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Paper 9. The Partnership and Network Strategy

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Abstract. The theory and practice of sustainable improvement and innovation partnerships and networks design and management can be enhanced in agricultural industries. The BPP project can contribute to enhanced real-world practices, and the research and development of better mechanisms, for the design and management of innovation partnerships and networks. The Partnership and Network Strategy is designed to accelerate the rate, scale and impact of valuable improvements and innovations in the beef industry by involving key players in the industry and ensuring support for all partners.

Keywords: Partnerships; networks; clusters; networking; support; dissemination; diffusion.

Background

The rationale for developing the Partnership and Network Strategy was that:

- the Beef CRC's 'Sustainable Beef Profit Partnerships' (BPP) project is based on the need to accelerate the rate, scale and impact of valuable improvements and innovations in the beef industry (Figure 1.3);
- the rate and scale of improvement and innovation are centred on two leverage points: (1) the involvement of individuals achieving improvements and innovations, and (2) connections between a larger number of these individuals;
- improvements and innovations need to be achieved by individuals, businesses and organisations throughout the industry (including public sector organisations); and
- in essence the BPP project is a 'partnership' between all of the players needed to accelerate and sustain the rate of improvements and innovations in the beef industry.

The Partnership and Network Strategy contributes most significantly to Elements 2 and 5 of the Sustainable Improvement and Innovation (SI&I) model described in Paper 4 (especially Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1).

Applying the Underpinning Science

As detailed in Paper 2, there is a large literature that discusses and promotes the importance of partnerships, networks, social infrastructure and social capital, and momentum, culture development and institutionalisation.

Many authors highlight the importance of designing, managing and supporting sustainable collaborations and partnerships in relation to achieving sustainable

improvement and innovation in businesses, supply-chains and industries (Rounthwaite and Shell 1995; Hill 2002; Ahmed, Yang and Dale 2003; Bateman and Rich 2003; Beth et al. 2003; Simmons et al. 2003; Trienekens et al. 2003; Curry and Kadasah 2004; Lippert and Spagnolo 2004; Wildridge et al. 2004; Wind 2004; Kirschten 2005; Parung and Bititci 2006; Taschereau and Bolger 2006; Spielman and von Grebmer 2006; Cox, Chicksand and Palmer 2007; Clark 2008).

The concepts of partnerships, networks and clusters, and the theory behind these concepts, can enhance individual, business and industry (including government) improvement and innovation (Gilbertson 2002; Hill 2002; Albury 2005; Bessant 2005; Hartley 2005; Moore 2005; Wyatt 2005; Smart, Bessant and Gupta 2007; BCA 2006; Davis, Ekbar and Spielman 2008; Ferlie and Shortell 2001; OECD 2004; Hyland, Marceau and Sloan 2006; Clark 2008). Clark (2008) provides a useful summary and discussion of clusters and clustering, networks and networking and partnerships, including information on success factors and indicators. Clark (2008) also highlights the following indicators of 'poor partnership performance': (1) low number of partners, teams, networks; (2) low number of key partner-types/role-players; and (3) low scores for the value of the partnerships.

An effective and sustainable social 'architecture' of partnerships and networks is needed to achieve and sustain improvements and innovations. There are several benefits including relevance and commonality of focuses and active collaboration, communication and interaction, from regionally bounded partnerships and networks (Paper 2). Figure 9.1 shows the concept of a regional and inter-regional partnership and network architecture which has been synthesised from the literature and the work of Stankey, Clark and

Bormann(2005). Key principles of these types of partnerships and networks are: (1) the integration of units – individuals, groups, organisations and regional networks; and (2) a shared understanding of goals, principles, methods and roles among all partners.

According to Rounthwaite and Shell (1995), successful partnerships rarely just happen – they have to be designed. Clark (2008) has shown that key functions/roles need to be fulfilled to achieve and sustain regional industry improvements and innovations. Figure 9.2 shows that three key functions are: (1) 'achieving' results – this function is fulfilled by 'achievers' (all members of the network); (2) 'leading' network members and teams – this function is fulfilled by 'leaders' who make up around 15 per cent of network members; and (3) 'managing' regional networks – this function is fulfilled by 'managers' who make up around 5 per cent of network members and should include people from project partner organisations, relevant policy-making bodies and project investors. The types of roles and role-players, in the right proportions, have been found to be vital for regional partnerships and network functionality. The required types and numbers of 'specialists' (leaders with specialist expertise, skills, tools and technologies) have also been found to be essential for partnership functionality (Figure 9.2).

Attrition of vital role-players (and teams) in networks should be anticipated and prepared for. Succession planning for key role-players can involve using the concepts of 'co-leaders' and 'co-managers' in project design, capacity-building and operations. The 'managing' and 'leading' functions/role-players are often easiest to resource through regional representatives from partner organisations (e.g. local, provincial and national industry, government and/or educational organisations).

Strategy Focus and Target Outcomes

System and strategy level thinking and design is required in order to have 'regional level' impact for sustainable improvement and innovation (Bessant and Francis 1999; Clark 2008). The primary focus of the Partnership and Network Strategy is to accelerate the rate, scale and impact of valuable improvements and innovations in the beef industry, by achieving optimum industry involvement and ensuring support for all partners.

The target outcomes for this Strategy are as follows:

- Essential key partnerships established for BBP project target outcomes;
- Clear shared goals, and operating principles, methods and roles;
- Support practices, processes and systems implemented; and
- Increased rates of valuable improvements and innovations in, and of, BPPs.

Implementation of the Underpinning Science in the BPP Project

The mechanisms developed and applied to achieve the target outcomes of the Partnership and Network Strategy are described below.

The first question relates to "Who are the 'Key' industry partners required to increase improvements and innovations for sustainable beef businesses and industries?" The Australian Government's 2004-5 *Innovation Report* placed strong emphasis on the need for increased collaboration between 'industry' and 'research organisations' in order to achieve the desired outcomes of increased innovation and commercialisation of innovation (Wyatt 2005). Table 9.1 lists six types of industry partners that may be necessary for achieving BPP and Partnership and Network Strategy target outcomes. A key issue is the linkage of BPP targets with priorities, strategies and projects of partners. Figure 9.3 shows how partner types could be linked into regional, state, inter-state, national, and international networks of BPPs.

The vision, mission, focus and target outcomes of the BPP project specified in Paper 1 drive all BPP strategies, and are communicated and marketed through the Communication, Information and Marketing Strategy.

Figure 9.4 shows the timing of key partnership and networking activities and support in the BPP project. Biennial regional BBP network 'Innovation Forums' are designed and scheduled to enhance the creation, dissemination, and diffusion of innovations for regional impact. The 'Innovation Forums' are designed to involve the right types and portions of partners (Table 9.1 and Figure 9.2) for accelerating the rate, scale and impact of innovations, and for enhancing the value and sustainability of the partnerships.

Measurement and management is essential for success of partnerships and networks (Ecoregional Conservation Strategies Unit

2000; Hill 2002; Hardy, Hudson and Waddington 2003; Hudson 2004; Hartwich et al. 2007). The critical success factors (CSFs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) for effective, efficient and sustainable partnerships and networks are specified in the SI&I model elements 2 and 3 (Papers 4 and 5). The quality of partnerships and networks, and their sustainability can be measured and improved using the criteria outlined in Table 4.1. In the BPP project, relevant CSFs and KPIs are used (by project partners, leaders and managers) in 30, 90 and 180-day CI&I sessions to create and synthesise new ideas and opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Issues and Opportunities in Implementation to Date

Partnerships developed to date involve Partner Types 1, 3 and 4 (Table 9.3). The quality of partnerships with industry agencies needs improvement, as does the quality of involvement of industry leaders, and organizational management (Figure 9.2). A dynamic feedback and feed-forward process from all partners needs to be designed and integrated with the BPP project CI&I process to ensure sustainability of the partnerships and networks. The CI&I of partnerships and networks is dependent on measurement, and while such measures currently exist, the KPIs of partnership success need further improving. The processes of institutionalisation need designing and implementation to contribute to the sustainability of the partnerships and their improvements and innovations.

Conclusion

The theory and practice of sustainable improvement and innovation partnerships and networks design and management can be enhanced in agricultural industries (including government). The BPP project can contribute to enhanced real-world practices, and the research and development of better mechanisms, for the design and management of innovation partnerships and networks. However much still needs to be done. In particular, the quality of partnerships with industry agencies needs improvement, and the processes of institutionalisation need designing and implementing to contribute to the sustainability of the project partnerships.

“If you can’t measure it you can’t manage it”
– developing better CSFs and KPIs are key to the successful design and management of effective partnerships and networks.

Appendix

Table 9.1. BPP partner types and examples

Partner Type	Examples
1. Small/Medium Businesses (SMEs)	• Beef Producers; Beef Enterprises
2. Large Businesses	• Pastoral Companies; Feedlots; Processors; Retailers
3. Government Departments	• State DPIs; Regional Bodies
4. Industry Agencies	• MLA; MWNZ; AgForce; Breed Societies
5. Commercial Organisations	• Consultants; Elders; Landmark; Banks
6. Education/Training Institutions	• Schools; Colleges; Universities.

Figure 9.1. Partnership and network architecture (adapted from Stanke 2006)

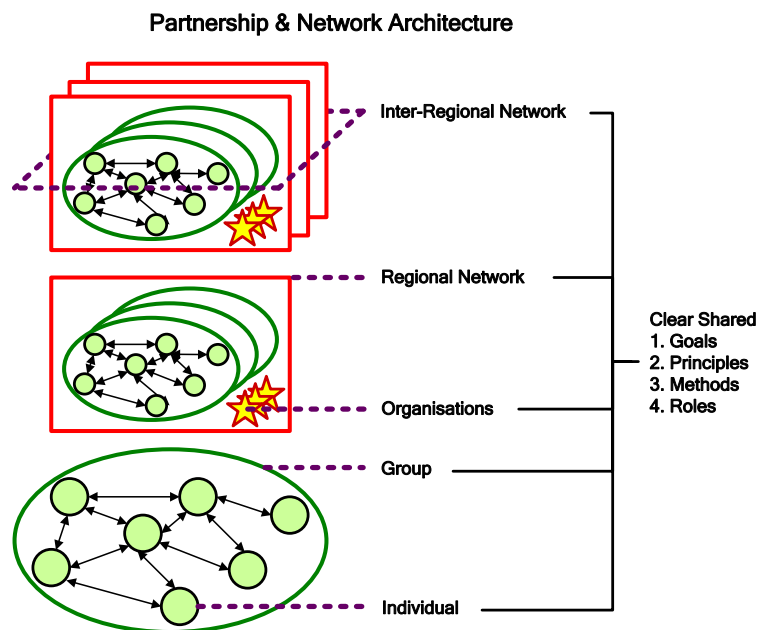


Figure 9.2. A regional improvement and innovation network (Clark 2008)

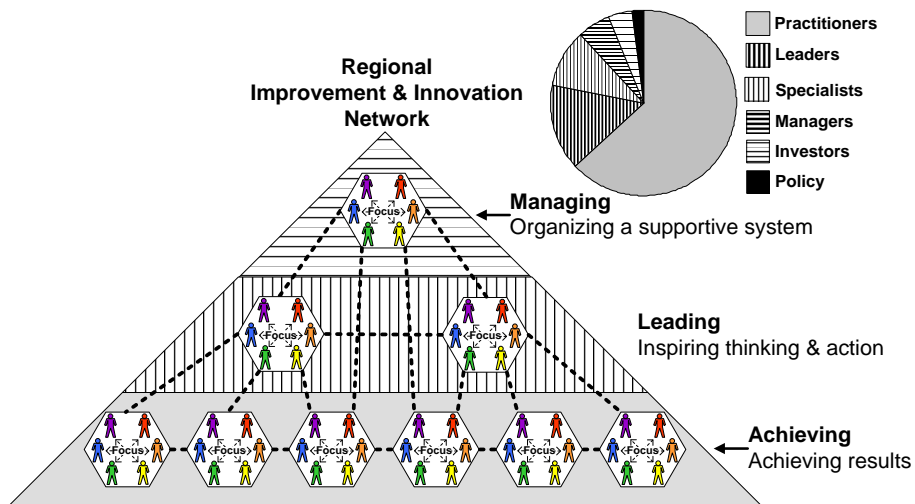


Figure 9.3. How partner types (Table 9.3) could be linked to regional BPP networks

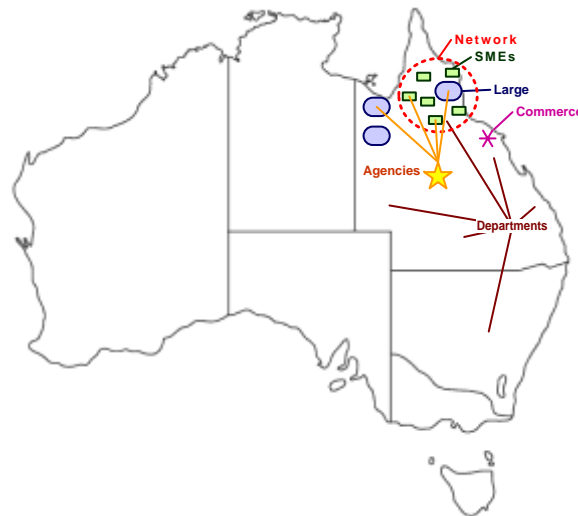


Figure 9.4. The use of the CI&I process in partnership and networking activities and support (Clark et al. 2005)

