

Proposal for MOPAN 2008

- (a) Title
Learning while Innovating in a Strategic Alliance: Learning Strategies for Public-Private Alliances
- (b) Author
Monique Cikaliuk, doctoral student, Lancaster University, email: m.cikaliuk@lancaster.ac.uk
- (c) Four key words
organizational knowledge, knowledge management processes; interorganizational learning; innovation
- (d) Pre-themed session
#6 Innovation and change through alliances in the service, public and education sectors with Professor David Faulkner

Previous research has identified how alliances are valued for the purpose of innovation in the competitive business arena. Far fewer efforts have been made to establish systematically how knowledge creation, sharing and retention facilitate innovation among multi-sector alliance members. Further, previous alliance research has not addressed in detail the nature of the learning strategies used in a multi-sector alliance context. This study explores the strategies employed by multi-organizational alliance members in the creation, sharing and retention of knowledge, and how this new knowledge informs alliance practice over time.

Using data from an action research case study of a multi-organizational alliance comprised of universities, government, health, and private sector firms in Canada to innovatively address a perceived leadership gap in healthcare, the research explores how, why and under what circumstances knowledge creation, sharing and retention takes place in an alliance context.

The findings in this research originate from a collaborative action oriented methodology, action research, which was used to gather data from multiple sources over 16 months. In addition to the participant observation of ongoing alliance activities, interviews were conducted with key alliance members ranging from the CEO to senior managers. Dedicated working sessions were also conducted in which the team gathered to discuss and explore the data, and to generate actionable knowledge. The findings of the first cycle in this action research project identify key processes for learning strategies in a multi-sector alliance, and the circumstances in which knowledge creation, sharing and retention take place.

This paper complements the MOPAN 2008 conference theme of collaborative innovation and change in three ways. First, the methodology of action research combines the twin aims of changing a problematic situation by solving a real problem while also studying it. In the context of this research this meant that the intent of some of the envisioned changes was not realized, and lessons learned from this are identified. Second, the findings generated from the research contribute to a growing body of research into how multi-organizational public-private alliances serve as vehicles for innovation and change. Third, the insights developed from this paper may be useful for those who endeavour to make multi-organizational alliances actually work in practice.