



Rationale

What are the ingredients of a good partnership?

To explore this question, The Partnering Initiative undertook a case study comparing Rio Tinto's partnerships with Dundee University and the Eden Project. Both partnerships have been described as "successful" by all partners involved but "quite different on the surface". This case study explores whether, despite the differences, these partnerships would offer similar lessons about partnering

Rio Tinto and Dundee: Working together to establish the rule of law

Rio Tinto and the Centre for Energy Petroleum and Mining Law Policy (CEPMLP) at Dundee University have worked together on areas of mutual interest since 1995, and in 2001 they formalised this relationship by signing a Memorandum of Understanding. The basis of the partnership and the MoU was the partners shared belief in the promotion of a fair, rule-of-law-based environment for minerals policy development on a worldwide basis¹.

To this end the partners have:

- established the Rio Tinto Chevening Scholarships
- created a Rio Tinto teaching and research Fellow
- worked on the development of the LLM in Mineral Law and Policy
- committed to developing internet services for the course and the mining industry

Both partners agree that the partnership has been “very successful”, but what lies at the heart of this success?

A Shared Vision

“A good partnership is not a sponsorship, it is not about corporate social responsibility it is about having a shared vision, believing in that vision, being committed to it and investing in it.”

John Hall External Affairs Manager, Rio Tinto

“The evolution of the partnership between Rio Tinto and CEPMLP has been very positive,” explains Christopher Rogers, the Principal Research Fellow in the Centre and the Director of the Centre’s PhD Programme.

Initially the relationship developed through personnel connection; the Head of the Economics Department at the University worked closely with the Chief Economist at Rio Tinto on issues involving mineral economics, and the former Head of CEPMLP collaborated with Legal Advisor at Rio Tinto on a United Nations project. Given the shared interests between the two institutions the opportunities for collaboration were inevitable and after working together for 6 years the two organisations formalized their partnership in 2001.

The partnership offered the CEPMLP not only financial support but also access to the knowledge and experience of one of the world’s leading mining companies. For Rio Tinto the partnership allowed them to focus on a subject of growing importance to their business; the rule of law. There were also matching geographical interests between the two partners; “Dundee represents a large body of knowledge and scholarship in the developing world, where the future of Rio Tinto lies, and where we want to build good regulatory structures.” explained John Hall.

Christopher Rogers adds that CEPMLP and Rio Tinto not only share a vision of the partnership and the programmes they have built together, but are also “convinced of the benefits of this partnership to them”. It is this belief that makes both partners so committed to the success of this partnership.

¹ Report on the Partnership Between the Centre for Energy, Petroleum and Mining Law Policy and Rio Tinto, 2001-2003.

It is this commitment that has inspired the partners to work together to develop innovative solutions, processes and structures to support the partnership, to try and better understand each other's needs and expectations. Both partners when interviewed separately described the other as being responsive, proactive and open to new things, as John explains:

"Dundee are always asking for our perspective by talking to different people within the company, seeking people's views, not all organisations do that. They are they are also willing to try new things and are not closed-minded".

Janeth Warden Fernandez, the Co-ordinator of the Mining Programme at the Centre, who manages the day to day relationship with Rio Tinto stressed the importance of the good working relationship between Rio Tinto and CEPMLP staff to the partnership: "the people at Rio Tinto are very easy to work with, very personable and responsive, there is a great deal of mutual respect between us and we can discuss things openly". John echoes this point of view adding that good relationship management is the basis of any successful partnership:

"You have to like each other, respect each other, you have to be thoughtful and collaborative, know when to ask and when to consult. Don't be shy about raising issues and concerns".

And certainly neither Rio Tinto nor CEPMLP have been shy of raising issues. In 2004, they completed a formal independent review of their partnership in order to understand how they can continue to enhance their partnership. John believes that review offered them an opportunity to *"think about things clearly, to create space to do that deliberately and to ensure that we don't lapse into a comfort zone but continue to build and improve on our partnership"*. CEPMLP values Rio Tinto's openness to reviewing the partnership and appreciate the ability to be comfortable to bring up issues and to work together to build partnering structures and processes that will further strengthen the partnership.

It seems that this approach has been working for both partners because since 2001 the partnership has grown in many respects. For example The Rio-Tinto Chevening Scholarships offered through this partnership have been increased from four fellowships in 2001, to six in 2004, and in 2005 there were discussions about scoping eight fellowships per year

Rio Tinto and the Eden Project

"To promote the understanding and responsible management of the vital relationship between plants, people and resources leading to a sustainable future for all".

The Eden Project's Mission

The Eden Project is one of the UK's foremost tourist destinations, drawing up to 1.2 million visitors in 2005, but it is also designed to be a formidable educational facility, a centre of excellence for research and teaching in science communication, committed to moving towards more sustainable and socially equitable systems.

A partnership between an environmental non-profit organisation and a mining company may seem confusing to some, but to Tim Smit the Chief Executive of the Project, it represents an opportunity to work with a controversial but essential industry in order to better manage the stewardship of rocks and minerals which are necessary for our planet.

Since the launch of the partnership in 2002, both partners have worked together to develop educational displays, organise conferences and educational events, raise public awareness and launch the Post-Mining Alliance which was set up by the two partners to build on the Mining Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD) project's *Agenda for Change*.

Both Rio Tinto and Eden seem very proud of what they have achieved together and equally proud of the partnership they have built.

Partners in Innovation

The idea for a partnership between Rio Tinto and the Eden Project emerged from a conversation between the Project's Chair of Trustees and Sir Bob Wilson the previous Chairman of Rio Tinto.

Initial discussions between Eden and Rio Tinto began in 2001 but the partnership was not confirmed until 2002. "It took us some time to get to know Rio, and we did start from a negative position, having been told to partner with a mining company when we are based in what used to be a mining community", explained Tim. There were some reputational challenges of partnering with a mining company which made Eden hesitant at first but after working together on the Mineral and Mining Sustainable Development project, it became clear to both parties that they had much to gain from this partnership. Eden offered Rio Tinto an opportunity to influence public perceptions of the mining industry, in return Rio Tinto gave the Eden Project a source of financial support, insights into the workings of one of the leading mining companies in the world and a chance to influence industry perceptions of environmental issues.

Along with a shared vision it was the personal relationships that they developed while working on the MMSD that inspired them to partner: "We were constantly delighted by the people who worked at Rio and the faith they have in what they do" said Tim. It was these relationships and the growing awareness of the benefits of working together that led to the creation of the Post-Mining Alliance.

John agrees that one of the most exciting aspects of partnering with Eden is working with a group of "innovative educators, who always do things differently" One example of this innovation in action is the development of the copper roof for the Project's Education Centre which comes from a single well-managed mine in Kennecott, courtesy of Rio Tinto. To meet Eden's exacting standards, Rio Tinto had to develop innovative ways to ensure that both the copper and the process by which it was transformed and transported were environmentally friendly.

Like with Dundee, Rio Tinto also initiated an independent review of its partnership with Eden. According to Eden the review gave them an opportunity to spend some time at the company's offices getting to know their staff and networks around the world and a chance to reflect on their partnership and talk through the issues ahead. Eden staff believe that this time for quiet reflection and review between partners is essential for good partnering.

In the end both Rio Tinto and Eden agree that the basis of their good relationship is the trust they have in each other. Time explained that while Eden does have other corporate partnerships that are successful on a project delivery level, they don't compare with the Rio Tinto partnership in terms of the quality of the relationship, because the trust is missing.

It is this trust, which has allowed the partners to learn from each other and to explore new areas for innovation. Through this partnership, both organizations have had an impact on each other. Eden is now passionate about the need for environmental organisations to work in partnership with industries to develop innovative solutions to our planets problems, and Rio Tinto is more than ever committed to the pursuing sources for renewable energy.

Lessons for Good Partnering

Thus despite their obvious differences in focus and circumstances both partnerships seem to highlight similar lessons about partnering. Both partnerships are built on trust and mutual respect, a commitment to the shared vision, a belief in pursuing new and creative ways of addressing complex issues, an open-mindedness and good personal relationships.

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