

# BY DESIGN AND BY CHANCE: THE STORY OF ONE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

*Emerging economies are becoming less reliant on funding from foreign agencies. One of the consequences of this is the formation of more self-funded international partnerships offering new models of inter-university partnerships. This chapter offers a perspective on such an on-going collaborative international partnership between two institutions of higher education – one in the United States and the other in India. It describes the context in which the partnership was formed, the manner in which it evolved over time as both partners faced barriers, and challenges to the instantiation of the original vision. Sakamoto and Chapman's (2010) Functional Model for the Analysis of Cross-border Partnerships is used to analyze and organize the key factors that have played roles in the development and success of the partnership. In addition, the chapter focuses on one component of the partnership activities, the short-term professional development visits to the United States for educators from Indian partner institution. Drawing on participants' experiences from both sides of the partnership, this chapter presents the expectations, challenges, and opportunities this partnership has offered to members of both*

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*universities. The chapter ends with recommendations to establish or improve international collaborative university partnerships.*

**Keywords:** International; collaborative; university; partnerships; teaching

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a perspective on an evolving collaborative international partnership between two institutions of higher education – one in the United States and the other in India. International university partnerships that connect two universities in different countries are not a new phenomenon in higher education; however, creating and sustaining international university partnerships has become an important concern of 21st century higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007; De Witt, 2002). Depending on the specific purposes for establishing them, university partnerships can be broadly divided into three main categories. The first category includes academic partnerships, such as joint degree and study abroad programs, which are programs where students and faculty participate for curricular or co-curricular purposes. Then, there are research partnerships that are built on faculty research interests and activities. The third category could be called “capacity building” partnerships that are focused on institutional and individual faculty and staff development. This chapter focuses on the third category, the capacity building partnership, that is also a self-funded partnership, and, in this instance, describes one that is mostly funded by the institution outside the United States. Historically, these partnerships that link U.S. institutions with institutions abroad have been funded by U.S. government agencies, most notably the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), or by U.S.-based private foundations. The focus of these partnerships has been institutional development, training of academic, research and administrative staff, and introduction of new technologies (Cohen, 2010; Coleman & Court, 1993; King, 2009). This has allowed the U.S. universities to not only become a model for many new institutions in developing countries (King, 2009), but also has led U.S. universities to adopt a specific partnership model that satisfies the requirements and priorities of the donor institutions, sometimes above the needs or interests of overseas partners.

The economic growth in many countries has led to rapid expansion in higher education, especially in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) countries (Altbach, 2005; Carnoy, Loyalka, Androushchak, & Proudnikova, 2012), where there is not only a growing demand for higher education, but also where governments have increased their efforts to advance research and technology. It has led to the development of new universities as well as changes in existing ones. The eagerness of governments and individual institutions to establish world-class universities with international recognition and availability of funding has led to increased interest in partnerships with highly regarded universities in the United States. Many of these partnerships are not different from the earlier ones, as they are funded by government or private donor agencies and are focused on individual and organizational capacity building. The main difference is that the funding is attached to the university located outside the United States.

While the donor-agency funded capacity building partnerships seem to dominate, a number of international university partnerships have emerged that are funded by one or both institutions. The sustainability of such partnerships depends on institutional collaboration and commitment to the partnership and provides opportunities to explore different approaches to both partnership planning and implementation.

In this case study, the U.S. partner is the College of Education at Michigan State University (MSU), well known for its international work and ranked education programs. The Indian partner is Azim Premji University, a new private, not-for-profit university established in 2010 by the Azim Premji Foundation, recognized in India for its work in the public school education sector. Azim Premji University has been established with a clear social vision – “to contribute to the realization of a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society” (Azim Premji University, Vision). Through its programs that prepare committed professionals in the area of education and development and cultivate research and service to the field, Azim Premji University aspires to advance changes in the education sector in India. MSU’s land-grant tradition and its commitment to research grounded in practice and service to community, “that seeks to answer questions and create solutions in order to expand human understanding and make a positive difference, both locally and globally” (MSU Mission Statement), aligns closely with the mission and vision of Azim Premji University and became the foundation for the partnership.

This chapter describes the context in which the partnership was formed, the manner in which it evolved over time as both partners faced barriers and found ways to negotiate and steer the association through these

roadblocks. This chapter will specifically focus on one component of the partnership activities, the short-term professional development visits to MSU for the Indian partner institution's staff and faculty. We document the nature of participants' experiences from both sides of the partnership and through that seek to understand the expectations, challenges, and opportunities that this program offered to members of both universities. We use Sakamoto and Chapman's (2010) Functional Model for the Analysis of Cross-border Partnerships to analyze and organize the key factors that have played roles in development and success of the partnership. Through this we identify factors that have both challenged and contributed to the successful development of the partnership and offer our recommendations. The chapter ends with us identifying three imperatives essential for establishing international collaborative university partnerships.

## CONTEXT AND PARTNERSHIP DESCRIPTION

Within the context of this chapter we define international collaborative partnerships as arrangements between two or more institutions with the goal of obtaining a shared objective (Eddy, 2010). In this we include both the organizational and human aspects of the project. This "partnership" is constituted by two organizations (in this case College of Education, MSU and Azim Premji University) working together to achieve a goal, while "collaboration," in our framework describes the faculty working together (either as individuals or in groups) (Eddy, 2010). Collaborative partnerships provide social structures (Psaltis, 2007) for building collaborations and, as such, shape individual experiences. Thus, we acknowledge that although individual faculty from each institution may work independently, there are also formal and informal agreements that tie each institution together and define the partnership.

The Azim Premji Foundation (operational since 2001), built on a belief that education is a powerful medium to influence change in society, has engaged with several state governments in India and at the ground level with issues such as teacher education, school leadership development, assessment reforms, curricular material development, institutional development for pedagogical and administrative reform. The Azim Premji University emerged from the Foundation's nearly decade-long experience on the ground with large scale intensive interactions with state-run government public school systems. The university is a unit (or a part) of the

overarching organization – the Azim Premji Foundation. It is important to clearly visualize the Foundation as an organization with two broad strategic footprints. One is its deep and established field institutions working on the ground to contribute to improving the state-run public school systems, while the other is the University that is specifically established recognizing the urgent need in India for well qualified and deeply committed professionals who will work and contribute to the education and development sector.

The institutionalized nature of work of the Foundation's Field Institutes is informed by the reality that long term and consistent engagement with multiple stakeholders is necessary for educational change. On-the-ground engagement includes capacity development of teachers, head teachers, and other education functionaries, as well as work on curriculum, assessment, and policy issues at the state and national level. These field institutes are currently in 46 districts across eight states in India, with a team of over 1,000 members.

It was on the basis of the learning and experience with their work on the ground with public school education systems that the Foundation saw a clear, urgent, and important need for well-trained, qualified, and committed professionals in the education and development sector. This is how the idea of a University was formed and this genesis is perhaps unique. As it established the university, members of the Foundation visited and studied the best institutions of education and teacher preparation to inform their plans and preparations. One of the institutions that the Azim Premji University staff visited was the College of Education at MSU. It stood out not only for its national and international reputation and for the quality of its faculty, but also for the land-grant tradition, a commitment to research that is grounded in practice. This tradition aligned closely with the mission of the Foundation and its vision for Azim Premji University and became the foundation for building the partnership.

The other organization in this partnership, the College of Education at MSU, is well known for its five-year teacher preparation program, nationally ranked graduate programs, and internationally recognized faculty. For more than a half century, College of Education faculty have engaged in international programs sponsored by external funding agencies, such as USAID, National Science Foundation (NSF), and private foundations, as well in short-term consulting opportunities and research projects with colleagues at different universities across the world. Since the early 2000s, MSU has emphasized and promoted the international mission of the University, which led to more organized efforts by the College of

Education to support development of new international programs and for faculty to integrate international experiences and perspectives into their teaching, research and service. For example, the graduate-level Fellowship for Enhancing Global Understanding program was established to provide international experiences to graduate students. The College established an international scholars exchange and study program with the Faculty of Education of Southwest University (SWU) in Chongqing, China, which includes SWU students and faculty groups visiting MSU for an extended time. In addition, a partnership program with Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa provides Department of Educational Administration graduate students with a short-term international professional consulting experiences.

When key members of Azim Premji Foundation and the College of Education met and discussed, they saw the potential benefits from an association or partnership between both institutions, an opportunity to contribute to the development of a new university, to form connections between faculty and students at MSU with educators in India, and an opportunity to gain valuable insights from a region that was distant from their own.

The partnership was formalized in March of 2011. In the ensuing years, the College of Education at MSU explored possible areas for working together, such as curriculum development, student welfare, faculty development, and the use of educational technology. Dr. Donald Heller, then the dean of College of Education, and several faculty visited Azim Premji University and interacted with its faculty members. The Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Azim Premji Foundation, Dileep Ranjekar and Anurag Behar (who is also the Vice Chancellor of the University), visited MSU a number of times. The faculty at MSU and members of the Foundation identified some research projects located in the field institute's work and jointly presented the research at international conferences.

It is important to note that the programming of the partnership has been constantly evolving to meet the interests of both institutions (details below). One of the first insights was the realization early on by both partners that to move from a vague and unsubstantiated desire to engage in various aspects of the University to a more meaningful partnership required both sides to identify one, or at most two, areas for tangible, concrete collaborations and thus create conditions for ownership and commitment. Over time this led to a focus on the Azim Premji University educator short-term professional visits to MSU and how it became the central element of the partnership project. We believe that this program not only showcases a different approach to professional development, but also highlights the strengths of this

partnership. In this section we will outline the program, share feedback from participant surveys and, finally, provide more information on the factors that have contributed to the success of this program.

## UNDERSTANDING THE “EXPOSURE VISITS”

The Azim Premji University educator (which include both university faculty and members of the field institutes) short-term professional development visits to MSU, also known at Azim Premji University as “exposure visits,” were developed to support Azim Premji University’s efforts to improve the quality of current and future education professionals in India. These visits are planned and developed in coordination with the participants, taking into account their backgrounds, professional interests, and needs. What started out as one-week individual or small group visits has evolved into a two-week program of scaffolded experiences, as explained below, which provide opportunities for the participants to expand their knowledge on a range of topics. These include topics such as teaching and learning philosophies and approaches; teacher education; leadership; technology integration; and school-level policies and practices. They also include opportunities to explore specific areas related to the professional interests and needs of the visitors. These visits of four to six educators from Azim Premji University take place twice a year, one in April and the other in October/November, at times convenient to the faculty involved at MSU’s College of Education and when Azim Premji University educators could take time off from their teaching or field work schedules.

Although the central focus of these visits is to expand Azim Premji University educator perspectives on teaching and learning through the context of K-12 and teacher education in the United States, in practice they benefit both MSU and Azim Premji University educators. The opportunity for the MSU faculty and staff to reflect on their own work and learn about education in India, more specifically how the Indian education context affects areas of their own expertise and research, has become an important aspect of these visits as well.

In the past four years, 34 Azim Premji University educators have visited the College of Education, and more than 50 faculty, staff, and graduate students at the MSU College of Education have been actively involved, sharing their expertise in teacher education, both at elementary and secondary level, in the content areas of literacy, mathematics, science, social

studies, and special education, as well in disciplines of educational technology, educational policy, research methods, and assessment. While the program is mostly financed by the Azim Premji University, the majority of MSU faculty and staff meet with visitors without financial (or any other) compensation.

This program does not include formal lectures or workshops. Instead it focuses on in-depth conversations with MSU faculty members structured around specific topics. The program also includes visits to undergraduate and graduate classrooms, K-12 schools and districts, the state of Michigan Department of Education, organizations that offer informal learning opportunities (such as after-school programs for students and museums), and other educational organizations. Although there are no formal lectures, the visits are structured and start with conversations about the U.S. education system, K-12 schools, and teacher education, followed by an overview of the Teacher Education programs at MSU, then visits to schools that include classroom observation opportunities, and discussions with school administrators, mentor teachers, and student teaching interns. Each visit and conversation is meant to provide opportunities for the visiting faculty to fulfill two goals: first, to learn about the practices in the context of schooling in the United States, including how issues of equity and social justice that are so important to the Foundation play out in the U.S. schools and classrooms of teacher education programs, as well as how they are included into teacher education curriculum; and second, to share their own experiences in the context of Indian schooling with MSU faculty, staff, and students, and anyone else they interact during their visits to different schools and organizations.

## THE VALUE OF THE EXPOSURE VISITS

We recently conducted an online survey of all the Azim Premji University and MSU College of Education participants in this program to provide us with their feedback about their experiences with the program. The findings confirm that the partnership is achieving our goal to provide new social and educational experiences that deepen professional understandings of their own practice for both MSU College of Education and Azim Premji University educators. Two findings especially stood out from the MSU College of Education faculty responses. When asked about their role during the meetings, words such as “share,” “engage,” “discuss,” and “learn”

were used frequently. One faculty member simply described their meeting with Azim Premji University educators as “professional colleagues having conversations.” Another faculty member said:

... I have learned a lot about teacher preparation, the education system, and community work in India through these interactions. I am always very interested in engaging in these conversations because they help me understand our own program in new ways.

Another interesting finding was the majority of MSU College of Education faculty, both junior and senior, regardless of their prior international experience, are interested in continuing these relationships with the Azim Premji University educators they have met, and most mentioned that they would like to visit Azim Premji University in India.

Additionally, a majority of MSU faculty were interested in future research opportunities; several mentioned their interest in collaborating with Azim Premji University faculty. Expanding research collaboration was also mentioned by Azim Premji University participants, though in terms of opportunities to develop research skills for junior and senior faculty. As one Azim Premji University participant mentioned, “structured opportunities if built, can help younger faculty in their professional development.”

Several findings from Azim Premji University educators’ survey responses highlight the strength of this program. One of the most memorable experiences for the Azim Premji University educators was visits to different schools in Michigan. One educator remembered “the images of engaged children, structured classrooms and dedicated teachers, quite vividly to this day.” Another mentioned, “the second most memorable experience was interacting with the kids and the teachers in U.S. schools. That was quite different from what we experience every day here.” It was not surprising, then, that the participants listed increased time in schools as one of the suggestions for program improvement.

When asked how Azim Premji University educators have benefitted from their visits to MSU, most mentioned developing a better understanding of U.S. higher education, teacher education programs, and K-12 education: “Observation of schools helped me with getting the pedagogical aspects of US schools”; and, “Understanding the US school system and teacher education programs were of high value.” Similar to MSU faculty, Azim Premji University participants used words to describe the collaborative meetings such as “conversations,” “exposure,” “engaging,” “and learning.” Azim Premji University educator responses show that these visits provide valuable learning experiences not only about the United States and MSU, but they also provide opportunity to broaden their perspective on their own system

and practices. In the words of one of the educators, “this visit gave a comparative framework to understand what we do in our practice of teacher education.” In addition, it was interesting to see that two Azim Premji University educators specifically mentioned that the visit gave them assurance and validation of their own work.

Key suggestions to improve the program of “exposure visits” recommended from Azim Premji University participants were to include more school visits, more conversations with school teachers and MSU faculty, and more college classroom observations. This was not surprising, as earlier conversations had changed the program from a one- to two-week program. Another alternative expressed by both MSU and Azim Premji University participants was having pre-visit preparation. Overall the survey results confirm that our design for the program is meeting the goals and objectives.

## ANALYSIS OF THE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES

A lot has been learned about partnership development in the past five years. We use Sakamoto and Chapman’s Functional Model for the Analysis of Cross-border Partnerships (2010) to analyze and organize the key factors that have played roles in development and success of the partnership. The framework identifies the following factors that influence higher education institution participation in international partnerships – (a) organizational, (b) financial, (c) individual (faculty), and (d) context for collaborative venture (political and regulatory environment). We loosely follow the framework as laid out (i.e., we maintain the four broad categories though we do not necessarily include all the sub-categories that Sakamoto and Chapman included in their approach). As will become clear, many of the key factors identified support the findings of other partnership projects. At the same time there are factors that have been crucial in the MSU and Azim Premji University partnership development process that have been less emphasized in the current literature or in the framework. Under each broad category of Sakamoto and Chapman’s (2010) framework we present our main recommendation, followed by a more detailed description and/or examples. The fact that the authors play leading roles in each of these institutions allows us to provide the perspectives of both institutions.

## ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

### *Centrality of Content to Institutional Mission*

*Recommendation 1:* Build partnership programs on trust and shared vision. Partners may have different priorities at different times. Trust will help to overcome differences. Shared vision, written or unwritten, will establish why the partnership exists in the first place and will allow the partnership to grow and develop or will help identify when the partnership has reached its full potential.

One of the strengths of the partnership between MSU's College of Education and the Azim Premji University was shared key values and perspectives. MSU is one of the first land-grant universities built around the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. The expectation was that these publicly-funded institutions would expand their focus from an abstract liberal arts curriculum to a broader commitment to applied education and social good in the communities in which they exist (Thelin, 2011). Though much has changed in terms of how land-grant universities are funded and how they operate, the original democratic mandate for openness, accessibility and service to people still exists today, and is particularly strong in the vision of the College of Education at Michigan State.

The commitment to the land-grant mission on MSU's side was met with a parallel set of organizational values that form the basis for the work of the Azim Premji University and the Foundation. Azim Premji University, in its mission, is committed to the development of a just, humane, equitable and sustainable society and on a foundational belief that education is a powerful medium to influence positive change in society.

In early conversations between faculty and leadership of both universities, this commonality of purpose was clear and, over time, served as a way of bringing both teams together around a shared set of values and broader social purpose, as well as a way of sustaining connections and partnerships when faced by challenges. The focus on practice on the ground (in the case of MSU, represented in its commitment to teacher education and practical research; and in the case of Azim Premji University, through being a unit of the overarching Foundation whose field institutes are core to its vision), combined with a parallel commitment to the development of a research agenda that would inform practice, were important to creating a shared set of values and commitments.

*Sufficient Comparative Advantage*

*Recommendation 2:* Each partner will benefit in different ways. The motivation to remain in a partnership depends on benefits received. Recognize that and build on it instead of seeing it as a barrier.

Despite the alignment of broader values, there were also significant differences between what the two partner institutions brought to the partnership. The College of Education at MSU is a highly ranked college of education, with years of expertise in the fields of teacher education and research, as well as a strong foundation in international work. That said, MSU had not had any significant prior international work with India. Thus, when the project started, one of the strong motivations from the side of MSU was a willingness to learn and be part of the growth and development of education in the largest democracy in the world.

For Azim Premji University, it was an opportunity to interact with a much respected university whose purpose of public good resonated with its own clear purpose. As much as the reputation of the College of Education, its value-based commitment to public good was an important factor. Since the Azim Premji University was established and had a plan to introduce degree programs in the area of teacher education, it found the College of Education at MSU as an appropriate institution to interact with and learn from as it established its own programs.

*Capacity of Institution to Absorb Extra Demands on Faculty Time and Work*

*Recommendation 3:* Institutional support, in the form of resources and expertise, is essential for establishing and advancing an international partnership. The success of a partnership depends not only on developing external relationships, but, most importantly, also builds on existing internal relationships. Seek out expertise, advice and support from others at your institution who have experience with international work.

The College of Education at MSU is a large unit that has been historically engaged with research on the practice and policy of education on a large scale. It has, over the years, developed extensive expertise in developing international relationships; an Assistant Dean for International Education coordinates these various projects and activities. Thus, there was both a large number of faculty participating in international projects as well as strong institutional memory of various models and funding structures that have worked in the past. There was also an understanding that

international work takes time and requires support – the size of the college allowed for such support to be provided. For instance, during the years that this partnership was being negotiated and structured, the office of the Dean and the department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education often picked up the costs of travel and other basic expenses. Individuals such as Dr. Jack Schwille, Assistant Dean (since retired), his extensive experience with global partnerships, and his unstinting support for this particular project meant that the individual faculty members who were pursuing this could always feel supported.

Having said this, to a very large extent the strength and tempo of activities depends on the time that individual faculty on both sides can give to the partnership. At Azim Premji University, the schedule of teaching, institution building, research, and field practice meant that faculty could only contribute at specific times of the year. The local environment and context, specific objectives, and student backgrounds limit the nature of what can be exchanged and absorbed. It is not as much skepticism as the limitation of relevance.

#### *Existing Institutional Relationships*

*Recommendation 4:* Communication is the key to building relationships. Maintaining any relationship requires effort, but especially international relationships.

In the case of this partnership, there were no specific existing relationships that could be leveraged. This meant that the first part of the process, almost four years, was spent in developing and nurturing a shared understanding of what each organization had to offer and take from the partnership. Key to this were the personal relationships that were formed (described in greater detail below). As Cooper and Mitsunaga (2010) have emphasized, “staying in touch and listening are both key to faculty collaborative efforts” (p. 80). Keeping this in mind, the initial conversations were general, seeking to better understand the needs and priorities of the two institutions. Initial meetings were also supported by the use of Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT), though it soon became clear that these technologies, despite the potential, did not offer the same level of connection that face-to-face meetings provided. There were, of course, some “hiccups” along the way – misunderstandings of intent, scope of the project, budgets involved and so on. In fact, there were often times during which it appeared this partnership would never see the light of day. It was only through constant

communication and interaction that both organizations and the individuals working within them could build a foundation of trust in each other and their respective goals to make this partnership a reality.

One of the stumbling blocks on MSU's end was misunderstanding the very nature of Azim Premji Foundation. The use of the word "Foundation" implied to faculty and administrators at MSU that Azim Premji Foundation was an organization with resources that were awarded in the form of grants, similar to those in the United States (such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). This is in contrast to Azim Premji Foundation, which is an organization that actually does the work on the ground. This misperception of the purpose of the Azim Premji Foundation led to MSU proposing a multi-million dollar five-year plan for faculty development. This plan was so far removed from the reality of what the partnership could be that it was the biggest challenge faced by this nascent partnership and could have been a deal-breaker. It was only continual communication by individuals on both sides that managed to salvage this near debacle into a functioning partnership.

One key way that trust was restored was by scaling back the scope of the project, making it an annual project that would be continually reviewed and extended only if both parties felt there was something worth continuing. This removed the pressure of a multi-year and multi-million dollar commitment and allowed the project to evolve over time.

In such a situation, the enthusiasm and commitment of the CEOs of the Foundation and the key faculty at MSU was of critical importance. As the conversations continued, it became clear that it was strategically crucial to identify one or two key realistic initiatives that can be immediately implemented. It became clear that rather than attempt to have MSU contribute ideas to program curriculum or course curriculum – something that was tried and did not work as planned – it would make sense to focus on issues related to student support and exposure visits for Azim Premji faculty to the College of Education at MSU. To arrive at this kind of wisdom and action was not easy. This is where patience, trust, transparency and candor between the key players on both sides was vital. The frank and candid conversation about what worked and what did not were important and allowed the partners to drop the efforts in areas that were not generating traction and focus instead on areas that were showing promise of success.

The other important aspect is that, ultimately, identification of initiatives depends on the individuals involved, not just the key personnel. For example, in the area of student support, a MSU College of Education faculty member and the head of student support at the Azim Premji University

formed an association of mutual respect, friendship, and willingness to learn. It led to a basis of successful interactions in which the various suggestions were seriously considered in order to decide what to implement in the context and environment of Azim Premji University and also allowed both parties to acknowledge that they had done as much as was possible together. This part of the project emerged not out of design but rather a chance meeting between an MSU faculty member and members of the Azim Premji University when they visited the MSU campus. Once an alignment of needs and capacities was identified both sides worked quickly to make issues related to students' affairs a key part of the partnership.

Similarly, it took a detailed discussion between Foundation CEOs Dileep Ranjekar and Anurag Behar, and Dean Heller and Professor Punya Mishra, of MSU's College of Education, to agree that going forward – from 2013 on – the partnership would focus on small groups of faculty (including members of the Field Institutes of the Foundation) visiting MSU for two weeks of interaction, exposure and learning that could cover specific aspects of education, such as teacher education, school management, assessment and pedagogy.

*Organizational Depth of Interest (Number of Faculty Who Want to Participate)*

*Recommendation 5:* Utilize your internal network and your knowledge about your institution – successful partnerships need a range of faculty and administrator support.

A multi-year, multi-threaded partnership of this nature needs a range of faculty and administrators to ensure its growth and development. One of the advantages of this partnership has been that most of the people involved share a commitment and passion for education, for sharing ideas, and for learning from each other. This support has ranged from that of the leadership at both institutions, from the Vice Chancellor of Azim Premji University to the President of Michigan State, as well as the Dean of the College of Education. This interest has been indicated by the number of visits by key faculty and leadership from MSU to India and vice versa.

One of the most important factors in the success of this partnership has been the key role played by individual faculty members or administrators, so called “internal champions” (Eddy, 2010), who took on the role of nurturing and supporting this arrangement even when things were not going very smoothly. At MSU, the charge was led by one of the authors of this

chapter. Though his research interests did not include international or comparative education, he was deeply interested in fostering a partnership between the two organizations – primarily because India was his country of origin. In some ways his lack of a research agenda in India was a benefit since there was no conflict of interest in his research and outreach agenda. Thus he became a crucial point of contact for all the work in which the partnership would be engaged. Having received tenure (and soon promoted to Professor) he was under less pressure than an untenured faculty member to “prove himself” and, thus, could take on longer-term projects and devote his time over years to making this project a success. Having been at MSU for over a decade, Mishra had well-developed contacts (and social capital) across the university that helped move things along. Over time, the addition of a deeply committed graduate student (the first author) brought not only extensive international experience, but also a network of professional connections and innovative ideas about program development; this led to the expansion of this project to individuals and groups across the university and the broader community. From the Azim Premji University, the Registrar and Chief Operating Officer – also one of the authors of this chapter – played the nodal point-person role to facilitate the partnership. In his case, he had been at the Foundation from its very early days, having contributed to building its field work and programs. He then moved to the university at its inception, which helped bring an overall perspective and understanding to the association. Individual rapport, friendship and mutual respect amongst the two nodal persons in the two institutions was a key contributor to the partnership.

Certain organizational changes also helped move the partnership along. For instance, in 2014, the Azim Premji University reorganized itself into five schools and a research center. These are the School of Education (SOE), School of Development, School of Policy & Governance, School of Liberal Studies (SLS), and the School of Continuing Education, each responsible for its own programs. This reorganization is relevant in the context of our discussion here. It meant that now the School Director took the responsibility of selecting the faculty who would attend the two-week program at MSU. It also means that any initiative that may be considered under this participation would get a buy-in/rejection from the School Director thereby ensuring complete ownership once an initiative was accepted. For anyone from the Field Institute nominated for the two-week program, the Foundation’s Director of Field Institutes would decide the nominations.

## FINANCIAL

*Recommendation 6:* Recognize that funding can define a partnership. Who is funding and what is being funded are central questions for any partnership. The financial structure of the partnership has important consequences for the nature of the relationship between partners and sustainability of the partnership.

The partnership between MSU and Azim Premji University is somewhat unique in that the bulk of the funding comes from Azim Premji University. Mr. Premji's endowment has ensured that the Foundation (including the University) has a strong financial structure in place. Some initial funding came from both organizations independently but, over time, there has been a clear shift to the funding coming from the international partner to the U.S. university. This is in contrast to most other partnerships between U.S. universities and universities in the developing world, which are typically funded by U.S.-based funding agencies (such as NSF, USAID, and the World Bank). This partnership has a different structure with important consequences for the nature of the relationship developed. The fact that the funding is coming from the University in India has meant that (a) the U.S. partner has to ensure that the partnership is truly serving the needs of the partner institution (the funder) and that money is not being misused on irrelevant matters that do not extend the work in fruitful directions, (b) that the project is not burdened by bureaucratic reporting requirements of external funding agencies, and (c) as mentioned earlier, the scope of the work is not predefined at the beginning of the partnership, but can grow and be adjusted as new needs arise.

## INDIVIDUAL

*Recommendation 7:* Find the right faculty members on both sides as things expand. Faculty not only need to be passionate about their work, they need to be flexible, able to think on their feet, open to challenges and opportunities, and embrace working collaboratively with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds and traditions, as well.

From the point of view of faculty at the College of Education at MSU, this partnership has provided opportunities to both learn more about the educational system in India and to contribute to it, as well as reflect on one's own practice from a comparative perspective. A range of faculty

members have visited the University in Bangalore and many more have met the visitors who have come from India to spend time at MSU. Interestingly, faculty for the most part have volunteered their time or participated in these projects once their travel and other incidental expenses have been met. A large part of this is because the Indian partner universities have been able to truly inspire the faculty at MSU with the breadth of their vision, the depth of their passion, and the scale of their ambitions.

Not all faculty members who have attempted to work with the partners have been completely successful, however. For those unable to navigate this partnership well, it was not because of any lack of interest or passion, it was more to do with style of operating. International work is messy and complex, and though planning may be important to success it does not guarantee it. A willingness to improvise and be opportunistic (in the best sense of the word) is essential. Design is important as is a willingness to be open to chance and the unexpected. Things seldom go as planned and it is important that faculty who want to work in an international context be willing to change their plans and be open to thinking on their feet to come up with alternative plans. As Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki (2007) emphasize, the flexibility and adaptability are key to successful partnerships. Learning to listen, to hear alternative points of view, is of critical importance. Taking a humble stance of a co-learner and participant, rather than that of an expert flying in to offer “gyan” (Hindi word for “knowledge”), is key.

Finding such people can be a challenge particularly as the scope of work expands. The key factor here is flexibility – at multiple levels. Over time there have been more than a few sub-projects that have started, grown and then, somewhat naturally, faded away. For instance, two areas that took a great deal of time and effort by faculty from MSU working with faculty and staff at Azim Premji University were developing processes of faculty evaluation and promotion. There were multiple meetings between experts at both universities, including visits on both sides, with full day workshops and so on. This work progressed steadily over two years and then, as Azim Premji University developed its own policies for faculty evaluation, this line of work gradually came to an end. A similar story could be seen in the development of the department of student affairs at Azim Premji University. The leadership at MSU had to continually monitor these sub-projects to ensure that they were moving along and be willing to have open conversations with partners at Azim Premji University regarding when each of these lines of work had reached its culmination and needed to be gradually phased out, even while keeping lines of communication open to envisage new sub-projects for the future.

## **CONTEXT FOR COLLABORATIVE VENTURE (LEGAL/REGULATORY), INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS, POLITICAL STABILITY, CULTURAL CONTEXT**

*Recommendation 8:* Relationships based on trust and collegiality will help navigate and overcome obstacles created by policies or practices at the institutional level, or external environments in which institutions operate.

The fact that both organizations saw the value in this partnership and, at least at the beginning, focused on overarching goals rather than specifics, combined with the fact that there was not a third party involved with its own goals and objectives (as often happens when external funders are involved) meant that the process of signing the partnership documents was relatively easy. The initial contract that was signed between the two organizations was for 18 months and was repeatedly extended for over five years. This has been possible mainly due to the development of a relationship based on trust and collegiality. In the Indian context, the fact that the Azim Premji University is a private institution has helped since it has a greater level of freedom than other government-supported public institutions in India. At the same time, while being a private, autonomous not-for-profit institution, it forms and conducts these kinds of collaborative partnerships in compliance with the requirements of the University Grants Commission, the central body that guides higher education in India.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has provided an example of what we consider to be a successful partnership between MSU and Azim Premji University. Both institutions came to the partnership with previous experiences, MSU with many years of experience with international projects, Azim Premji University with the experience of Foundation that for many years in its work on the ground has partnered with a number of other organizations. The cardinal principles that applied to Azim Premji Foundation partnerships also applied here. The principals of mutual trust, respect, candor, and openness were understood by MSU College of Education and become a basis for the partnership between both institutions.

Through the analysis of our experiences we arrived at several key realizations that we believe are important to the establishment and development of successful collaborative partnerships and that we have described in the

previous section. These can be summarized in three imperatives for anyone considering developing or participating in international collaborative partnership:

1. *Change the perspective.* Shift the focus from “capacity building,” which has dominated international partnerships for decades, to partnerships that are built on mutual learning. It is an opportunity to look beyond traditional forms, think creatively, and be innovative and expand on past partnership experiences.
2. *Build relationships.* Relationships among individual people are the foundation of every partnership, especially those that are self-funded and collaborative in nature, and make each partnership unique and different.
3. *Be flexible.* Be flexible with modes of communication, with choice of faculty, and with needs of projects. As the title of the chapter says, design and planning are important to success. But equally as important is an openness to the unexpected – to take a chance when things do not go according to plan. In this context steady small steps make more sense than putting all your resources into one large project.

Over the past five years, this partnership has involved over 100 people from MSU and the Azim Premji Foundation. We are hopeful that this partnership will continue to grow and evolve with time. The strength of this self-funded, collaborative partnership lies in multiple threads of connections that, at their foundation, have a strong connection in shared values and goals.

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