

MOPAN PAPER PROPOSAL, 1/3/08

Is it a Partnership? A Case Study in Central America

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of an international corporation and an international nonprofit that are collaborating in Central America to bring basic social and health services to poor, rural communities where the corporation is conducting business. Using an approach to case analysis inspired by appreciative inquiry, the paper considers whether the arrangement is a “partnership” per se or some other form of collaborative arrangement.

The case analysis provides a valuable contribution to the literature for three reasons:

- the case is one of few Latin American examples of such a collaboration;
both organizations are strategizing for long-term sustainable collaboration and outcomes instead of solely on short-term project success; and
- the corporation’s contribution to these community-development initiatives is primarily rooted in the for-profit mentality of maximizing shareholder returns.

Key findings include:

- A more nuanced description of the various tensions that both for-profits and nonprofits must manage and negotiate in these types of collaborations;
- Insights for both scholars and practitioners into the skillsets required for corporations and non-profits when engaging in multi-stakeholder, international collaborations; and

- Propositions to support the expansion of ways that for–profits and nonprofits might engage with each other for their own mutual benefit.

Key Words:

intersectoral collaborative arrangements
corporate social/environmental responsibility
Business as an Agent of World Benefit

Rationale for the paper’s inclusion in the conference

This case analysis offers insights of use to both scholars and practitioners of intersectoral collaborative relationships. We represent the Case Western Reserve University Department of Organizational Behavior, a department known for its scholarship on organizational and social change. The case study analyzed in this paper was developed with the support of the Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit.

Possible fit with pre–themed session on

“Intersectoral Collaborative Arrangements: Effective Vehicles for Societal Problem Solving?”