ABSTRACT

Purpose

Social responsibility initiatives that incorporate multiple sectors have the capacity to challenge unsustainable practice and pave the way for model solutions towards the societal problems we face globally. This paper identifies models of best practice and examines the manner in which such social partnerships attract new partners and scale-up their solutions.

Design/methodology/approach

Comparisons of three Australian case studies were analysed. These cases were purposefully selected as they all represented relationships that demonstrated social partnerships characteristics and they had all attracted acclaim by their peers. They differed in terms of their societal problems and relationship duration. Semi-structured interviews were held with managers and employees from each social partnership where they discussed all aspects of the partnership lifecycle from pre-collaborative conditions through to outcomes. A total of 50 semi-structured interviews were held with members of the private, nonprofit and public sectors.

Findings

Social partnerships pool skills, knowledge and finance across sectors, concentrating on specific societal issues of mutual concern. Resultant successful initiatives act as catalysts in soliciting further support. Three primary pathways exist for successful social partnerships that wish to evolve: expansion, replication and refinement. Focused attention and resources, through the formation of social responsibility clusters, can lead to sustainable solutions.
Practical implications

There are many organisations wishing to move on from philanthropic exchange towards more meaningful integrated relationships. This paper highlights the value of both within sector and cross-sector collaboration to achieve organisational outcomes. It provides some insight into the entry points for both nonprofit organisations as well as small to medium sized private sector organisations who would otherwise consider social investment in large scale societal problems beyond their reach.

Originality/Value

Social partnerships within the Australian context are under-represented; this paper addresses this by examining three best practice exemplars. The rationale for incorporating new partners and sharing success is discussed and supported by a model of social responsibility cluster formation.

Keywords:

Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
cross-sector
social partnerships
nonprofit
social responsibility clusters

Introduction

Social responsibility initiatives that incorporate multiple sectors have the capacity to challenge unsustainable practice and pave the way for model solutions towards the societal problems faced globally. It is recognised that some problems have become too large and complex for the public sector to tackle alone (Austin, 2000a; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Overbeek & Harms, 2011; Waddock, 1988) and that it is unrealistic to expect the nonprofit sector to fill this void (Canadian Business for Social Responsibility, 2005). Furthermore, concerns are expressed that the private sector too often sees itself removed or separate from the community they serve, and instead, should consider themselves as members of the community and the footprint they leave on society (Grayson & Hodges, 2004; Gunningham, 2007).

Instead of apportioning blame, several organisations have risen to this challenge and become leaders in the field of social awareness and responsibility. Many nonprofit, private and public sectors have come together to pool resources, skills and knowledge to form formidable cross-sector partnerships. United, they have greater capacity to achieve innovative and workable solutions than if they were to tackle issues in isolation. Some of these cross-sector partnerships have received much acclaim for their outstanding contributions and are consequently generating interest amongst their respective industries or sectors who themselves, seek to become involved in the solution.

This paper seeks to provide a platform for entry into socially responsible initiatives by showcasing social partnerships that are making clear strides in this area. Recognising that each sector has different needs, motives and responsibilities to their stakeholders, this paper begins with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) literature, then proceeds to integrate this with collaboration literature and a the discussion surrounding a ‘cluster approach’ to social responsibility.
Literature

The operations of some private sector or for-profit organisations (FPOs) may directly impact the social or environmental landscape. Increasingly, FPOs are recognising the legal and ethical expectations to rectify their impact and are adopting some form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) response. Some posit that FPOs have filled a void left by the public sector (Elkington & Fennell, 1998; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Lantos, 2001; Newell, 2000). Others view increasing levels of FPO involvement in CSR as evolving from reactive approaches towards more proactive, strategic planning (Bhattacharyya et al., 2008).

A logical argument supports corporate investment whereby an FPO invests in social or environmental issues that intersect with their core business. In such cases, a FPO may invest in issues to appease stakeholders, or to rectify an issue to which they have an obligation. There is also an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage by investing in societal issues that demonstrate a degree of alignment to an organisation’s core business (Porter & Kramer, 2006). This proactive approach encourages FPOs to select issues that intersect with their business operations; such alignment allows greater opportunity to utilise corporate resources and strengths. Investment of core resources can provide meaningful benefit for communities as well as value to the business (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Unlike those FPOs that deploy CSR as a response to stakeholder pressure, or those seeking a business case for investment, some have begun to acknowledge that they have a responsibility towards social issues thus operate from a more altruistic rationale.

Altruistic CSR not only fulfils the discretionary or philanthropic responsibilities of an organisation but also addresses social issues regardless of whether there is a direct benefit to the business (Lantos, 2001). This can be likened to Berger et al.’s (2007) description of a social values-led model to CSR. In this definition, businesses placed more emphasis on the noneconomic objectives; therefore, meeting the social or environmental objective becomes imperative.
Contrasted against the business case, and the social values-led model to CSR, is the syncretic stewardship model presented by Berger et al. (2007). This orientation to CSR is described as those firms encompassing “a larger and more diverse set of stakeholders” including activists and nonprofit organisations (NPOs) (Berger et al., 2007: 143). Those adopting the syncretic stewardship model seek a balance of meeting economic goals whilst also measuring success in terms of social and environmental outcomes. Here CSR may be integrated into the organisations “mission, values, goals, processes, and daily decision making” (Berger et al., 2007: 144). A FPO that utilises their “core competencies and resources to address key stakeholders’ interests” can achieve organisational benefits whilst creating social value (Thorne et al., 2008: 294).

It is important to consider the link that exists between CSR and cross-sector collaboration. Regardless of the specific rationale for social investment, there are many FPOs forging relationships with NPOs and the public sector to help channel their social responsibility agendas. Husted (2003) presented three governance structures to facilitate CSR: charitable contributions, in-house projects and, collaboration. In-house CSR does not require the assistance of a NPO whereas the other two forms do. Charitable contributions are described as a mechanism to outsource CSR (Husted, 2003) and can be likened to a donor/recipient transaction found in philanthropic relationships. In this vein, the syncretic stewardship model (Berger et al., 2007) complements the use of cross-sector collaboration as a mechanism to enact CSR activities.

Collaboration between sectors can take many forms. Some involve just two partners from differing sectors while others may include all three sectors and multiple partners. Cross-sector collaboration assumes various relationships types summarised by Austin (2000a, 2000b) as philanthropic (such as donations), transactional (such as sponsorships) and integrative (social partnerships). Samu and Wymer (2001) suggested that more businesses are beginning to distance themselves from traditional philanthropy and see greater leverage or competitive advantage in alternative forms of relationships with NPOs.

According to Austin, relationships that have reached an integrative stage begin to merge “partners’ missions, people and activities” resulting in “more collective action and organizational integration” (2000a: 71). Compared to philanthropic and transactional forms, several
characteristics become enhanced such as, levels of engagement, strategic value and importance, allocation of resources and breadth of activity (Austin, 2000b). Emphasis on relationships forming around a social purpose that harbour integrative characteristics are labelled ‘social purpose partnerships’ (Austin, 2000b) or ‘social partnerships’ (Waddock, 1988, 1991). In summary, social partnerships are voluntary relationships that occur between organisations from different sectors; nonprofit, private and public. These active relationships are cooperative and collaborative, forging around the desire or need to resolve a societal issue of mutual concern (Waddock, 1991).

Several researchers have presented detailed, case specific research investigating the progress of cross-sector relationships; their inception and progression towards social partnerships (see, Austin, 2000a, 2000b; McDonald & Young, 2012; Overbeek & Harms, 2011; Seitanidi, 2006). This paper sought to extend the body of knowledge from factors influencing the development and maintenance of a single social partnership that involved a few organisations, towards the expansion into larger-scale societal initiatives involving additional, multiple partners. As such, it is important to incorporate literature that fuses CSR and configurations of multiple partners, otherwise referred to as ‘clusters’ in this context.

A growing body of literature links CSR with ‘clusters’. Porter and Kramer (2002: 60) defined a cluster as “a geographic concentration of interconnected companies, suppliers, related industries, and specialized institutions in a particular field...” They suggest that clusters arise from the four elements of competitive context, “factor conditions, or the available inputs of production; demand conditions; the context for strategy and rivalry; and related and supporting industries” (Porter & Kramer, 2002: 60). Linking this to CSR, they suggest that pooled philanthropic investment can strengthen a cluster’s competitiveness and performance of its constituent companies (Porter & Kramer, 2002). Additionally, through philanthropy, FPOs have a legitimate avenue to collaborate with NPOs and government organisations (Porter & Kramer, 2002).

Subsequent work has extended the notion of CSR enacted through a clustered approach with a variety of rationales for their development. Zadek et al. (2003: 24) were early adopters to consider the notion of corporate responsibility clusters in the form of a ‘challenge’ (arising from
antagonistic relations between FPO and NPO), ‘market-making’ (the innovation of sustainable business activities), ‘statutory’ (public policies supporting CSR) and ‘partnership’ (cross-sector partners supporting competitive advantage). Advancement of CSR cluster research has resulted in some authors highlighting the statutory aspect, with a particular focus on governance (Lund-Thomsen & Nadvi, 2010; Lund-Thomsen & Pillay, 2012; Nadvi, 2008), while others have focused predominantly on the benefits (Battaglia et al., 2010; Santos, 2011; von Weltzien Høivik & Shankar, 2011; Zappalà, 2007).

While geographical proximity, as per Porter & Kramer’s (2002) definition, is an important factor for cluster formation, Zadek et al. (2003: 3) proposed that CSR clusters might form along global supply chains hence raising the “possibility of geographically-dispersed clustering”. With a focus on cluster formation in developing countries, a similar conclusion was posited by Lund-Thomsen and Nadvi (2010) and Lund-Thomsen and Pillay (2012) who stressed the importance of considering the divergent interests at each end of a global value chain. As such, clusters are interconnected not only by the supply chain, but also by the societal issues that require a multi-stakeholder approach.

Several common factors resonate within findings of the articles linking CSR and clusters; they all draw on collective resources with the aim of achieving a common goal. Those joining a cluster may benefit through improvements in stakeholder relations, market share, innovation, expertise, brand equity and exposure, cost reductions, credibility, learning and value creation (Porter & Kramer, 2002; Santos, 2011; von Weltzien Høivik & Shankar, 2011; Zadek et al., 2003; Zappalà, 2007). Opportunities for within sector and cross-sector collaboration, particularly for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), form a strong rationale for the formation of CSR clusters (Battaglia et al., 2010; Santos, 2011; von Weltzien Høivik & Shankar, 2011; Zappalà, 2007).

Whole communities can benefit from cluster-based initiatives targeting societal problems, such as poverty reduction and child labour (Lund-Thomsen & Nadvi, 2010) and improved infrastructure (Porter & Kramer, 2002). A cluster-based approach toward such large societal problems shares responsibility, investment and accountability (von Weltzien Høivik & Shankar,
2011; Zadek et al., 2003). For resource and time-poor SMEs and NPOs, pooled sector resources are a viable option to enter large-scale initiatives that have the potential to create “a greater societal impact” (Zappalà, 2007: 38). If CSR clusters have the potential to achieve a much greater impact it is imperative to identify the key factors that allowed such clusters to evolve.

This research sought to bridge the literature on social partnerships with the concept of CSR clusters. In effect mapping the transition from an isolated or contained partnership, towards a relationship with multiple networks, connections and linkages. As this research sought to focus on successful partnerships that had not only achieved outcomes but also had moved into a phase of regeneration, it was important to select cases that were well advanced. This would help determine how and why the development of CSR clusters could occur.

**Data collection**

As this research sought to examine the thoughts and approaches adopted by members of the nonprofit, private and public sectors, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most effective method to produce rich data for analysis. Three cases were purposefully selected which represented ongoing social partnerships in Australia. Case studies have the benefit of closing in on real-life situations (Flyvbjerg, 2006) allowing detailed, real-life accounts of how social partnerships operate and evolve in present-day (Yin, 2003). By utilising a multiple case strategy approach, comparisons could be made and themes detected. Data was collected in a consistent manner across all cases incorporating a variety of evidence including, semi-structured interviews, archival records and organisational documentation (Yin, 2003).

A review of published documentation, along with 12 background interviews, helped inform the research about the state of cross-sector relationships in Australia. The social partnership phenomenon involved the examination of three purposefully selected Australian-based cross-sector relationships chosen for the richness of information they could provide (Perry, 1998) and their classification as a social partnership as per Waddock’s (1988, 1991) definition. The three social partnerships demonstrated maximum variation (Flyvbjerg, 2006), with differentiation found amongst the societal issue represented and, the duration of their relationships.
The three cases shared a relationship status commonality, for they were all considered social partnerships, yet Table 1 identifies the differentiation. The homelessness initiative was represented by all three sectors and had been actively involved in a social partnership for two years when interviews were conducted. Operational for seven years at the time of interviews, was the literacy initiative. In this case, two sectors pioneered the partnership. The third case focused on an environmental initiative. This had representation across two sectors that had been together 27 years when interviews commenced. By selecting multiple cases, this allowed richer theory building (Perry, 1998) and provided an appropriate fit for the research in question; how and why do social partnerships evolve into social responsibility clusters?

Table 1: Collaborative Partners representing the Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Industry or Classification</th>
<th>Partnership Duration</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness Initiative</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Development &amp; Housing &amp; Social Services</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Initiative</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Education &amp; Research</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Initiative</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Mining</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from McDonald, 2010)

Data was collected from a variety of sources. The use of multiple sources of evidence has been endorsed by authors such as Yin (2003: 98) when conducting case study methodology for it allows the researcher to “address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioural issues” providing a “more convincing and accurate” account. Thus, a combination of data
collection methods was employed including the retrieval of archive material, conducting semi-structured interviews, and recording observations (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Documentation included all available information: memoranda, agendas, minutes of meetings, administrative documents, formal studies and media articles (Yin, 2003). Archival records included organisational records and lists of names (Yin, 2003). Information was readily available on organisational Web sites including annual reports, sustainability reports and CSR reports. Similar material was sourced by Edward and Onyx (2003) and Rondinelli and London (2002) in their cross-sector collaboration investigations. Sources of background information also included content provided in emails or attached documents. Such documents included board minutes and unpublished reports. All information that was not classified as confidential by the informant was utilised in the overall case analysis.

A total of 38 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of all participating organisations including newly invited partners. The employment of the interviewees included, CEOs, directors, various management roles, team leaders, coordinators, community relations/corporate affairs managers/officers and administration roles. To further ensure confidentiality, employment classifications were delimited to either ‘Manager’ or ‘Employee’. Managers included senior and middle management plus a Partnership Manager or equivalent from each organisation; the majority of participants were in this classification (Table 1). Employees included those implementing the partnership at an operational level, those with an awareness of the partnership but were not directly involved and, volunteers participating in the partnership initiatives. By including representation at various hierarchical levels, this provided a form of triangulation (Perry, 1998). Consistency of interview questions for all sources and use of multiple sources to corroborate facts helped to achieve data triangulation (Yin, 2003).

Open-ended interview questions and themes were generated following an extensive review of collaboration and CSR literature. It was important that interview participants had some knowledge of the social partnership. Although the participants were purposefully chosen, it needs to be stressed that participation was voluntary and occurred without coercion in accordance with University protocols. Once a participant was formally interviewed, they then
facilitated further interviews with relevant and willing colleagues, thus replicating a snowball sampling technique. Interested participants were briefed on the aims of the research and the treatment of subsequent information. Participant information sheets were issued along with a consent form prior to the interview. The average interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Adopting Seitanidi’s (2006) approach, participants were provided with their own interview transcripts allowing the option of making amendments or selecting extracts to exclude from publication. As such, participants were able to substantiate transcript accuracy thereby strengthening construct validity (Stake, 1995).

External validity was achieved by selecting cases based on prior theory to set a priori codes. Codes and themes were labelled according to prior theory sourced from literature pertaining to CSR and collaboration (Table 2); as data collection progressed, participant terminologies replaced or were added to the list of codes. Validity was maintained in the interview process itself by incorporating “probing, cross-checking and recursive interviewing” techniques (Minichiello et al., 1995: 177). By repeating the questions, coding process and analysis procedure for each of the three case cases, this study adopted replication logic (Yin, 2003). Consistent use of the semi-structured survey instrument and a detailed account of the coding process were maintained using a case study protocol; thus striving to ensure reliability and minimisation of errors or bias (Yin, 2003). Saturation was reached when no new codes appeared and the codes appeared to support emerging theory (Ezzy, 2002). The final code set included a combination of the deductive and inductive coding and assumed a hierarchical arrangement with subcategories linked logically back to the primary codes.
Table 2: Summary of key variables in cross-sector collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivational Determinants</th>
<th>Key Researchers - application to cross-sector partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Necessity</td>
<td>Oliver (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Dependency</td>
<td>Austin (2000b); Rondinelli &amp; London (2002); Samu &amp; Wymer (2001); Waddock (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Austin (2000b); Oliver (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation Opportunities</td>
<td>Kanter (1999); Rondinelli &amp; London (2002); Waddell (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Reputation and Publicity</td>
<td>Fiedler &amp; Deegan (2007); Rondinelli &amp; London (2002); Selsky &amp; Parker (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement</td>
<td>Austin (2000b); Cardskadden &amp; Lober (1998); Googins &amp; Rochlin (2000); Samu &amp; Wymer (2001); Waddell (2000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closure/Renewal</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scaling-up</td>
<td>Austin (2000b); Glasbergen (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from McDonald, 2010)

Discussion

Upon analysis of the three cases, a clear set of common reasons for entering social partnerships was apparent. These reasons closely align with the literature pertaining to CSR and collaboration. Supporting Berger et al.’s (2007) syncretic stewardship model, all FPOs were partnering with the nonprofit sector and were able to achieve a balance of organisational and societal objectives. One common objective, predominantly aligned to FPOs, was the critical core motive, ‘employee engagement’. Two further core motives identified by NPOs and FPOs alike, are those more closely aligned to the needs associated with achieving societal objectives: ‘social/environmental value opportunity’ and, ‘resource dependency’.

‘Employee engagement’ was demonstrated across all three cases. ‘Employee engagement’ can be explained as an opportunity for FPOs to provide social or environmental initiatives for their staff to become actively engaged. Organisations’ benefit from improved motivation, morale, retention
and recruitment (Austin, 2000b; Berger et al., 2006; Cardskadden & Lober, 1998; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Samu & Wymer, 2001). Managers of both FPOs and NPOs represented by the following statements confirmed such engagement benefits:

“[Providing employees with an opportunity to become involved in social initiatives] is a good thing to do and people respond to those things; it does permeate a feeling of making a contribution and it is a small part of the overall culture” (FPO Manager).

“...there is also a morale boost for their staff as well – doing something really meaningful” (NPO Manager).

Employees agreed with the sentiments expressed above; two statements illustrate the importance of employee engagement in social initiatives:

“I am proud to say that I worked on this project and ... it is nice to be involved in something that does have meaning... I think there is a benefit in that; you can take pride” (FPO Employee)

“Just to know that you are part of an organisation who is trying to make some difference. I think for myself, personally, it is fantastic. We are in a position where we can help them do something about it” (FPO Employee).

As indicated in Table 3, participants rated this first motive as significant in the formation of social partnerships. Participants praised their employers for providing social inclusion opportunities because it allowed them to connect and make a valuable contribution to the community. Consequently, employees developed a sense of pride in their employer. This later characteristic cannot go understated for a positive corporate culture within an organisation allows the employer to benefit from constructive word-of-mouth communication extending beyond the confines of their corporate boundary. As such, an engaged workforce may provide organisations with a competitive advantage.
Table 3: Cross-case Analysis of Formation Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Homelessness Case</th>
<th>Literacy Case</th>
<th>Environmental Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NPO (n=7)</td>
<td>FPO (n=6)</td>
<td>Govt (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Environmental Value Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 6 2</td>
<td>3 9 5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Dependency</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 2 1</td>
<td>2 6 4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 2 0</td>
<td>2 7 3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Partners or Network Opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>2 0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation &amp; Publicity</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Licence to Operate</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: McDonald, 2010)

‘Resource dependency’ is associated with organisations sharing assets. Without the assistance of cross-sector partners, organisations had more difficulties in fulfilling their objectives. In all three cases, FPOs provided financial assistance towards the partnership along with specialised knowledge and skill sets. As one NPO manager identified, FPOs “have the resources, they have the funding…but they are also giving us time of their employees and engagement of their employees …” (NPO Manager). NPOs provided specialised knowledge, access and insight into the societal issue. This was clearly encapsulated by a FPO Manager who felt only the NPOs could provide necessary knowledge for the initiative to succeed; “the specific issues of the population that they are dealing with are those that the commercial sector just does not get” (FPO Manager). In addition, NPOs have extensive reach and provide an opportunity for FPOs to connect with a wider audience. This codependency of resources placed partners in a position to learn new skills, obtain new knowledge and through the existence of an innovative initiative, provided partners with a competitive niche.

The nature of these partnerships however, cannot always be traced to the desire for competitive advantage. Ultimately, all participating organisations had an overwhelming desire to create positive social or environmental change. This aligns with Lantos’s (2001) description of
altruistic CSR; resources are pooled to create social value (Berger et al., 2007; Thorne et al., 2008). The broader motive to create ‘social/environmental value opportunity’ was common to all cases, which was supported by statements from managers and employees from all sectors as per these three representative statements:

“[We] have a genuine concern about homelessness and I think they want to get involved in community projects and address such a serious issue” (FPO Employee).

“…. is just a personal satisfaction that you are helping a child get ahead in life without being left behind” (FPO Employee).

“It starts from a motive to do good, do the right thing...I have always had those beliefs, that you can’t as a corporate, just do what you want and not think about what the consequences are. You have to think about how you are assisting the communities that you work in, so that is I think a fundamental reason for getting involved” (FPO Manager).

Two further strategic motives were identified that were specific to individual cases. As displayed in Table 3, the literacy case saw partnership as an opportunity to strengthen their network and work with new partners. FPOs have extensive networks which are attractive to NPOs, as illustrated by an NPO manager “…it was always thought that [the FPO] would recruit other corporates, bringing in their customers and people that they work with” (NPO Manager). This motive can be linked to ‘resource dependency’, as there was the potential for sharing a resource: networks.

A core motive isolated to the environmental case was ‘reputation and publicity’ (see Table 3). Again, this motive can associated with ‘resource dependency’ but on this occasion, it is the reputation and credibility of organisations that draws partners together. By collaborating with high profile FPOs, NPOs benefit from the “credibility and profile”, such FPOs offer (NPO Manager). Importantly, FPOs benefit from collaborating with a credible NPO for they have access and ability to facilitate relationships with the public sector (NPO Employee).
In summary, there are three common motives: ‘employee engagement’, ‘resource dependency’ and, ‘social/environmental value opportunity’, which all provide insight as to why sectors come together to form social partnerships. They can be considered a combination of altruistic and strategic reasons providing organisations with a range of benefits. Involvement in social partnerships provides managers and employees with a feeling of self-worth and allows organisations an opportunity to give back to the community. As a result, this benefits the organisation’s reputation through enhanced opinions of both internal and external stakeholders all whilst providing much needed societal value creation. Such motives also provide additional insight as to why FPOs share, what could be considered, a competitive advantage with other FPOs. The discussion now moves onto the evaluative phase of the social partnerships whereby the principle partners made the decision about the future direction of their relationships.

**Evaluation**

All cases reflected on the outcomes they had achieved. These could be generalised under two classifications, micro and macro outcomes. As displayed in Table 4, micro outcomes included ‘capacity building and sustainability’ whereby the capacity of partnering NPOs was enhanced; helping to establish the initiative so that it could be sustained in the future. This was linked to the variable ‘new partners and programs’ as diversification led to a more secure future. Heightened ‘reputation and publicity’, from being involved in a successful program, also featured as micro benefits to participating organisations. The identified motive, ‘employee engagement’ (see Table 3), was realised for all FPOs involved who classified this as an outcome (see Table 4).
Table 4: Cross-case Analysis of Social Partnership Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes Variables</th>
<th>Micro</th>
<th>Macro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NPO (n=7)</td>
<td>FPO (n=6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity Building &amp; Sustainability</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation &amp; Publicity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Partners &amp; Programs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp;/or Environmental Value</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Policy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Best Practice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: McDonald, 2010)

Macro outcomes, ‘social and/or environmental value’ and ‘industry best practice’ were common across all cases. The value realised by each case was presented as measurable change. For example, the homelessness and literacy initiatives could provide numerical totals of people they assisted and the environmental initiative could provide numerical values for land re-vegetated.

More difficult to measure were the intangible outcomes. Placing value on immeasurable outcomes, such as the inspiration or motivation a child has upon improving their reading, or the hope or self-esteem of a re-homed person, is a difficult task. Those people directly involved in the various initiatives provided word-of-mouth, personal accounts. Such dialogue describes the value they feel they have achieved through their personal involvement or that of their organisation; this information is important to capture. A single statement best captures the importance of creating social value and demonstrating this as a method of best practice:

“….whatever else we are doing for schools, children and families, we have just by doing it, made an extraordinary contribution to demonstrating what the possibilities are in the realm of Corporate Social Responsibility… [the partnership’s success has provided] an indication of what best practice could look like and the sort of ingredients you need to bring to bear to affect it – and then the great win- win- win- win outcomes that it can have when it is at its best”. (NPO Manager)
A macro outcome identified by the homelessness case was the influence the social partnership had on ‘government policy’. Isolated to this one case, it was a demonstration of success and best practice because the initiative was able to draw attention to the social issue and, demonstrate an applicable, cost effective solution.

In all three cases, once the relationship achieved some form of success they made a decision to seize the opportunity to take the initiative forward. In order to achieve additional success they adopted one of three courses: expansion, replication or refinement. Such pathways align to the literature by Glasbergen’s (2007) on relationships that are scaled-up.

An obvious advantage for NPOs who consider scaling-up is the opportunity to further address the societal problem that they are actively trying to resolve. However, from a FPO perspective, growth may place further strain on resources available for social responsibility initiatives. One mechanism that reduces this unbalanced financial dependency is to invite additional partners to participate.

More FPO partners subsequently extend available resources for partnership initiatives. In seeking to identify why other FPOs would be attracted to join an existing partnership, ‘reputation’ and ‘credibility’ were cited as core characteristics. For example, when the core FPO involved in the homelessness initiative sought to involve other FPOs, they were able to use their reputation as credible leaders in the construction industry to attract support. One manager reflected on the strength of the corporate name; having “someone of that stature come and endorse the idea” was considered valuable to attract further support (Public Sector Manager). As one NPO manager stated, “… you have one of the most powerful construction companies …working on your project…” and “a lot of people stand up and take notice when you say you have a really good corporate partner” (NPO Manager). Statements from additional partners confirmed the importance of ‘reputation’ and ‘credibility’ but also used the term ‘respect’ when discussing this variable.
Smaller FPOs also welcomed the opportunity to become involved in a large-scale social initiative to which they could apply their skills and knowledge. This supports the findings from Santos (2011) and von Weltzien Høivik and Shankar (2011) who suggested there was no lack of desire amongst SMEs to be involved in larger-scale CSR but time and resource limitations were inhibitors. New partners expressed a sense of organisational pride for becoming involved in social initiatives, alongside expressions of self-worth; this resonated throughout an interview with a new partner invited into the homelessness initiative, “it is the point of view of internally being happy with ourselves that we have actually done something for the community and done something for homeless people” (FPO Manager). As Santos (2011) intimated, SMEs can be part of a bigger solution if they are extended an invitation to work on a structured CSR project; collaboration between sectors and investment from larger FPOs facilitates this form of inclusion.

Not only do the activities of high profile organisations attract interest amongst their industry peers but also the initiatives themselves attract attention. All three cases identified that a partnership outcome was the demonstration of industry best practice. The literacy case, in particular, aimed to encourage additional FPOs to become involved in the issue by showcasing the successful outcomes of their social partnership initiative. This initiative had been designed to be measurable. Upon releasing statistics on measured success, this initiative was able to achieve incremental uptake; attracting additional funding and support within the organisation and, attracting new external partners. As one FPO Manager noted, “for every dollar that we are spending and every other corporate that is involved, a child is better off. It is all measured” (FPO Manager). A new partner to the initiative confirmed the value of measurement, “that was definitely one of the advantages of this alliance, because they did really good reporting and you could see the results. There was always improvement so I know that that was definitely the reason we continued on” (FPO Manager).

This supports Kanter’s (1999) discussion on developing prototypes as a form of shared best practice; the homelessness and environmental cases demonstrated that such foresight is not exclusive to educational initiatives. Best practice was something all cases sought to achieve and exemplify. While none of the initiatives arising from the three cases could be considered
profitable for the FPOs, they were certainly replicable (Kanter, 1999) and were a good way to create change (Fabig & Boele, 1999 cited in Selsky & Parker, 2005).

The homelessness initiative itself originated from a successful model in the USA. As such, this homelessness case demonstrated the importance of measured success. The founding members of the Australian homelessness initiative recognised the value added by others in this arena. They subsequently bought into the successful model and adapted this to meet their needs and resources. Once the Australian homelessness initiative gained traction and delivered a positive solution, they too lead by example thus supporting the replication argument. Both the literacy and homelessness initiatives support the importance of measurement and showcasing tangible outcomes. Investors, suppliers and competitors are attracted to programs that use clear evaluation measures.

The FPO involved in the environmental initiative led by example in their relationship with the NPO; this attracted attention and uptake by other FPOs. Some entered dialogue with the NPO to plan future environmental programs together. A benefit described by Googins and Rochlin (2000) was the extended reach NPOs could provide their FPO partners. This research found that by encouraging new private sector partners, it was the NPOs that strengthen their position in the marketplace. The NPO had the opportunity to extend the reach of their initiatives.

Whilst Berger et al.’s (2007) syncretic stewardship model of CSR helped to explain why the cases participated in social partnerships; the inclusion of new partners into existing partnerships had to be traced back to the motives defined in this research. The desire to resolve the social issue and resource dependency provide a sufficient rationale as to why partners solicit further support.

The inclusion of more partners enables an initiative to expand, evolve and achieve greater social value. As such, if existing partners are willing, new partners may be invited in order to help sustain the initiative. The added benefit of this additional new investment is shared risk and a more pronounced societal impact. As such, social partnerships can be considered catalytic whereby new partners facilitate the sustainability of social initiatives.
By encouraging additional partners to be involved, this too created a more sustainable future for NPOs and their programs. A combination of increased efficiencies and control of environmental uncertainty adds to literature previously put forth by Waddock (1991) and Oliver (1990) yet in this instance, new partners are recruited within existing partnerships to further their scope. Replication was mentioned by Austin (2000b) and Glasbergen (2007) but the point of difference found amongst the literacy and homelessness cases in particular, was the inclusion of new partners within the existing relationship.

Industry isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) may provide a possible explanation whereby similar processes are adopted across an industry sector. DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 152) suggested that some organisations model themselves on “similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful”. Applied to a CSR perspective, organisations may adopt specific forms of social investment to replicate their successful counterparts (Husted and Allen, 2006). Isomorphism is apparent when industry competitors are included in the partnership cluster. A desire to see replication as an outcome has synergy with Kanter’s (1999) findings, while the rationale for partnership expansion extends Austin’s (2000b) rationale for multiparty collaboration and incorporates the interdependence argument for CSR clusters (Zadek et al., 2003; Zappalà, 2007).

**Social Responsibility Clusters**

The rationale for replication or expansion of social partnership initiatives was intimated through Austin’s (2000b) cases. This research confirms several of Austin’s (2000b) findings, and in addition, provides greater clarification about social partnership evolution. This paper contributes to theory by merging the facilitation factors surrounding social partnerships with multiparty collaborations (Austin, 2000b) and the formation of clusters that aim to achieve large-scale social initiatives.

The introduction of additional partners into social partnerships forges a tangible link to the discussion on CSR clusters. Numerous partners unite around CSR practices and collectively
work towards the same objective, hence responsibility and investment are shared (von Weltzien Høivik & Shankar, 2011; Zadek et al., 2003.). The findings from the Australian cases extend the classification of clusters that focus on social and/or environmental objectives. The pattern arising from the Australian cases represented a concentration of cross-sector organisations that united around a societal issue in geographical locations in which the problem was most prominent. Resultant ‘social responsibility clusters’ attracted focused attention and investment toward a specific societal issue. This provided an opportunity for industry sectors to collaborate and cooperate in CSR, social investment and issue management practices.

This research demonstrates that the pre-conditions or motivations leading to a social partnership (Table 3) may also be the same factors that lead to a ‘social responsibility cluster’. The three motives discussed, ‘employee engagement’, ‘social/environmental value opportunity ’ and, ‘resource dependency’ attract potential partners particularly once such outcomes become visible or are communicated through networks. The original social partnership serves as a catalyst (Austin, 2000b) in soliciting further support. The three Australian cases revealed that resultant ‘social responsibility clusters’ form in three main ways: ‘expansion’, ‘replication’ and ‘refinement’. The mechanisms leading to cluster development along with the associated benefits to scaling-up is presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1: Formation of Social Responsibility Cluster Development

(Adapted from McDonald, 2010)
‘Expansion’ is one pathway relationships may take. A ‘social responsibility cluster’ may evolve from a single partnership that willingly and actively sought the inclusion of new partners in order to expand the partnership initiative. New partners may be sourced through private sector networks. Originating partners can tout the organisational benefits they have accrued from their involvement in the social partnership to entice new partners. This can be seen as a controlled way of expanding the partnership’s aims because originating partners retain ownership and direction of the initiative while sourcing necessary resources to facilitate a greater societal impact. This form of clustering was evident within the literacy initiative in particular.

‘Replication’ of the same partnership initiative may take place with one or more of the originating partners. This may involve one partner utilising their learning outcomes or enhanced capacity to confidently replicate the initiative in a new location. For those organisations that have observed the organisational benefits achieved by their industry competitors or colleagues in different geographic locations, they too may replicate the partnership initiative. This form of replication is supported by DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) discussion of mimetic isomorphism. Linkages to the originating initiative are maintained through shared intellectual property and/or direct involvement by a founding social partnership organisation. While this form of clustering could be seen across all cases, it was most evident within the homelessness initiative.

Application of an initiative in a new locality can be adapted to accommodate local variation; such diversification can also be present when refining an initiative.

‘Refinement’ is a third pathway. Partnerships may be refined through further innovation or diversification that may involve originating or new partners. Refinement occurs after some form of measurement or evaluation has taken place. Small-scale success or a trial program provides partners with confidence to enhance their initiative. An additional form or refinement occurs when partners look to seize opportunities to improve their initiative that may involve some form of diversification of the program itself. This was witnessed through the literacy initiative where traditional face-to-face programs were offered through an online format. Refinement may also incorporate new partners whose presence offers differentiation.
The pathways described above extend work presented by Long and Arnold (1995) who proposed that partnerships that do not end in termination might continue in the form of migration, renewal or the formation of new partnerships. The three Australian cases presented in this paper, demonstrate that partnerships have greater potential that can be shared beyond a few partners. Regardless of the configuration, the partnership activities have a broader, positive impact on the societal problem. It is important to note that in addition to the expansive pathways an initiative may take, there is an option for conception partners to opt out or see closure towards their current form of involvement (Egels-Zandén & Wahlqvist, 2007; Long & Arnold, 1995).

Represented in Figure 1 as ‘Closure’, partners may decide for various reasons that they may wish to terminate their involvement. In the literacy case, the FPO partner sought to tackle new initiatives and as such, this would alter their current form of involvement in the original initiative. To their credit, this organisation actively sought new partners to help sustain the original initiative thus ensured they had left their NPO partner in a more stable and competitive position than when the partnership first commenced. An important aspect occurring in this closure phase is the sustainability planning between organisations. One FPO representative reflected on the significance of such planning:

...the success of anything like this is to be able to walk away from that relationship knowing that that partner is in a much better place, and in the case of [the initiative], it is going to be going on in perpetuity and as a income stream for [the NPO]. (FPO Manager)

The NPO agreed stating that the FPO “really want - and as an indicator of success, would expect - that the program will not only continue but it will grow and flourish” (NPO Manager).

All partners, those from the original partnership or newly invited partners, go through a point of reflection (Long & Arnold, 1995) which occurs at the evaluative phase (Figure 1) of their initiative. It is at this point that organisations make the decision to terminate or continue in one of the forms outlined in Figure 1.
Conclusion

This paper has drawn attention to the commonalities of successful social partnerships in Australia and how these can lead to social responsibility clusters. Although it was beyond the scope of this research, further research could investigate the longevity of cluster formation and the ongoing organisational and societal outcomes. It would also be valuable to measure the views of the recipients of social initiatives to seek their opinions of the social value outcomes.

Regardless of whether a relationship has arisen out of some form of risk or for altruistic reasons, social partnerships form around a societal problem. Partners share a common vision where the societal issue is central and commit to the creation of a solution through shared resource exchange. Social partnerships also present opportunities to achieve multiple organisational benefits, which include the development of a positive corporate culture, and the opportunity to build reputational capital. This research paper confirmed the significance of three core motivational factors, ‘employee engagement’, ‘resource dependency’ and, ‘social/environmental value opportunity’, taken from the development of social partnerships and applied to social responsibility clusters.

While some social partnerships may choose to remain with founding partners, others invite new partners to expand, replicate or refine the partnership initiative. The formation of partnership clusters allows additional resource sharing which extends the originating partnership’s societal impact and ensures greater sustainability of the initiative. Increasing numbers of private sector members involved in societal solutions not only helps resolve important issues but also encourages FPOs to acknowledge the significant contribution they can make. For those organisations aspiring to begin a relationship or enter into a social partnership yet lacking confidence to initiate the process, entering a pre-existing social partnership thereby helping this expand into a social responsibility cluster is one option.

This paper presents a new model, ‘Formation of Social Responsibility Cluster Development’ (see Figure 1), which illustrates the evolutionary pathway of successful social partnership towards social responsibility clusters. Social responsibility clusters are groups of organisations, across
sectors, which form around a social issue and act as catalysts in soliciting further support and generating positive change. United by a social or environmental cause and sector-specific strengths, social responsibility clusters have great potential. Enhanced cooperation and collaboration across all sectors, combined with a greater concentration of resources, provides greater potential to resolve some of the globe’s greatest challenges.

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