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Towards a Sustainable Partnership in Crime Prevention and Community Safety

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Towards a Sustainable Partnership in Crime Prevention and Community Safety

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Abstract:

The Centre for International Corporate Governance Research (CICGR) at Victoria University in partnership with Crime Prevention Victoria (CPV) received an Australian Research Council grant for the project: Evaluating the Community Governance of Crime Prevention and Community Safety (2002-2004). The authors draw some conclusions that enhance the feasibility of sustaining partnerships. The present paper reviews the achievements of the project over the past three years; reflecting on the research process and products and the partnership process. It identifies some of the challenges involved in working in partnership with government departments (e.g., major policy changes, staff secondments, departmental vs. academic aims) as well as the major barriers to sustaining the partnership (e.g., contract arrangements, funding). Finally it questions whether the initiative is a worthwhile one to maintain and what are the avenues and opportunities towards a sustainable partnership in crime prevention and community safety.

Introduction

Governments are increasingly turning to local communities to resolve such problems as crime, drug addiction, and youth alienation. The rationale behind this move is that local communities are best placed to resolve local problems and that assuming responsibility for such problems enhances the development of social capital and the general well-being of the community. At a government level co-ordination of various government activities can be more productive than 'silo' attempts by individual departments trying to address what are often complex problems with many causes and ramifications. "Whole of government", "joined up government" and "partnership" initiatives harness the combined resources of different government departments, the corporate sector and local citizens.

"Whole-of-Government" policies seek to build partnerships across levels of government that allow functional departments to focus on common problems. Joined-up-government is the sharing of data, information and knowledge across government agencies and community groups. The term "partnerships" is used in a broad way in the current context to refer to relationships, collaborations and networks involving a range of stakeholders in a community.

Much research into partnerships has focussed on mapping the networks of partnerships and other linkages, attempting to explain them in terms of concepts such as growth coalitions, urban, regional and institutional thickness, modes of regulation, their application in meeting policy decisions, (See for example, (Bassett et al., 2002, Crawford, 1999) and as a central facet of community governance (Armstrong et al., 2004, Armstrong and Francis, 2004).

Recently Interest in managing partnerships has also received increasing attention as a key element in integrated *governance*.. The report "*Working together – Integrated Governance* (IPAA 2002) presents a sequence of processes for integrated governance based on the degree of change and commitment required.: networking, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and partnership. At the lowest end of the continuum networking and cooperation imply a dialogue over issues, with little loss of autonomy by the participating organisations. Co-ordination can mean allocation of authority and market mechanisms such as contracts. Collaboration and partnerships in this hierarchy represented integrated governance.

Structures for managing partnerships were found to include several models depending on the context in which they operated: a statutory partnerships model, a Model for meeting funding conditions, contractual partnerships and voluntary quasi-contractual models. Despite the different models, successful partnerships had the characteristics: organisational commitment, honesty and trust, with a common agenda of shared objectives and understanding of partners' priorities. It is these attributes that are promoted in the Commonwealth and State governments' partnership policies.

Government policy supporting partnerships

Peter Shergold (Shergold, 2004)in his speech launching "Connecting government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges" in 2004 described 'whole of government' as a commitment to 'joined up government' combined with 'seamless delivery'

of government services. The difference to previous efforts to coordinate activities “lies in the behaviours that are brought to the conference table. A collegiate leadership, driving an ethos of cooperation, and bound by effective lines of communication, can achieve outcomes that are far more than the sum of the parts that have been brought together”(p.13).

An example at State government level is the Victorian policy, *Growing Victoria Together*, now in its second iteration. Note that *The Contract Guide* for the Victorian public sector is called Partnerships Victoria. In this publication, governance is largely about risk management and accountability and partnerships refer to contractual arrangements. Noted in the rhetoric in the Victorian document are references to cooperation, collaboration and trust.

Most government departments now have partnership arrangements of one kind or another in place. Our partner in our project was Crime Prevention Victoria (CPV).

CPV and Partnerships

Partnerships are central to the operation of Crime Prevention Victoria. When the current project began, a new Crime Prevention Victoria policy, the Safer Streets and Homes, had just been developed. Central to the broad strategic direction do improving safety in streets and homes were initiatives to strengthen the capacity of communities to address specific crime, violence and community concerns. As the report said:

Strengthening the capacity of communities needs a multi-faceted whole-of-government approach, which includes State and Local government, local agencies, non-government organisations and community members. Partnerships (were formed) with organizations such as Victoria Police, the Victorian local government Association, the Municipal Association of Victoria, Department of Justice, department of Infrastructure, Department of Human Services and the Department of Education. (2002, p.21).

Before describing the partnership between Victoria University and CPS, it may be useful to note that promotion of partnerships between universities and external organisations is also a central tenet of the federal Government’s Higher Education funding model.

Research partnerships

A significant impetus to universities to become engaged with partners is that a major component of university funding is also tied to receipt of external funding. Commonwealth Government policy is directed towards the promotion of “user” relevant research and a major role for industry in directing what research should be funded. The purpose of the industry partnerships is to:

- Encourage funding from industry groups;
- Provide research back-up for Australian industry;
- Do research that is useful;
- Support economic development and sustainability

The premier research funding bodies in Australia are: the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council. A condition of the Linkage grants from ARC is a contribution in cash or kind from an industry partner.

The Victoria University and Crime Prevention Victoria Partnership

The Victoria University and Crime Prevention Victoria partnership began in 2002 following an Australian Research Council (ARC) award of funding to the institutions over a three-year period. The major aim of the project was to evaluate the role of community governance in crime prevention and community safety in Victoria. CPV expectations were to inform policy by identifying local community governance issues and structures that enhance or inhibit the development of safer and less crime prone communities. The longer term aim of the research team was to question the theoretical assumptions underlying community governance, identify cost-effective governance structures that enhance or inhibit a community's capacity to participate in and respond to community safety initiatives. Specific objectives of the project were to:

- Evaluate the CPV crime prevention program
- Determine community-based factors and other characteristics of the implementation to which success could be attributed
- Evaluate the contribution of the programs to the well-being of the communities
- Identify the factors that enhance or inhibit the development of community capacity
- Develop models of community governance that can guide ways to most beneficially build community capacity

The project was guided by a theory which posits the relationship between crime and community well being (see Figure 1). This framework suggests that dysfunctional communities have high levels of community need and that this is reflected in high levels of crime, which has a negative effect on community well-being. The potential of communities to respond to crime prevention strategies is moderated by their community capacity. The balance between community needs and community capacity is reflected in community well-being (Armstrong, et al., 2002b).

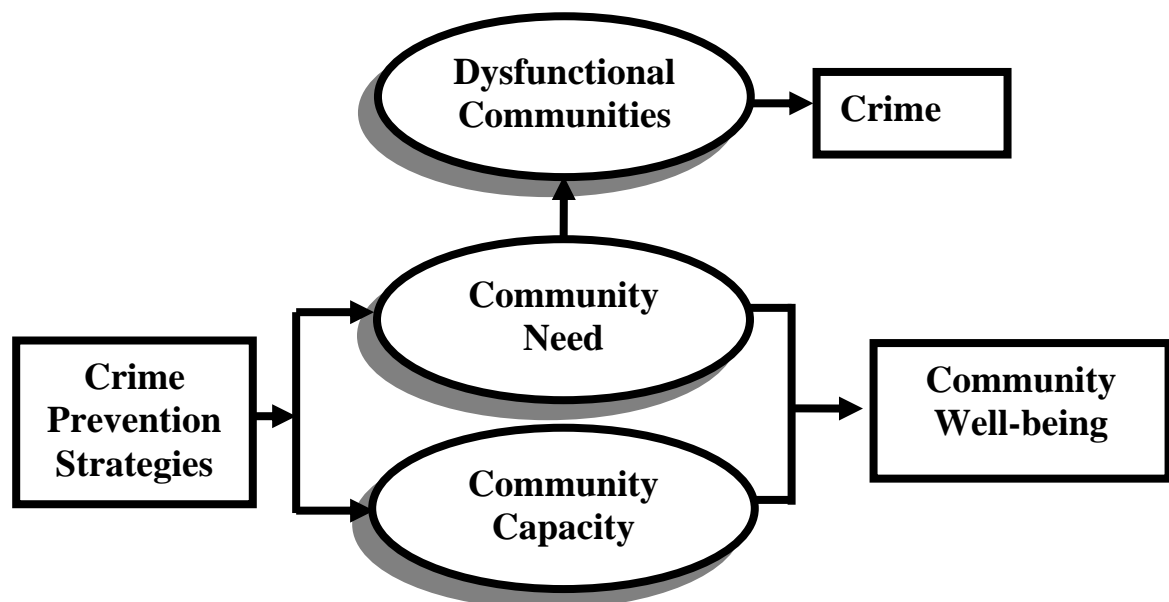


Figure 1. Crime and Community Well-being Model.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the project took an evidence-based approach and was undertaken in five distinct stages to achieve outcomes that would meet the above aims and objectives. The design was consistent with a proactive evaluation which utilises various methods such as needs assessment, reviews of research, literature, best practice and data bases, questionnaires and focus groups to provide evidence to assist the synthesis of programs and knowledge about an identified issue or problem (Owen & Rogers, 1999).

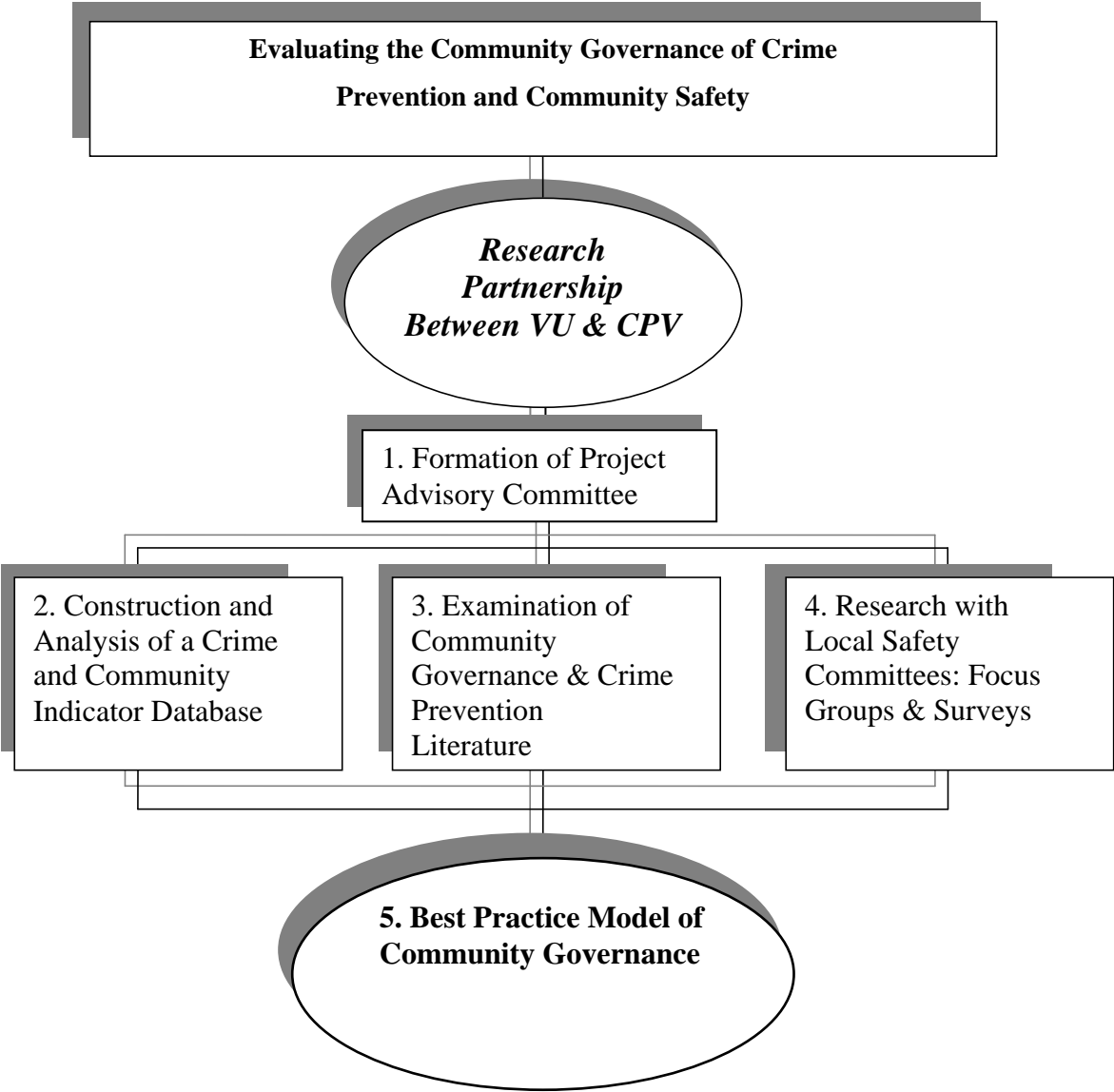


Figure 2. Research design showing the stages/methodologies employed in the evaluation

Research Outcomes

In order to meet the above aims and objective, the project was designed and undertaken in five stages. The stages are:

- Stage One: Project Advisory Committee
- Stage Two: Data-base Construction and Analysis
- Stage Three: Collection and Examination of Community Safety Strategies and Literature
- Stage Four: Research with a sample of LSCs (Focus Groups and Follow-up Survey)
- Stage Five: Development of a Model of Community Capacity

Stage One: Project Advisory Committee.

The Members of the Project Advisory Committee were selected to add expertise and advice and to facilitate networking with Victorian Government Agencies and other organizations involved in community crime prevention. The committee members included 10-14 representatives from CPV, Neighbourhood Watch, Victoria Police, Local Government and Victoria University academics with backgrounds and interests in law, corporate governance, ethics, community psychology, community engagement and social policy. The meetings were held on a bi-annual basis for the whole committee, with more frequent meetings held between the members of research team from both VU and CPV.

Stage Two: Data-base Construction and Analysis.

A major aim of the second stage of the project was to investigate the relationships between crime and various community indicators. The state of Victoria consists of 79 Local Government Areas or geographical “communities”, which differ in terms of crime rates and social and demographic characteristics. While there is an increasing agreement that crime is the result of a combination of factors such as disadvantage, dysfunction and lack of community capacity and social capital (Armstrong, Francis, Bourne & Dussuyer, 2002a), systematic investigations of the relationships between crime rates and other community characteristics are rare.

One reason for this is this the cost and difficulty of building an appropriate and comprehensive data base.

The first task was to develop a database of quantitative data from various sources and to construct social indices at Local Government Area level. The paper: ‘Towards developing an evidence based database for the evaluation of the community governance of crime prevention and community safety’ describes the development of the theoretical model that guided the selection and analysis of information from the data-base used to construct, for each LGA, comprehensive social indicators relevant to the crime prevention needs and capacity in LGAs in Victoria (Armstrong, et al., 2002b).

Community need, community capacity and community well-being are not unitary concepts as shown in the community well being model but rather consist of many factors and issues which concern a community. Following a review of literature in this field, models consisting of numerous needs, capacity and well-being indicators were developed (the full lists may be

seen in Armstrong, et al., 2002b). These indicators guided the development of the subsequent database, which has been named the Crime and Local Community Indicator Database.

The theoretical and practical issues involved in developing social indicators are discussed in several other papers developed as part of the present project (Armstrong et al., 2002b; 2002c; Armstrong & Francis, 2003; Armstrong & Rutter, 2002). Two empirical papers have also been developed. One of these: 'Crime Rates and Community Characteristics: Implications for Crime Prevention' consists of empirical research on the relationships between police recorded crime rates and the various community need and capacity variables from the database. The second one entitled: 'Ethnicity and crime: A statewide analysis by local government areas' specifically explores the relationship between various cultural variables and crime rates.

The quantitative data collected during this stage of the project also enabled us to develop comprehensive community and crime and safety profiles for the six LGAs. And causal analysis of associations between for example, community socio-economic status and crime, and ethnicity and crime (Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis (in progress)).

Profiles of this kind can be extended to all LGAs and are essential to evidence based crime prevention activities. As listed earlier 'Developing demographic and need profiles of Local Government Areas' is one of the major initiatives supported by the Safer Streets and Homes Program program (CPV, 2002b). The importance of community profiles has also been outlined in the Victoria Police policy and guidelines LSC Resource Kit (2002). According to this publication a community profile provides an overview of the local safety issues and acts as a planning instrument to assist police and LSCs "in identifying and developing strategies to address those issues" (p.18).

It must be acknowledged that whilst many local governments in Victoria have already developed profiles of their LGAs, the structure of these profiles are not consistent across LGAs and do not necessarily consist of crime and safety data. The profiles of the six LGAs developed in the present project include Community Profiles covering Geographical Features, Population Characteristics, Income, Cultural Diversity, Families, Education, Employment and Employment Type in these areas. The second profile is a Crime and Safety Profile of the six areas covering Recorded Crime Rates, Crime Rankings, Change in Crime from 2001-2003, Victimization Survey and Local Safety Survey.

Stage Three: Collection and Examination of Community Safety Strategies and Literature.

A thorough examination of community safety strategies and literature is essential to understanding and improving community safety. During the course of this project, we built up a small library consisting of literature and website information related to crime prevention and safety infrastructures and activities in Australia and internationally. Some of the specific topics covered in our collection include articles on the evaluation of crime prevention programs, community governance and related issues such as community capacity, community well-being, social capital, community participation and ethnicity and crime.

As well as informing the present work, the information collected will be useful to further work aimed at promoting community safety and improving well-being. One of the projects underway within this stage has been the construction of the Local Crime Prevention/Community Safety Infrastructure Database. This consists of a database with numerous fields of information at the Local Government Area, including information about

LSC structures, issues covered in Local Safety Plans, current CP&S initiatives and completed activities. This database will be a valuable resource for crime prevention practitioners when completed.

Stage Four: Research with a sample of LSCs: Focus Groups and a Follow-up Survey.

A full report of the focus group research appears in chapter six of the report (Armstrong, Francis, & Totikidis, in progress) and a shorter discussion appearing in Armstrong, Francis, & Totikidis, (2004). In summary, six focus groups were undertaken to gain an in depth understanding of the functional structure of LSCs. A total of 41 people (18 females and 23 males) from the six LSCs/LGAs: Boroondara, Brimbank, Glen Eira, Port Phillip, Greater Bendigo and Greater Shepparton participated in the research. The participants consisted of police officers and local government workers (59%) as well as community service providers, road safety officers and local business. Most were aged between 36-55 (71%), were born in Australia (91%) and lived in the local area (56%).

An interview schedule consisting of 30 questions and prompts (see Appendix F) guided the research. These questions addressed issues associated with community governance: leadership, participation, representation, skills, partnerships, decision making, policies and implementation of programs, accountability, networking and collaboration.

Stage Four: Research with a sample of LSCs: Follow-up Survey with LSCs.

Following the undertaking of focus groups with LSCs and data analyses, two questionnaires designed to explore emerging assumptions and hypotheses were also developed. The first questionnaire (the Local Safety Committee Questionnaire) was directed to each LSC member while the second (Local Safety Committee Questionnaire to Examine Hypotheses Relating to Reduction of Crime in LGAs) was directed to the chairman and committee as a whole. A total of 34 LSC members from the Bendigo, Boroondara, Brimbank, Port Phillip and Shepparton LSCs participated.

Stage Five: Development of a Best Practice Model of Community Governance. Stage five proposed the development of a best practice model of community governance. The model is described in the Report: Guidelines for Best Practice in Community Governance.

Research and the Partnership Process

As indicated above the term partnership applies not only to the partnerships between VU and CPV.

Our experience of partnerships showed that the characteristics of a good research partnership are:

- Contributions of both parties to the project;
- The development of a good networking frame.
- Shared understanding of the problem;
- Realistic expectations;
- Enthusiasm;
- Relevance of the problem to 'user' decisions;
- Accessibility of the outcomes of the research to 'users';
- Trust, co-operation, sustained interest;

Contributions of both parties to the project

The partnership was a partnership. The research officer at CPV who had initiated the project had a major role in developing the proposal, briefing the VU team and maintaining contacts with the relevant people at CPV.

The development of a good networking frame.

Membership of the Advisory committee represented people who were interested in Crime Prevention and the opportunities offered by the research. The team collaborated with CPV, attended their research seminars and meetings held with LSC officers.

Shared understanding of the problem

The issues were well understood by the project team but less so by those on the ground who seemed to assume, prior to our visits, that we were evaluating their performance and only subsequently came to understand that we were trying to identify structures and processes that facilitated governance.

Enthusiasm

In the CPV and VUu project, the early enthusiasm stimulated the appointment of an Advisory Committee, provision of data and positive assistance in obtaining data from other sources.

Realistic expectations

People have very little idea of the time taken to produce research results. An example was an investigation of participation and crime. Investigation of previous studies showed that conclusions were often based on dubious measures of communication. The research team searched for and tried to gain access to various data bases and then tried a number of different variables and numerous analyses before arriving at any conclusions. The timetaken in this pursuit was not evident in the production of a final paper.

Research is not consulting. The outcomes are not always clear and not are they always what is desired. One problem was the term 'evaluation'. People were reluctant to give us the results from previous evaluations of various projects and a review of previous projects had to be abandoned.

Relevance of the problem to 'user' decisions

Because of the lack of funding and the need for CPV to build partnerships to be effective the organisation had a real need for knowledge about how to manage their partnerships. The findings and the 'Good Guide to Best Practice in Community Governance' met this need.

Accessibility of the outcomes of the research to 'users'

The Advisory Committee was intended to represent the interest of stakeholders and to be communicators with their respective constituencies. The major communication of results was directed through the Advisory Committee Meetings and Reports and secondly through our papers published on our web site, at conferences and in journal articles.

The research team produced comprehensive reports every six months and a final summary report. CPV also asked for a 'user friendly' brief report for wider distribution, which resulted in the 'Guidelines for Best Practice in Community Governance. News of the project appeared the University Research Report, several papers were presented at conferences and have been

(or are in progress of being) submitted to journals. Project papers are also housed on the CICGR website.

Trust, co-operation, sustained interest

One of our problems was that the membership of the Advisory Committee changed. New members not familiar with the project felt that they had to ‘start again’ and had a confused idea of what the purpose of the project was. For example, Ethics Approval had been obtained at the beginning of the project from the University and from the Department of Justice. However, halfway through the project, a changed representation from Victoria Police meant a new request to submit an ethics application to Victoria Police.

A major problem was the change in the CPV representatives on the project. During the three years there were four changes of director, and the original liaison person was assigned to a project which took her away from the department. Data was also not compatible across all the government Agencies which each had their own boundaries and consequently data from each source had to be adapted and collated.

There are also unresolved issues about the power structures in partnership relationships with research institutions. In analysing power, theorists note that an imbalance of power can cause both satisfaction, among those with the higher power, and dissatisfaction in those without if needs are not being met. In a research partnership, there is a balance between those providing the funding and support and exercising control of information and resources, the industry partner, and those researchers achieving academic impact and institutional recognition and whose independence and autonomy are vital to their academic freedom. Issues arise about access to people and data, levels of disclosure, and how much effort goes into satisfying user requirements, and the balance between these and, for example, publications requirements, of the researchers.

When trust in partnerships is high, the partnerships are more likely to arrive at decisions through consensus and compromise and to achieve mutual benefits for both partners (Figure 3). Achieving these is the foundation of long term sustainable partnerships.

What are some of the skills needed by researchers in building partnership? Key differences between successful alliances and networks are the skills and attention given to building and cultivating networks of friends and allies. Control of the agendas and ability to influence direction is important. Membership of Advisory Committees can be crucial in building support for various projects.

Important, too, are the capacities of research team leaders for charisma, political skills, verbal skills and the capacity to articulate the research vision – and in real life to ‘sell’ the vision to both funding agencies and end users. Equally important will be their credibility with the partner and in their own institution. In partnerships it is the foundation of trust, in their own institution is leads to understanding of what will be judged socially and politically worthy of institutional support.

		TRUST	
	Low		High
High			High sustainability
I N D E P E N D E N C E			
Low		Low sustainability	

Figure 3. Trust, academic independence and sustainability

Benefits and implications of our partnership

Among the benefits derived from this study are:

- The development of a large and comprehensive database of significant value.
- The production of a comparative database of value to future researchers.
- The development of partnerships and fostered collegial relations.
- An endorsement of the value of cross-disciplinary work.
- Building partnerships is a complex task, and one for which this present study affords some useful additions. Among the conclusions drawn, and thus giving rise to recommendations, are that the collegial spirit and networking are crucial components; that the availability of comprehensive databases is an invaluable resource; and that those gifted at running projects are not necessarily the same people who are gifted at obtaining finance for such projects (or in appropriate reporting).

The theoretical structures outlined in this paper are the conceptual explanations of the community governance issues that lead to better understanding.

Conclusion

Despite the difficulties, our experiences were extremely positive. Working with a partner added enormously to the relevance of the project as well as giving it legitimacy and some accountability. There was a sense of teamwork with CPV and in an atmosphere of trust, an acceptance of our findings. Both CPV and the CICGR team brought their unique competencies and capabilities to the project. CPV gained some insight into how their partnerships were working and CICGR added significantly to the body of knowledge about community governance. This paper illuminated some of the necessary characteristics for a good research partnership. While some challenges were identified, the biggest challenge involves the question of how to maintain a sustainable partnership in crime prevention and community safety beyond the life of a research project.

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