



RESEARCH UPDATE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ATTRIBUTES, NETWORKS AND IMPACTS OF PLP AND ITS PARTNERS

BACKGROUND

Developing and supporting partnerships has been an important part of Pacific Leadership Program (PLP)'s work since it commenced in 2008. Commissioned by PLP, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of its approach on a wide range of partnership activities. It maps the coalitions and organisations with which PLP works, tracks the program's investment in relationships with partner organisations over time, and determines whether the investment has contributed to positive change.

This briefing note provides an update on the progress and early findings of the study. It also identifies lessons that can be used by PLP and other organisations when planning future activities of this type.

RATIONALE

The third phase of PLP activities is focused on the generation of new knowledge and lessons from the Program's support for developmental leadership, to be shared with the development community in the Pacific, and internationally.

This study maps the coalitions and organisations with which PLP works, tracks the program's investment in relationships with partner organisations over time, and determines systematically whether the investment has contributed to the achievement of positive organisational and/or developmental change.

The study intends to show:

- the amount and type of resources PLP has invested in the relationship with a particular organisation or coalition;
- how the organisation/coalition is using (or has used) this investment to develop relationships that lead to change; and
- the particular conditions under which core organisational support (or a combination of particular types of support) leads to change in the exercise of leadership over time.

Key Points

- PLP and La Trobe University's Institute of Human Security and Social Change are researching the impact of PLP's approach to, and support for, partnerships.
- Early findings suggest it is not possible to quantify any linear relationship between PLP support for partners and positive developmental change; and that predicting failure is as difficult and problematic as predicting success.
- PLP's 'hedging' approach allows for a blend of support that can contribute to both short and longer term change objectives.
- The study suggests that support for leadership that challenges existing power structures (e.g. women and young people) may result in fewer instances of success than working with established leaders.
- However, female leadership of a network or coalition is positively associated with success.
- Modelling the partnership approach and knowledge-sharing by PLP and other organisations appear to be methodologies for supporting the development of local and regional networks.
- Further research into aspects of this study will provide important insights into how PLP and DFAT can act to influence developmental change through partnerships.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study has been designed to address the following research questions:

- How has the reach of PLP and its significant partners grown since a partnership arrangement was entered into?
- What attributes of the partnership are more or less likely to be associated with a successful intervention by PLP?
- What unintended consequences have arisen that can be attributed to PLP's support to significant partners?

METHODOLOGY

The study examines the relationships between PLP and 28 of its most significant program partners (SPP). The partners in this group are coalitions or networks that have either maintained a steady membership or are focused on achieving developmental change. They are partners who have received PLP support over a prolonged period.

There are three datasets that inform the study

- Project networks of partners: a social network analysis identified the extent of partner networks at the beginning of the relationship with PLP and currently (or on completion of the partnership). The data captures the extent to which partners' exposure to other networks has changed during the partnership period.
- Attributes: an examination of common attributes of partners and PLP's forms of assistance identifies those characteristics most commonly associated with partnerships that were successful as well as those that were less so.
- Unintended Consequences: capture of data that describe the unintended impacts (social, economic, governance) attributed to the PLP partnership by partners.

EARLY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

The environment in which PLP and partners interact

The package of relationships and practices used by partners are best described as 'complex adaptive systems'. This means they are dynamic entities that are continually providing and receiving stimulation to and from other parts of their networks. Their experiences cannot be replicated because their environment is constantly changing and adapting (Hatt, 2009; Holland, 2006).

The inherent complexity in this area of PLP's work means it is not possible to see linear relationships between what PLP does and the achievement of positive change.

Synthesised Findings

Combined analysis of research findings (see below) indicates that PLP has played a crucial role in supporting its partners to drive developmental change leading to positive outcomes. The overarching theme of the three datasets is that developmental change and progress occur in a number of ways.

PLP's experience and research provides insights on how support for developmental leadership can be streamlined and made more effective, e.g. through focusing on established leaders. PLP's 'hedging' approach appears to have worked well given the complexity of the environment in which it operates. This has allowed them to support partners that present as likely to be successful on paper, as well as those that are more of a 'long shot'.

Social network analysis

A social network analysis of 21 (of a possible 28) partners showed that, over an eight-year period during which they were supported by PLP, partners significantly increased their own exposure and networks.

Attributes associated with more or less success

Analysis of this dataset indicates that no single attribute or combination of several was necessary and sufficient to greater success of the PLP interventions with their SPP.¹

Unexpected impacts of partnerships

The survey identified some unexpected impacts of the partnerships, and the extent to which outcomes achieved by partners would have occurred without support from PLP.

Three different types of unexpected impacts were identified by partners:

- Positive social change consequences
- Positive economic consequences
- Positive governance consequences

Whilst unintended negative consequences were raised, they were less concrete in nature and not discussed as frequently as those that are positive.

REFERENCES

Hatt, K. (2009). Considering Complexity: Toward a Strategy for Non-linear Analysis. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 34(2), 313-347.

Holland, J. H. (2006). Studying Complex Adaptive Systems. *Journal of Systems Science and Complexity*, 19, 1-8.

For further information on PLP, visit www.plp.org.fj or email: info@plp.org.fj

¹In this context, 'necessary' means that the outcome is only achieved when that attribute is present. 'Sufficient' is used when the outcome is achieved in all cases where the attribute occurs, even if there are further successful examples.