date. They provide advice and guidance to the partner to enable them to meet the University's requirements, and a substantive element of their role involves ongoing relationship management.

Experience required for post:

See attached Person Specification

Main duties:

Communication, Visits and Relationship Management

- Regular communications with, and visits to, partner to ensure that the provisions of the Operations Manual are being implemented, and the programme is being delivered as approved.
- Meet with students and staff (separately, as appropriate) during visits
- Complete full and timely visit reports within one month of return

Problem Identification and Resolution

- Work with partner to resolve problems and issues with the delivery and management of the programme/s, as they arise
- Escalate any issues that cannot be resolved promptly, and at the earliest possible stage, in the first instance via the relevant School/Faculty Sub-Group.

Ensure that FAESC is notified of any potential breaches in meeting expectations relating to academic quality and/or standards

Student Admissions

- Regularly monitor/audit admissions decisions and procedures (involvement as outlined in the operations manual)
- Ensure student records are accurate and up to date, in both partner and University systems

Annual Review Cycle/Risk Register

- Take part in the Annual Programme Review, and carry out an annual review of the programme documentation and resources supporting programme delivery
- Ensure the Operations Manual is kept up to date (at least once per year, through the Annual Review process). Update the Risk Register and Risk Improvement Plan, as appropriate.
- Ensure programme documentation is logged with APQO annually, and provide regular reports on the quality of provision to Faculty AESC.

Regulations

- Provide advice to partner staff on the implementation of new University policies and regulations applying to the programme.
- Have a good understanding of information flows within the partnership, and work with partner staff to ensure that all information relating to programmes which lead to Oxford Brookes awards is processed in accordance with current Data Protection legislation, and in line with the relevant University policies.

Programme Change/Evaluation

- Provide advice on any minor/major changes required to any aspect of programme delivery and coordinate the approval process, as necessary.
- Coordinate preparations for Approval and Periodic Review events, and other QA exercises; and attend meetings with University panels, as required.

- With the support of the relevant Faculty and APQO (for UK partners) and OBI (for International Partners), monitor changes in statutory regulations that may affect any aspect of programme delivery

Assessment/Awards

- Coordinate the transfer of data from the partner to the University for the production of awards certificates and transcripts, and for the preparation of funding and other statutory returns
- Coordinate nominations for External Examiners, and ensure they are briefed on their role. Work with the partner to ensure that External Examiners are provided with sufficient information to carry out their role.
- Ensure all draft assignment briefs and examination papers are approved by the appropriate Brookes staff and External Examiner prior to issue to students.
- Ensure External Examiner Reports are forwarded to the partner and coordinate response to the External Examiner.
- Where appropriately qualified and trained, chair Examination Committees and/or attend as a permanent member.
- Attend Programme Committees.
- Maintain oversight of the process and decision making in cases of Mitigating Circumstances

Student Experience

- Monitor quality of teaching through peer teaching observation if appropriately qualified (please note there is no formal requirement to produce a written evaluation of this activity)
- Monitor collection and analysis of student feedback by the partner
- Ensure students participate in appropriate committees and forums
- Ensure all new members of teaching staff at the partner institution are formally approved via appropriate channels at the University
- Monitor the ongoing suitability of, and student access to, learning resources
- Assure the quality of work placements (if relevant)

- Carry out a formal site visit if partner teaching premises change or evolve, and complete appropriate report

Marketing Material

- Ensure all publicly available marketing, and other material, about the partnership and programme of study is correct and up to date; and accurately represents the relationship with the University, the delivery of the programme and the awards available. This includes a regular check of web presence.

Financial Data

- Maintain an awareness of key financial data associated with the programme/s, including required minimum student numbers and fee levels. Report any concerns to the Head of Finance and Planning and/or the ADSD (specific to each School or Faculty).

Note: the Liaison Manager is not responsible for the collaborative provision business plan, ongoing marketing plan or financial negotiation/monitoring.

Person specification

Faculty/Directorate: All

Title of post: Liaison Manager

Salary Scale: Commensurate with substantive post

Specification	Essential	Desirable
Education/Training	Qualifications commensurate with academic position (minimum Senior Lecturer)	

Relevant Experience	Previous experience of Liaison Manager role and/or Programme Management and/or working with international partners and/or on international projects or UK equivalents Demonstrable experience and awareness of sensitivities involved in intercultural exchange	Experience of managing change in a Higher Education setting Experience of developing new programmes, and of taking them through the validation and set-up process
Relevant Skills/Aptitudes	Sound knowledge of Oxford Brookes Quality Assurance procedures, University Regulations, Academic processes and strategies A good general knowledge of Faculty/School academic provision and expertise in the curriculum area of the partner programme Ability to act independently and problem solve quickly and efficiently Understand the importance of escalating problems appropriately and in a timely manner Ability to work with stakeholders across the Oxford Brookes and partner matrix	
Special Requirements	Willingness to travel off campus to other UK and international locations	
Other	Awareness of Data Protection legislation and relevant University policies; and of any other local regulatory requirements that apply to the partnership.	

