Sustainability of global interchange across tertiary institutions: listening to the other

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Abstract
This paper explores the sustainability of relationships between one Australian university and two of its partner universities in Asia. The case study of La Trobe University exemplifies how personal and cultural differences manifest themselves in the dealings between tertiary institutions and either prevent or promote the sustainability of their relationships.

The data recorded through experience and interviews, particularly with the "off-shore' partners, reveal the beliefs, values and behaviors of individuals and how they were grounded in varied cultural mindsets and practices. These culturally developed preferences for thinking and working underpinned the expectations and interpretations of events and intentions. Examples reveal how working collaboratively over some ten years required awareness of these cultural differences combined with well developed skills to handle cross-cultural interactions.

We explore specific examples of events that were interpreted differently and suggest the factors that contributed to the successful resolution of differences so that the relationships could be sustained.

Offshore programs are developed and maintained in an increasingly competitive international market. It is vital that the challenges are identified and addressed to ensure sustainability of existing programs and further expansion.

Key Words
Offshore program, Higher Education, international education, China, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Consistent with the cultural and economic context in which it was originally framed, Australia's view of teaching relationships with other universities largely reflects economic imperatives. For example, Australia's international education industry was described as the third largest service export, worth more than $5 billion in national income during 2004 with more than 20 percent of Australia's international education being delivered offshore, and this was described as increasing (DEST, 2004). And more recently: "The March 2006 data show steady growth overall in Australia's international education market with a year-to-date increase of 8.2% in enrolments and 9.3% in commencements." (AEI, 5 May 2006).

The same paradigm is applied to programs taught overseas – even when issues of cultural engagement and exchange might be expected in such situations. "Offshore delivered program constitute more than 20 per cent of overall earnings, with an increasing trend" (DEST, 2004).

Given this background, it can be hard to sustain relationships that reflect non-financial values. In the event of questions being raised about the worth of offshore ventures, both current and future potentially problematic issues need to be identified from the perspectives of all partners with a view to developing strategies to overcome issues that could jeopardize the maintenance and development of programs.

2. Australian governance of global interchange across tertiary institutions

Provision of higher education services to overseas students in Australia is regulated by the national Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Australian Education International (AEI) is part of this government department.

Even when focusing on ensuring high quality programs and experiences of university education for 'international' students, the dominant paradigm appearing in AEI publications that frame international relations reflects Australia's economic and competitive interests. "Australia is committed to ensuring the high quality and integrity

of Australian education and training, regardless of the location in which it is delivered."
(AEI, Transnational Quality Strategy, 17 November 2005). This commitment reflects a
belief that

> International education builds valuable international linkages and exchange in all
> fields of study, and broadens the opportunities and experiences available to our
> students. It also makes a significant contribution to Australia's ability to attract
> qualified and skilled people to participate in our society and economy. (AEI,
> Transnational Quality Strategy, 17 November 2005).

While the opportunity for 'exchange' is identified, it is not elaborated extensively and
neither are the 'other' sides of the exchange extensively explored.

3. Perspectives for onshore and offshore study choice in tertiary institutions

However, the issues that influence whether international relationships can be sustained
extend far beyond economic issues.

3.1. *Onshore issues*

Overseas students studying in Australia require student visas regulated by DEST through
the Education Services for Overseas Students Act (ESOS Act 2000) and the associated
legislation also ensures compliance with immigration laws. Reporting requirements
related to these legal responsibilities, documenting the quality of tuition and pastoral care
services available to students are significant tasks, which demand much time, effort and
resources from academic and administrative staff in tertiary institutions. These issues
focus attention on the 'costs' for the institution and encourage a view of 'benefits' in
economic terms – to contrast with the obvious costs. The significance of less tangible and
measurable benefits is easily overlooked in the powerful dynamics of income and
accountability.

Given these enormous economic pressures, it is comparatively rare for institutions to
systematically place the potential of cultural exchange for all participants in competition
with financial measures – even though international students have cited the quality of

education, the cultural experience of living in a foreign country and the opportunity to broaden their experience as the main reasons for studying away from their home country (Doorbar, 2006).

3.2. *Offshore issues*

Australian provider universities seek relationships between institutions in other parts of Asia, often for commercial reasons including the increased profile gained through international presence. Global visibility necessitates participation in offshore programs, which requires careful selection of partners, and the time and energy-consuming task of building up both programs and academic and administrative staff relationships and resources. Off shore education services have to be set up and maintained from a distance, with tuition fees and other costs being subject to fluctuating exchange rates.

For students in countries of Asia, a degree from an Australian university is often considered more prestigious than a local degree, much as for Australians, degrees from the UK and other European or North American universities may be regarded as more prestigious. The added advantage for Asian international students is the current edge that being a fluent speaker of English gives them in the competitive labour market with foreign international firms based in their home countries. The foreign qualification holds more cachet, giving graduates a competitive edge when applying for employment and thus provides strong motivation to study. Also, overseas study is only possible for holders of a student visa and not every applicant is eligible for a visa or scholarship. Age limitations, political persuasion or failure to meet other requirements, such as robust health may prevent them from obtaining a visa. Financial considerations such as the expense associated with living and studying in another country, giving up employment and personal reasons such as leaving family and friends are other contributing factors. All of these dimensions add pressure for universities to view relationships and the core issues involved in sustaining them in financial terms and, as a consequence, can lead to the universities downplaying cultural and intercultural issues in seeking to sustain relationships over time.

4. Portrayal of global interchange in the mass media

The consequences of this pressure can be seen in a case recently highlighted in the public media in Australia – which indicates that (a) there are other views of how relations with international students can be constructed and (b) that the pressures to view students in economic terms are very real.

Russell (2006:36) succinctly summarises her experience: "I recently taught a masters degree unit to overseas students that gave me a first hand glimpse of our offshore educational activities and I was shocked by the low academic standard. I was also frustrated by the university's managerial approach to students. This brief experience suggested to me that some Australian universities may be treating overseas students as economic units, or cash cows, not genuine students."

This practice is not a result of a lack of policies and agreed principles by governing bodies or the Ministers of Education and Training of Australia and participating countries as the previous discussion has highlighted. The portrayal in the Australian media of an almost exclusively economic interest in international education is entrenched. The reality within institutions is much more complex and the motivation for many of those involved includes many non-commercial issues. While we cannot pretend to offer a full description of this complex reality, we try to unpack some of the varied convictions and behaviors of individuals.

5. Methodology

The paper is based on research conducted between an Australian educational provider and Asian partner universities in Vietnam and China. A number of academic staff, administrative staff and students in onshore and offshore programs were interviewed in all three countries. The initial set of open-ended questions and additional follow-up comments provided rich qualitative data. At times, the specific experiences reported mirror the shared experiences and perspectives of the major stakeholders in the research from different countries, while at other times country-specific problems and potentials emerged.

6. The situation at La Trobe University

The University has a particularly strong commitment to internationalization and it seeks not only to attract students and staff from all around the world but also to provide opportunities for local students and staff to gain international experience through a scheme of exchange programs. In particular it leads the International Network of Universities, which is a consortium of universities specifically designed to promote student mobility. Currently the University has links with some 250 institutions in more than 40 countries. (Professor Brian Stoddart, Vice-Chancellor and President, 12 September 2006).

6.1. *The offshore history of the School of Educational Studies*

The offshore programs in the School of Educational Studies (SES) within La Trobe University (LTU) have been operating for more than a decade, with over 120 students having graduated so far from different programs. In 2006, almost 200 students are enrolled in the Master of Applied Linguistics (MAL) and Doctor of Education (EdD) programs at the campuses of the offshore partner institutions in Vietnam and China (SES, 2006). Collaborations exist between the University of Social Sciences and Humanities at Vietnam National University (USSH) in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and the Vietnam National University in Hanoi. Teaching programs commenced in Vietnam in 1996. In China, La Trobe University taught in co-operation with Yunnan Normal University in Kunming from 1993 to 2006 (SES, 2006).

The broad structure of off-shore operations in the SES is that a single Masters level unit is taught in a two-week block, supported by a pack of readings. The member of staff from La Trobe flies to the relevant city, stays for the two weeks of teaching and during that time, delivers the workshops/lectures associated with the subject, provides consultation to the students and advice on assessment essay topics, research requirements and potential references. Students then have some two to three months to write their essay with support from the library and email support from the unit lecturer.

The collaboration between LTU and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (previously the University of Ho Chi Minh City) in HCMC and the Vietnam National University in Hanoi was initially not a commercial decision on the part of La Trobe University's School of Educational Studies. A rather coincidental start evolved into a long standing alliance, which is representative for a number of inter-country educational endeavours a decade ago. An offshore academic (F4, Australia, May 2006) recalls those early days

> In Semester 1, 1994 Staff member 1 spent his [Outside Studies Program] partly in Vietnam and brought back an invitation to Staff member 2 to each teach one week of guest lectures in Hanoi on computer assisted language learning. He duly did in October 1994 on a combined visit to Kunming, Hanoi and HCMC. Whilst in Hanoi and in HCMC, the senior staff of the host universities approached him with requests for a cooperative agreement between their institutions and La Trobe University. Letters making such requests were duly brought back to the Vice Chancellor at La Trobe and as a result negotiations were set in motion which resulted in the first program starting in HCMC. The original agreements were for three subjects of a Master Degree to be taught offshore with the students coming to LTU to complete the rest. The assistance LTU was rendering was viewed as capacity developing of local infrastructures and developing good relations with neighbours. The offshore programs were never seen as independent money making ventures. Later HCMC requested that we teach the complete degree there as students could not afford to come to Australia to complete the degree. Senior staff from the VNU in Hanoi requested the same program in October 1998 whilst on a visit to Melbourne.
> The Kunming program has been altogether different. Basically LTU staff were paid by Yunnan Normal University (YNU) to go to YNU to teach odd MA subjects and the students at YNU eventually were granted LTU awards. In 2000 the YNU programs was put on the same footing as the Vietnam programs. (F4, Australia, May 2006).

The historical perspective illustrates and illuminates the way in which the programs were established, how they developed and kept running and why certain differing viewpoints emerged. They reveal individual and institutional expectations based on economic, political and social influences and highlight the need for skillful handling of situations that demand well developed cross-cultural awareness and skills.

7. Offshore program disparity examples

An interesting aspect of the issues that concerned the partners trying to sustain the relationships is the way in which they do NOT reflect the dominant economic rationalism that governs larger level policies and decision-making frameworks.

7.1. *Shared vision and communication*

Careful investigation and articulation of the motivation for the partnerships and the goals are essential to ensure smooth progression in the building up phase of programs and the mutual understanding of expectations and obligations. In the initial setting up of the programs no formal compliance documents existed at La Trobe for predetermining or investigating such issues. Since 2004 a set of formal compliance procedures has been put in place that need to be enacted before entering into contractual obligations with offshore partners.

Initially, the Vietnamese side saw the establishment of the program as a pilot project

> This is a market test, and to build up relationship between universities for joint-venture education for mutual benefits…. The programs started in 1995 and it was implemented in 1996 with the first course for only 5 students. I thought we were very brave to take a risk to do that…. The first off-shore programs in Foreign language education for degrees in HCM City might have great influence on other areas in Vietnam. It is good for the contribution of in-country training to meet the high demand of the Vietnamese society when English has played an important since the 'Open-door 'policy was implemented in 1986. (F1, Vietnam, May 2006).

An Australian academic (F5, Australia, August 2006) had a completely different viewpoint on the reasons for involvement in the offshore venture

> …it is good for us to be taking us out of our comfort zone…the motivation for instigating the program is…idealism, chance to travel, chance to do something different…with particular institutions: they choose us in a way…they were the ones that contacted us…

The establishment and maintenance of successful partnerships requires clear expectations and guidelines with associated regular monitoring of agreements and evaluations of programs as this Australian academic indicates

> The expectations have to be very clear ….we have to be clear about the other person…their role within the institution and what the overall structure within their work is…we need to have a very clear sense of hierarchy and who has responsibility…as well as who has duties…and what their status is…and the overall structure there…it needs to be written down and traded regularly…that you need a hierarchy…and that it is everyone's duty and responsibilities and that it is clear to the other side… (F5, Australia, August 2006).

The most commonly cited source of misunderstandings is when partners have visions and goals for the collaborative venture, which may neither be shared nor openly communicated. Regular meetings are useful in clarifying points of difference, but such meetings can often be seen as 'too costly' if the relationship is understood primarily in economic terms.

7.2. Finances
The major tension seems to be between the financial and educational aspects of course provision and the various intentions of administrators, academics and students.
On an institutional level, revenue generation might often be the real driving force behind the inception of a global interchange endeavour. While participation in the world wide market place enhances global and local prestige, financial reasons are often the strongest motivator at the institutional level.

One Australian academic (F 3, Australia, May 2006) put it bluntly as

> …they are getting in to grab a slice of the lucrative market before other players
> have divided the pie amongst themselves.

Another academic (F5, Australia, August 2006) cautions that

> …it's a long term investment but they [the universities] are not actually making
> money out of it…they spend a lot of money every month…That has always been
> a concern of the management…. Of course we want the programs to break
> even…but the senior management have been looking [at] which overseas
> programs are making a loss…and they are saying…look at each program to see
> whether to close it down or to keep it going…The university has a different view
> about the sustainability of the programs from how an academic looks at it.….The
> university management wants the books to balance each year…They don't look at
> it as a long term venture…They want to be in the black every year…

The academic perspective is that the hidden benefits like the prestige and establishment
of the university's name by word of mouth makes the students choose to come to it as
onshore international students and that research opportunities are opened up by the
physical presence. Using the same logic of presence, cross fertilization between different
departments of the university (while the faculty running the offshore program may not
make the money their presence may provide advertising to attract students to other
faculties of the university onshore) can be of benefit to the university as a whole.

Students studying in an offshore program are typically older, with fewer financial
resources and extensive family commitments. These limitations influence the course
design and expectations of students, institutional provider and academic staff teaching in
these programs.

Choosing the offshore option has financial advantages, as one Australian academic
currently teaching in the program describes

The usual reason for students is financial and professional. Staying on in a job in their own country means they are fully employed, have the usual infrastructure and network of family and professional support, do not have to cope with making special arrangements for family care, pay fees which are usually a third less, don't have to cope with expenses of travel and offshore living. Do not have to give up a job if they cannot get leave of absence for several years for overseas study. (F4, Australia, May 2006).

An academic involved in one of the offshore programs since its inception remembers

In Vietnam we were among the first 'foreign' universities in there and at a time when Australian scholarships were limited to those under 45 or 40. Thus, for the first groups of people, we were less interesting to the younger people who still had access to scholarships designed to support applied linguistic study and were also seen as brought up within the regime. The people who came to us were older and therefore in part politically suspect because they had some experience of education prior to 1975 and they were also people who could not get out of the country to get scholarship education in Australia. This tended to mean that our initial students were 'older women'. There is now a group of 'older' men who have family responsibilities and probably difficulties with career disruptions. (F4, Australia, May 2006).

Moving to another country for a sustained period of study time may not be possible for students with family commitments.

Many of our students are newly weds or married mothers with young children." (F4, Australia, May 2006).

A significant challenge has been the provision of a degree that is academically compatible in standard and quality in every way with the same degree taught onshore at the Australian campus while offering it at a financially viable price that covers the costs of both the Australian university and the offshore partner university expenses. Providing teaching facilities, local administration and advertising have to be covered financially

while remaining affordable and competitive within the local economy of the student's country; and the requirements of the course.

7.3. Support and services for students

Academic assistance, sharing databases for record keeping purposes, access to library support, English language support and pastoral care are the main areas in this section. The Australian academic staff member providing most of the teaching in the Asian regions summarises lack of provisions due to the challenge of geographic distance between the partners

> The academics were most concerned with the provision of the highest standard of academic content as possible. The issue of the availability of research materials and textbooks was and still appears to be an ongoing concern of some offshore students. [To a] large extent this problem has been met head on and solved by the library services of La Trobe which continues to develop new online research possibilities for offshore students[1]. (F5, Australia, August 2006)

Setting up a designated physical area or library corner to provide additional facilities and access for students was one of the suggestions made for improvement by this interviewee (F5, Australian academic, August 2006). Referring to the situation in one of the off-shore locations, this person argued

> …if we had a better centre…from my point as an academic…many students call out for papers from the library…and if there was just one room for our program…our students…like La Trobe corner... then those papers could be photocopied…you could build up a little library…even just a filing cabinet…it seems like every student has to repeat what the students have done before them…and we are not building up the resources to make this easier…

This is not an inherent problem of off-shore locations, but rather a reflection of the particular circumstances, including the physical location, of specific programs. If the

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[1] See Karasmanis (2006)

partner organization does not have an academic teaching base, it may not have the physical infrastructure to support shared resources.

An off-shore administrator (F 1, Vietnam, May 2006) lamented the lack of a shared database to process student records as the hard copy turn around is a delayed process due to the geographical distance and mail turn around between Asia and Australia

> …you have a very good software for managing the students…but if we can have many… any chance of access that…I can manage….in a way…how can I say…but it is not a modern way…of course I can complete it…but it takes time for me…I have to decide who can I allow to continue to the subject? Or continue the course? What are their scores? But I do not have the paper back...this is one disadvantage…

Of course, this need on the part of the partner institution raises complementary concerns in the Australian base in relation to the potential dangers in providing electronic access and privileges regarded as 'internal' to the home institution and those areas of its operations that it is essential to secure (e.g. student records).

The language barrier and cultural differences in understanding what is seen as appropriate in relations and communications between Australian and Asian academic teaching staff and students, academics and administrators was another source of confusion and thus frustration

> … we need to know what's appropriate…and what's not…what are the factors that would help students…and to listen to what happened when students haven't finished and the reasons why…that sort of thing… they keep their private things private…I think it's cultural, yes…That they don't approach and say: my partner has died and the kids are sick and I just lost my job and I've got other things to worry about than your assignment… (F5, Australian Academic, August 2006)

Also sometimes the reverse is true. Students do not realize the very formal procedures required in Australian universities and appeal to administrators and academics to help

them by telling them all the intimate details of their problems and medical concerns whereas what the procedures need are the correct, formally documented medical certificates. It can be difficult for all parties to understand the complex and culturally shaped interaction between pastoral care and administrative regulations. This can be even more difficult in partnership arrangements where parties are asked to enact practices reflecting the culture of their partner organization.

Difficulties in implementing in the off-shore programs the teaching approach assumed by Australian trained staff as part of the development of a critically-informed academic education were expressed by an educator (F5, Australian Academic, August 2006)

> The other problem that comes up in Vietnam is that people are looking for the right answer…and of course, there is no right answer…and if students are scared, then its very hard for them to find a right answer… literature is being used for discussion and there is no right answer. Evaluating how students discuss…that's all about process…evaluating a process…and what they actually come out with does not have to be the right answer…they often expect that the teaching is the major thing, not the learning through discussion because the teacher is the one who knows…

English proficiency for students in the offshore programs was seen as a pre-requisite prior to admission as this administrator in Asia (F1, Vietnam, May 2006) indicated. Concern about establishing procedures that would be both fair to applicants and able to be implemented by both local and Australian-based staff was an ongoing issue in the relationships. Administratively, the neatest solution would have been to have tested all students prior to commencing the program and ensuring that the formal IELTS requirement was satisfied before commencement of the program.

> …first of all the problems with the students who can not do English…who first come to the program…we should have criteria first for choosing…for admitting…for example, we do conduct an interview to check their English…and check English proficiency first…just their speaking and listening skills…when we

find they qualify, at least they can improve their English…to get the IELTs score as required…they will allowed to apply…

Alternative arrangements that sought to provide some level of experience with academic English at levels appropriate to the needs of the program were often a source of ambiguity and frustration for all concerned.

Currently students are expected to be English majors and also to pass a local in-house test administered by the partner university. In order to facilitate their ease into the program the initial IELTS requirement of 6.5 is waived until the 4th subject is reached by which stage all students are expected to have completed and achieved the English proficiency entrance requirements normally expected of all onshore international students. However, it has appeared that this approach is being interpreted by students as evidence that LTU does not take the requirement seriously and the university is now considering making it an initial requirement for entrance, even though this may affect the availability of the programs by deterring potential students. The students have always used the argument for a lenient test score entry to the program that doing the essays and attending the course will assist them to do better at the IELTS later on; however, we have not actually found that the scores on specialized time speed intensive tests like the TOEFL and IELTS is improved through attendance at regular academic subjects we offer, which leads to speculations as to how effective such tests are in measuring the use of English required for academic situations as opposed to a special kind of English 'test' proficiency.

7.4. Support for and responsibility of staff

Geographical distance between both partners and thus the unfamiliarity of key administrative personnel with one another was one of the frustrations of off-shore staff (F1, Vietnam, May 2006)

> …the collaboration has been set up for almost eight years…but I have not much idea about La Trobe University…only this program…because we almost have no access to La Trobe as a whole system…three years to five years we have talked about gradually to set up visiting trip between the two administrator, between the

to university…I have worked with her [the Australian administrator] for so long…I have not met…it would be good to meet…

This point was also made by the Australian teaching staff

It's very dependant on our link person at the other end…in [name of location] its very dependant on [name]., who is in the office and accepts the enrolments and tells the students whether they are likely to be accepted or not…that sort of linchpin person… (F5, Australian Academic, August 2006).

On an institutional level, internal structures and hierarchies as well as academic and administrative roles and responsibilities have to be explicit and clear as cultural differences and interpretations can cause friction and thus jeopardize the sustainability of the global interchange as this academic illustrates

…first thing is to be clear of the hierarchy…not to assume about the other side…I think the other side assumes about us as well…having said that then we need to be clear in our commitment as well and I think we haven't been clear in our commitments all the time…particularly when we are having arguments about money…the sense of which courses are going to be offered when is pretty flexible… whether that relates to what is promised: I can't go because my wife is sick or getting divorced next week…for us, it's easy to cancel out… but it is not always clear, which course is going to be offered when… In Vietnamese culture…I think people have structures and structures that work exactly…I think that's a strong Asian…it's a strong commitment…we will provide this and of course students structure their lives around this and this and this…so you should be able to count on courses being provided…don't over promise but promise definitely…What is difficult is…we don't have implicit knowledge of the other side…and they don't see our side…they don't see that the person's mother is sick…they just see: you made the promise to come and therefore, you must come… (F5, Australia, August 2006)

La Trobe wanted to be able to commit to having exactly the same staff teaching on-shore and off-shore. But the competing demands on the time and commitment of those staff (particularly when programs are costed at break-even levels) mean that there is little scope to expand base staffing and, therefore, there was ongoing uncertainty about when staff would be available to teach as the La Trobe side tried to juggle competing demands.

Tertiary systems differ significantly across countries and the distinction between administrators and academics may not be universal as this comment from staff in Vietnam testifies

> She [the linchpin person] is also a junior lecturer…what we in American would call faculty as well as staff…a teacher as well as an administrator….so sometimes we get a little bit confused…and I think she sometimes gets a little bit confused…and two statuses…sometimes we think she's an administrator and she should be doing all this like we expect a secretary to do…and other times she has the understanding of a lecturer…

Similarly on the LTU side the recent retirement of an experienced administrator has led to some problems as previously overlapping tasks have been assigned to different members of staff with need for different communication and record keeping processes as a consequence. When students or administrators are only located at a distance, they assume continuity in roles (if not in people) and are not able to find ways 'around' gaps that may have emerged as a result of changed roles.

Similar concerns were expressed in terms of the administration by the off shore administrative support

> It's big time [a lot of time / work] for me and I can not imagine when I stop this, who can take over my work easily? (F1, Vietnam, May 2006).

Conclusion

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Sustaining international relations and, in particular off-shore teaching operations, requires extended, sensitive and flexible responses to multiple and sometimes competing needs. We have framed this report within the tensions between larger institutional imperatives that are heavily influenced by economic issues and some of the motivations of individuals within Australian institutions and off-shore partners, where the motivations more frequently reflect concerns for cultural interchange and exploration of international experiences. We noted that the economic aspects can undermine cultural interchange, but also that economic goals cannot be achieved if cultural issues are ignored. We have documented many examples where the issues that needed to be resolved in the relationship required deep cultural understanding of the values and organisational arrangements of the 'other' institution and its staff. We noted that failure to address these issues could threaten the viability of programs.

One firm conclusion we can draw about sustainable development is that it is a journey that must be traveled by partners willing to dialogue, learn from each other and change accordingly. Sustainable development cannot be created without these ongoing adjustments to the obligations and nature of the co-operation. These adjustments will not be predictable and will not occur in a timeline that suits the cultural expectations of either partner. Like any venture, the more willingness there is to learn and accommodate on both sides, the more likely the sustainable and ongoing success of the project. For this to happen there also must be some common ground or overlapping aims in the objectives of the project, even though some of these aims and the reasons for them may differ in part from a totally objective viewpoint. The sustainability lies in the mutual trust and respect between the partners that allows them to continue to partake in this dialogue about the sustainable development of their mutual plan.

This requires the following:

1. each partner must trust the integrity of the other;
2. each partner must acknowledge the different potential outcomes and benefits for the 'other';

3. each partner must build outcomes and benefits for the 'other' into the relationship.

This ongoing negotiation and productive recognition of difference can be endangered if

1. partners seek to lock one another into an agreement too early;
2. partners seek to narrow the range of benefits to suit only their own needs;
3. partners feel that they are locked into an agreement that is inflexible.

By sharing some of our experiences we have identified the challenges and benefits in partnerships arrangements and highlighted the importance of a shared vision and clear, effective communication. The key to sustainability of global interchange across tertiary institutions is listening to the other.

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