Attraction of Strangers
Partnerships in Humanities Research

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A key objective of Backing Australia’s Ability, the Australian Government’s innovation action plan (DEST, 2001), is to encourage collaboration between universities and industry in conducting research that will advance the nation’s innovation system and drive the development of Australia as a knowledge-based economy and society.

The ARC Linkage Projects grants program was introduced in 2002 to reflect this emphasis, replacing the Strategic Partnerships with Industry Research and Training (SPIRT) scheme (1998-2001).

Attraction of Strangers: Partnerships in Humanities Research considers how Humanities researchers contribute to knowledge that is of economic, social and cultural benefit by teaming up with a wide range of industry partners through the Linkage Projects scheme.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the Linkage Projects scheme is impacting positively on both industry partners and Humanities researchers and achieving its national policy objectives:

Impact on industry. Industry partners expressed a resounding enthusiasm for their collaboration with Humanities researchers through the Linkage Projects scheme.

The scheme enables industry partners to leverage scarce resources for much needed R&D, and to have access to high quality research capacity and networks. Engagement with Humanities expertise provides industry organisations with valuable tools for conceptual renewal and innovative solutions to complex problems and issues.

Impact on the Humanities and Creative Arts. An increasing number of Humanities researchers have taken up the challenge to participate in research partnerships with industry, leading to a gradual change in practice, scope and focus of research. Humanities researchers are developing their research agendas in collaboration with colleagues in industry, knowing that their task is not only to provide critique from a distance, but to engage constructively with possible solutions.

Impact on the national innovation system. The Linkage Projects program has been a major driver in breaking down the divide between Humanities researchers and a wide range of partner organisations. Successful collaboration leads to new knowledge that transcends the theory/practice dichotomy. These successes combined with the significant growth potential for collaborative Humanities research demonstrates that the knowledge and expertise of the Humanities and Creative Arts has a considerable contribution to make to the national innovation system.

Data for the Partnerships in Humanities Research study were obtained through four avenues:
- Statistical information provided by the ARC;
- A survey conducted of grant recipients in the Humanities and Creative Arts;
- Interviews with selected chief and partner investigators;
- A major symposium in February 2004 held at the University of Western Sydney featuring industry and university research partners.

The study found that:
- The participation of Humanities and Creative Arts researchers in the ARC Linkage Projects scheme is relatively small but steadily growing;
- Industry partners in Humanities Linkage Projects are predominantly public sector organisations in Government, Administration and Defence (38 per cent), Cultural and Recreational Services (27 per cent) and Property and Business Services (13 per cent);
• There is considerable scope for much broader partnerships including the areas of Health and Community Services, Education, the Environment and Transport;

• Academic researchers in the disciplines of law, historical studies, architecture, media and communications, archaeology and the arts have been the most active initiators of Humanities Linkage Projects partnerships to date;

• The vast majority of respondents are positive about the impact of the Linkage Projects program on Humanities research, and consider engagement with a wider community a major goal of research;

• The increased emphasis on collaborative research with industry is effecting change in research practice, away from purely curiosity-driven, individual research to multidisciplinary research where outcomes are negotiated within industry contexts;

• An increasing number of Humanities researchers have made conscious decisions to adapt to the new research environment, to set new agendas, and to integrate research ideas into collaborative projects with a wide range of industry partners;

• Industry and academic researchers face multiple challenges when they enter into collaborative partnerships, and need good communication, productive teamwork, professional project management, appropriate skills development and, above all, clarity of purpose to make partnerships work;

• Humanities Linkage Projects have produced outcomes and benefits that are of major significance for the national innovation system: relevant knowledge has been created; deep industry and community engagement has been achieved; and the challenge of cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration has led to the creation of genuinely new knowledge and innovation; and

• The best Linkage Projects research involves a balance between industry and academic perspectives: it is neither industry-driven contract research nor purely curiosity-driven academic scholarship, but a complex blend of the two.

A conscious effort needs to be made by Government, the ARC and the Australian Academy of the Humanities and Universities to make the most of the exciting new opportunities created by Humanities partnerships with industry. This can be achieved through targeted publicity, education and professional development programs.
1. THE HUMANITIES AND THE NEW RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

What is the role and place of the Humanities and related disciplines in the dynamic knowledge society of the 21st century? How do Humanities researchers respond to the challenge of contributing to knowledge and innovation that will benefit the community at large? These are the key questions behind Attraction of Strangers: Partnerships in Humanities Research.

In the knowledge society, national prosperity and well-being are increasingly dependent on the generation of new ideas and the sharing of innovative knowledge across society. This has implications for the nation’s research endeavour, both within and outside universities. Backing Australia’s Ability, the Australian Government’s 2001 innovation action plan, was designed to ensure that Australian higher education research keeps pace with the global revolution in knowledge production and usage, and with the national innovation system that is driving Australia’s development as a dynamic knowledge-based economy and society.

A central development in the past two decades is the emergence of a new mode of knowledge production dubbed Mode 2 research by Michael Gibbons et al. (1994). This research style emphasises collaboration between a heterogeneous set of experts and practitioners, working together on finding solutions for a problem in specific contexts of application. This collaborative research practice is shaped by a diverse set of intellectual and social demands that may give rise to the creation of genuinely new knowledge, characterised by transdisciplinarity and social accountability.

The growing importance of Mode 2 research is reflected in one of the Australian Research Council’s grants programs, Linkage. ARC Linkage is about “brokering research partnerships within the Australian innovation system and capturing economic, social and cultural benefits of research”. One strand of the Linkage program is Linkage Projects, which aims to strengthen links between universities and ‘industry’ by funding collaborative research projects involving academic researchers and their partners in industry.

Collaboration is the key: “Collaborative links stimulate innovation by facilitating cross-cutting interactions and a free flow of ideas and knowledge. Innovation generally occurs more rapidly and with greater intensity in situations in which there is a higher degree of collaborations.” (ARC, August 2003).

Humanities researchers face particular barriers in successfully developing collaborative research of this kind for two reasons. First, the culture of Humanities research is traditionally one where curiosity-driven, individual scholarship (that is, Mode 1 research) predominates, with the most prized output that of the sole-authored monograph. As a result, many Humanities academics lack the experience, skills, and contacts which would enable them to establish meaningful linkages for collaborative research.

Second, the nature of the knowledge produced within Humanities disciplines is generally perceived be less responsive to the needs of business, industry, government and the wider community. Humanities research typically produces “explanatory models and rich and nuanced interpretations of complex questions” (SSHRC, 2001, p. 19). As a consequence, the economic, social and cultural benefits of Humanities knowledge are often difficult to measure; its contexts of application are often diffuse and inferential. The specific intellectual expertise, resources and assets that Humanities scholarship and research can bring to the solution of problems are often not understood or recognised by potential partners and collaborators.
These barriers notwithstanding, this report demonstrates that an increasing number of Humanities researchers have made conscious decisions to adapt to the new research environment, to set new agendas, and to integrate research ideas into collaborative projects with a wide range of industry partners. The projects showcased throughout clearly outline the exciting innovative capacity of Humanities researchers and their industry partners.

The Partnerships in Humanities Research study has examined the changes in Humanities research practice as a result of the new emphasis on developing partnerships with industry encouraged by ARC Linkage Projects. The study was designed to investigate the breadth of Humanities research funded under Linkage Projects, to learn how research partnerships were formed and sustained, to consider specific skills and characteristics that contributed to the success of a project, and to contemplate issues fundamental to Humanities research and scholarship in light of their capacity to contribute to knowledge that is of economic, social and cultural benefit.

Building and retaining research capacity through collaborative research with industry has been a relatively recent development in the Humanities. Their importance, however, is not in doubt (Stannage & Gare, 2001). This report provides an empirical evaluation of the experiences of Humanities researchers and their industry partners with Linkage Projects to date. It will also provide guidelines that will encourage many more researchers in these disciplines to establish linkages with a broad variety of industry partners.

The Humanities and related disciplines play an essential role in Australian society, knowledge and the strengthening of research capacity (AAH, 2003). However, resonating through the Humanities research community is the idea that “while creative possibilities are always abundant, creative realisations are sometimes not” (Caves, 2000, p. 7). Attraction of Strangers: Partnerships in Humanities Research shows how creative possibilities can be more effectively turned into an abundance of creative realisations.

2. ARC LINKAGE PROJECTS AND THE HUMANITIES AND CREATIVE ARTS

The ARC Linkage Projects grants program has been in existence since 2002. The program continues the focus of its predecessor, the Strategic Partnerships with Industry Research and Training (SPIRT) scheme, which funded collaborative research projects from 1998-2001. In this report the term Linkage Projects will be used to refer to both the current Linkage Projects and earlier SPIRT programs.

The Linkage Projects scheme supports research and development projects that are undertaken to acquire new knowledge and that involve risk or innovation.

It funds collaborative research projects between higher education researchers and industry, and identifies an allocation to projects of benefit to regional and rural communities. The interaction with actual or potential users of research outcomes is a critical element in Linkage Projects.

In addition to encouraging the development of long-term research alliances between universities and industry, Linkage Projects fosters the development and training of postdoctoral fellows and postgraduate students to pursue internationally competitive research in collaboration with industry. The program also aims to produce world-class researchers who are able to contribute to the needs of Australian industry.

The term ‘industry’ should be interpreted broadly, and can refer to partner organisations in both the public and the private sector.

“The concept of bringing universities and industry together – it’s only through doing that, that you come up with some marvellously exciting and innovative things.”

Industry partner
Linkage Projects proposals are submitted by the university-based chief investigator(s), and they must contain a significant industry contribution, both cash and in kind. In other words, there must be evidence of a real partnership.

Selection and funding recommendations on Linkage Projects applications are made by the ARC’s College of Experts, with members working together in six discipline groupings: Biological Sciences and Biotechnology; Engineering and Environmental Sciences; Humanities and Creative Arts; Mathematics, Information and Communication Sciences; Physics, Chemistry and Geoscience; and Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences. Previously, SPIRT applications were considered by a single multi-disciplinary committee, and Humanities and Social Science applications were grouped together for assessment.

To evaluate the experiences of the Humanities with Linkage Projects, the Partnerships in Humanities Research study has used data on Linkage Projects grants that were submitted to the Humanities and Creative Arts (HCA) disciplinary grouping. This is a felicitous merging of two broad discipline areas, as many scholars and practitioners working on the projects studied work in both areas. Accordingly, the actual scope of this study embraces the Creative Arts as well as the Humanities, and the references to Humanities activity in this report apply for our purposes to Creative Arts research as well. Moreover, it should be pointed out that some researchers in HCA projects also have other disciplinary backgrounds, especially in the Social Sciences.

In ARC usage the year of the project refers to the first year of funding. That is, successful applications submitted in 2001 but commencing in 2002 will be referred to as 2002 projects. Applications for projects considered in this study were submitted over the period 1997–2002; they were funded to commence between 1998–2003. In 2002, the ARC implemented two rounds for Linkage Projects applications. The timing of this study was such that only the projects funded in the first round of 2003 could be included.

Between 1998 and 2003/Round 1, there were 178 HCA projects funded through the SPIRT and Linkage Projects programs. For 2002 and 2003/Round 1 Linkage Projects, a total of $108 325 397 was awarded by the ARC; of this amount, $9 282 208, or 9 per cent, was awarded to Linkage Projects in the HCA disciplines. The average funding awarded was $210 959 over three years. The success rate for all applications was 51 per cent; for HCA applications it was 59 per cent. HCA applications made up 8 per cent of all applications during the period of study, increasing from 6 per cent in 1998 to 9 per cent in 2003.

In the six years of ARC funding of collaborative research through Linkage Projects, Humanities researchers have responded by increasing the development of innovative projects with industry. This is a relatively new development for most Humanities researchers. It is also a relatively new experience for industry to enter into research partnerships with Humanities researchers. It is therefore timely to conduct an evaluation of the experiences to date. How successful have the collaborations been? What have the partners discovered from working through the challenges of this new environment? What lessons do they have for their colleagues, both in industry and academia? How can the Linkage Projects program be improved? These are the questions driving this study.

3. THE STUDY

The Partnerships in Humanities Research study has three primary purposes:

- to gain a detailed understanding of the possibilities and limitations of research partnerships for the Humanities;
- to establish best practice guidelines for the development and conduct of high-quality collaborative Humanities research projects; and
- to provide knowledge that can assist in shaping future directions in research and research policy.

Data for the study were obtained through four components that enabled us to analyse the trends and developments in Humanities and Creative Arts collaborative research:

- Statistical information on SPIRT and Linkage Projects collaborations since 1998, based on data provided by the ARC;
- A survey sent to all SPIRT and Linkage Projects grant recipients in the Humanities and Creative Arts (HCA) disciplinary grouping the ARC between 1998 and 2003/ Round 1;
- In-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted with 26 chief and partner investigators from a broad range of projects; and
- A major symposium in February 2004 held at the University of Western Sydney that expanded industry-university dialogue through the presentation of preliminary findings of the Partnerships in Humanities Research study, showcasing Linkage Projects case studies and investigators’ experiences, and exploring the challenges and future directions for Humanities and Creative Arts research in Australia.

The survey provided general data about research partnerships including project initiation, project management, experiences with research students and postdoctoral fellows, the collaborative process, and issues for Humanities scholarship and research. The survey also probed the main characteristics of effective partnerships. To access the full survey, please go to the Australian Academy of the Humanities website, http://www.humanities.org.au/research/partnerships.htm.

A total of 301 surveys were sent out to all listed chief and partner investigators on all ARC SPIRT and Linkage Projects grants in the Humanities and Creative Arts discipline group between 1998–2003/Round 1. The survey component of the research took place over a two-month period from mid-May 2003 through mid-July 2003.

A total of 116 survey responses were received, giving us a response rate of 38.5 per cent. There was a high chief investigator response rate (65 per cent) and a low partner investigator response rate (16 per cent). Reasons for the low partner response rate include the fact that fewer than half of the ARC applications included named Partner Investigators, and unfortunately surveys were often not forwarded to the appropriate investigator. There also appears to be a high turnover in the responsible officers of the partner organisations working with Humanities researchers.
The survey sought information on research partnerships, focusing on: project initiation, project management, experiences with postgraduates and postdoctoral fellows, issues for Humanities scholarship and research, and characteristics of effective partnerships.

The results of the survey give us a snapshot of the main characteristics of Humanities research partnerships with industry, the identities of the main players, and some preliminary insight into what works and what does not work in a Humanities partnership context. A summary of survey findings is presented in Chapter Two.

A series of interviews enabled us to probe in detail why and how these partnerships work, and sometimes do not work. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. Interviewees were able to intellectually reconstruct how projects worked, where there were positive and negative aspects, and how particular processes could have been improved. Many investigators commented on how institutional assumptions and project management may have helped or hindered the project process. Research outcomes were essential ingredients to these projects; often, issues of intellectual property or publication agreements were points of discussion for all investigators involved in the projects. While these formal aspects of partnerships are important, in this report we will focus on the partnership experience, as recounted by our interviewees. It is our belief that if the participation of Humanities researchers in Linkage Projects is to grow, what will be of most use is a grounded understanding of the nuts and bolts of collaborative research practice.

The future of Humanities research has much to do with adjustment to change on the part of both academics and industry partners, the training of students who will fill future research positions, and the building of broad capacity across a range of skills and understandings. Collaborative partnerships take time, trust, and flexibility if they are going to work, especially in an innovative and interdisciplinary context. There has to be a commitment to create a mutually beneficial agenda for both university and industry partners. These issues may seem self-evident, but often they are the very issues that can derail or challenge the cohesiveness of a project. We discuss these issues at length in Chapter Three.

### Case Study: Transforming Drivers: Driving as Social, Cultural and Gendered Practice

Researchers: Dr Zoe Sofoulis, Dr Greg Noble, Dr Sarah Redshaw (University of Western Sydney) and Ms Anne Morphett and Mr Alan Finlay (NRMA Motoring & Services)

The accident statistics on young drivers aren’t very encouraging. 17–20 year old drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a crash than those aged 21 and over. Last year, young drivers aged 17–25 years, who represent 15 per cent of the population, accounted for around a quarter of all road fatalities.

These startling figures confirm the perception that many young people are reckless drivers. They also prove that current road safety messages just aren’t getting through to them. The unique approach of the Transforming Drivers research project hopes to change that.

Transforming Drivers is an innovative collaboration between Humanities researchers at the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney, and the NSW motoring body NRMA Motoring & Services. The three-year project, funded by the ARC Linkage Projects scheme, is the first research-based venture of its type in Australia to examine the cultural influences behind young people’s driving habits.

The research is developing new approaches to youth driver education and road safety awareness that take into account not only technical skills and knowledge, but also the feelings, meanings, gender issues, and the social role of cars and driving for young people.

Instead of being lectured at, or shocked into safety awareness, young drivers are being given the chance to explore ideas and reflect on their own driving experience in small peer-group settings. They are also asked for their thoughts on the images and suggestions they get from films and television programs, road safety messages, computer games and internet material.

This approach makes these young people more aware of the factors that influence their driving and the choices they make as drivers or passengers.

The inclusion of young drivers from both metropolitan and regional centres has led to a diverse array of responses, and is helping to identify regional variations in cultural perspectives on driving that may be important in future road safety campaigns.

The ultimate aim of this Humanities research collaboration is to gain a new insight into young people’s driving behaviour that will lead to a culture of change and, ultimately, reduce the road toll.

The research concept has been embraced not only by partner NRMA Motoring & Services, but also by council road safety officers, and young drivers throughout NSW. It is helping foster strong relations between all significant stakeholders: academic and non-academic; institutional and community. The project has also attracted widespread media interest, reflecting the significance of this issue to the general community.

Transforming Drivers is an excellent example of the opportunities afforded by the ARC Linkage Projects grant scheme – combining Humanities expertise and research with community and industry interests to deliver real outcomes of national benefit.
The ARC Linkage Projects scheme has provided an incentive for a growing number of HCA researchers to pursue collaborative research initiatives with a range of industry partners. Importantly, these initiatives require a different way of conducting research to that of conventional Humanities scholarship. The Linkage Projects scheme is all about a change in practice.

In this chapter we provide findings from the Partnerships in Humanities Research survey. This fundamental phase of the study offers a broad overview of some key elements of collaborative research in an HCA partnership context. To begin with, we set out to identify the main players in these projects. Who are the chief investigators, which disciplines are most represented, and who are the industry partners working with Humanities researchers? We will then look at the important issues of project initiation, management and outputs. Finally, we will discuss how the survey respondents consider the implications of ARC Linkage Projects for the future of Humanities research.

1. WHO ARE THE RESEARCHERS?

(a) Career stage

As Figure 1 shows, the majority of researchers who have been successful in winning ARC Linkage Projects grants are at a senior career level (58 per cent) or are mid-career researchers (31 per cent). In fact, only 11 per cent of respondents were at the early career stage. This result has clear professional development implications. It is crucial that opportunities be created for early career researchers to work collaboratively with relevant professionals from outside academia, to enable them to make links and networks that may result in the establishment of research partnerships throughout their careers. Early career researchers are the next generation of researchers, and their training and experience on collaborative projects such as those funded under ARC Linkage Projects may prove crucial for the future success, innovation and creativity of Humanities scholars working with or within industry.

(b) Disciplinary spread

The Humanities and Creative Arts grouping comprises a broad range of disciplines. Some of them may be more involved in collaborative partnerships than others. Figure 2 shows the disciplinary spread of Linkage Projects grant recipients as categorised by the ARC, using Research Field Classification Descriptors (RFCD) adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
“You have to be able to demonstrate how this is new knowledge and what value it has. If you can’t do that, you haven’t achieved anything and, probably, you ought not to be asking for grants.”

University researcher
The following list is a selection of the many organisations that have participated as industry partners in collaborative research with HCA researchers under the auspices of ARC Linkage Projects since 1998.

- NRMA Motoring & Services;
- Kids Help Line;
- Bureau of Meteorology;
- Palmtree Wutaru Aboriginal Corporation;
- Australian Technology Park;
- Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority;
- Fremantle Port Authority;
- New South Wales Department of Education;
- New South Wales Department for Women;
- New South Wales Premier’s Department;
- Department of State Development, Queensland;
- Queensland Health;
- Vic Health;
- Brisbane City Council;
- City of Sydney;
- Corporation of the City of Adelaide;
- City of Greater Bendigo;
- Melbourne Magistrates’ Court;
- Department of Justice;
- Western Australian Police Force;
- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority;
- Northern Land Council;
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation;
- Channel Nine;
- Special Broadcasting Service;
- Strehlow Research Centre;
- Australia Council for the Arts;
- Australian Dance Council;
- Queensland Arts Council;
- Arts Victoria;
- National Library of Australia;
- National Archives of Australia;
- Australian Museum;
- Art Gallery of New South Wales;
- Historic Houses Trust;
- South Australian Maritime Museum; and
- Australian War Memorial.

As this list demonstrates, there is an immense pool of potential industry collaborators across Australia, although there have been relatively few industry partners from the private sector to date. Thus there is considerable scope for Humanities researchers to broaden their partnerships beyond government and the broad cultural sector.

2. PROJECT INITIATION, MANAGEMENT AND OUTPUTS

(a) Project initiation
Projects to date have primarily been initiated by university-based chief investigators, signifying the continuing origination of research ideas within universities and extending to industry and community on the initiative of academics. The vast majority of academic and industry partners (83 per cent) knew each other prior to embarking on developing an ARC Linkage Projects application together. Many of the interviewees found this history of either knowing or working with each other previously to be a benefit to their collaborative project. This is an important finding: it indicates that a research partnership cannot be established overnight. It also indicates a likely need to find creative ways of putting potential partners from academia and industry in contact with one another. As shown, there is a particular need for such opportunities at the early-career stage, and the investment would pay larger dividends over the long run the earlier the opportunities are made in the partners’ careers.

(b) Project management
Many investigators noted that project management was an issue that needed more attention in the early stages of the project. This often meant more communication and planning during project initiation stages. Timelines and specifics of contract negotiation were also issues cited as important processes in the early stages of project management. According to one respondent, these problems are not peculiar to Humanities and Creative Arts partnerships, but are encountered across the board. Such institutional issues are perhaps indicative of the complex nature of industry-academy partnerships, as found in an earlier study (DETYA, 1999).
An important indicator of effective project management processes was reflected in how a research team dealt with changes in goals over time (see figures 4a and 4b).

**Did Agreed-Upon Project Goals Change over Time?**

1. Substantially 14%
2. To Some Extent 39%
3. Very Little 41%
4. Not At All 6%

**Did Goal Change Present Problems for the Team?**

1. Substantially 8%
2. To Some Extent 19%
3. Very Little 38%
4. Not At All 35%

Several respondents noted that goals had changed somewhat over the course of the project, but those changes presented few problems for the research team. There were several exceptions, particularly for project teams who had experienced a substantial change in goals. This would imply a strong commitment to collaborative research design, outputs, and goals.

Over half of the respondents noted that their Linkage Projects partnership had led to further collaboration, including the development of another ARC Linkage Projects application, other funded research, and non-research based collaboration such as publications and exhibitions. Specific kinds of collaborations included:

- Participation in lecture series and seminars;
- Co-publications;
- Website development;
- Development of a research centre within a university;
- Contract research projects;
- Access to more research sites; and
- Collaboration between indigenous communities and universities.

Additionally, several investigators who were in the early stages of their projects felt optimistic that further collaboration with their partners would occur.

In summary, successful project management was interpreted by respondents to subist in good communications and planning in the early stages of the project. If a project worked well and produced results for investigators involved, ongoing collaborations in some form were often pursued in the longer term.

**Project outputs**

What did the Humanities projects funded under Linkage Projects produce in outputs? Figure 5 shows that there is a combination of conventional academic outputs – journal articles, conference presentations, books – and alternative outputs for dissemination to a broader, non-academic public (websites and other digital products, exhibitions, films, industry guidelines, and policy statements).

This shows that these research partnerships generate a much wider range of activities and modes of communication and dissemination than conventional academic research, suggesting a real engagement with stakeholders and communities outside academia. At the same time, for academics there is a need to continue to produce outputs that are recognised as legitimate within the academic community; specifically, DEST-approved publications. As we will see in the next chapter, this double requirement generates complex balancing issues in these projects.
3. THE FUTURE OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH

(a) Effective partnerships
Did investigators consider their projects to be effective partnerships? This is an important question as it may teach us whether the experience of collaborative research has been a positive one, and whether researchers are likely to continue with this kind of research. We provided respondents with the following list of twelve characteristics of effective partnerships:

- Flexibility in project definition;
- Future collaboration prospects;
- New knowledge created;
- Identified opportunities for success early in the project;
- Developed a mutually rewarding agenda;
- Continuous assessment of the partnership;
- Attention to communication;
- Focus on shared knowledge;
- Emphasis on positive consequences for all investigators;
- Joint exploration of goals;
- Overall satisfaction with project outcomes; and
- Overall satisfaction with the project itself.

The majority of responses were satisfied with their collaborations and outcomes of their projects. Overwhelmingly, respondents said that new knowledge was created: tellingly, this outcome was achieved even when the partnership itself was described as a negative experience. Many issues about effective partnerships will be explored in further depth in the next chapter.

(b) Impact of the Linkage Projects program
Finally, survey respondents were given the opportunity to express their views on the impact of the ARC Linkage Projects program on the Humanities (figure 6). The vast majority felt positive about Linkage Projects: in their view, a greater emphasis on collaborative research as encouraged by the Linkage Projects program is a good development for the Humanities. They also believe that Humanities disciplines are well suited to industry collaboration, though interestingly they were somewhat less germane about whether industry is suited to work with the Humanities! Most respondents considered engagement with a wider community a major goal of the research, and were of the view that these collaborative projects have led to different kinds of knowledge production than other ARC programs. Interestingly, however, most respondents believe that the Humanities as a whole are only changing to some extent as a result of new schemes such as Linkage Projects.

In other words, while the move towards collaborative research partnerships was overwhelmingly experienced as a positive development by these respondents, they still see this practice as marginal to mainstream Humanities scholarship. There is, therefore, room for further growth and change, as well as the need to acknowledge the continuing importance of traditional modes of Humanities scholarship to disciplinary practice.
Kids Help Line has been providing counselling and support – or simply a friendly ear – to young people since 1991 through its national telephone counselling service. Last year alone, more than 1.1 million people between the ages of 5 and 18 dialled the freecall number for help with a range of problems including relationships with family, friends or partners, bullying, teenage pregnancy, child abuse and drug and alcohol issues.

Strong demand from young people also prompted the organisation to enter the digital arena and develop an online counselling service. In just three years of operation it’s already proven a success. In 2003, almost 15,000 young people from all over Australia logged on to vent their frustrations and work through their problems with trained counsellors.

But Kids Help Line wanted more. Emotions and feelings don’t translate well in text-only formats, and many of the nuances that come through so powerfully in the spoken word are lost on a computer screen. Many young people have problems expressing their feelings through the typed word.

To overcome this, a collaborative research partnership between QUT Creative Industries and Kids Help Line was formed, with world-first results – kids can now incorporate visual background images and other ‘emoticons’ into their online counselling sessions.

The new visual tools are giving kids the opportunity to express and process their feelings more effectively, while also providing them with an enhanced emotional vocabulary. The counsellors also find the new tools enhance the counselling process, especially with young people who are feeling overwhelmed or who have difficulty identifying and describing their inner state.

Funded under ARC Linkage Projects, this partnership brought together a mix of academic expertise from disciplines as diverse as the social sciences, creative arts and information technology. The research and development phase of the project posed a number of significant hurdles, including:

- using the internet, multimedia applications and other information technologies to advance the well-being of young people;
- identifying the forms of interactivity which engage and empower young people; and
- adapting traditional counselling practices to new and innovative online formats.

The unique approach by academic and non-academic interests in this project has also ensured that kids, especially those in remote communities with limited technical resources, aren’t left behind. Despite the addition of new graphic material to the website, it still remains accessible on older, slower computers with standard dial-up internet connections. This ensures that young people from Sydney to the Pilbara have equal access to on-line counselling services.

The merger of creative industries and counselling expertise in this research partnership has led to a new approach in protecting the mental health of young people, and technical innovation. Both have widespread benefits to academia, industry groups and the general community. The project has also generated strong commercial interest both in Australia and overseas.
The epigram to this chapter, from one of our interviewees, highlights several assumptions about the Humanities and Creative Arts, particularly the fact that research in these disciplines is mostly driven by the curiosity of the individual scholar rather than being motivated by a desire to resolve issues or problems in collaboration with an industry partner. During the course of this research, we interviewed a range of ARC Linkage Projects grant recipients who have been pioneering this new mode of research practice. Investigators were asked about the overall management of the project, how projects were conceived, how goals and outcomes were made explicit, and how those goals were achieved and agreed on. Importantly, we probed interviewees on the experience and conduct of the collaborative process itself.

Linkage Projects collaborations pose multiple challenges to all partners concerned. These projects have to be founded on a relationship of trust between the collaborators. Indeed, collaboration itself has to be learned: it is not something one can do well naturally. Moreover, misconceived assumptions about what a research partnership implies often need to be overcome; as well, it is important to be aware of the structural differences in the professional requirements and institutional constraints within which academics and their industry partners operate. To make partnerships work there are several rules that investigators would be wise to adopt: good communication, productive teamwork, appropriate project management, and the development of the necessary skills to succeed in this kind of endeavour. Underpinning all these is the need for clarity of purpose, especially about the outcomes and benefits.

Most investigators – academics and industry partners – have been overwhelmingly positive about what they have achieved. Relevant knowledge has been created, there is a deep engagement with the impact of research, and interdisciplinarity and innovation has been central to these projects, demonstrating the capacity of Humanities researchers to contribute to knowledge that is of national benefit.

1. MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

Collaborations and partnerships are at the core of this study. It is the quality of the collaboration process that makes projects work, or sometimes not work. During the interview phase, chief investigators, partner investigators, postdoctoral fellows, and postgraduate students attached to Linkage Projects research spoke about their involvement in the research process. Indeed there is potential for tensions between project team members at the application stage, the design stage, and during the conduct of the research itself. There are multiple challenges that need to be addressed in research partnerships, significantly on developing trust, learning to collaborate, dealing with misconceived assumptions, and working between different professional cultures and environments. On the essential ingredient for making
partnerships work, one investigator summed up simply, “There’s a lot of mutual respect.”

(a) The need for trust
Trust and mutual respect rate highly as qualities that can make or break a partnership. Trust within the research team was cited as something that often needed to be developed. Trust enabled research partners to get through difficult issues regarding many aspects of the project including research design, different cultures in academe and industry, and project management, to name a few. The quotations below highlight the value many investigators placed on trust as a major part of a successful partnership:

“It’s certainly easier if you’re working with people that you already know, because there has to be some degree of trust.”

“So, there’s that problem about the fact that the expectations on both sides are different, and it takes you a while, and a bit of trust, I think.”

Trust can also be developed over time, provided that the partners are committed to working together on an agenda that is of mutual benefit. The partners have to be prepared to invest in the relationship, so that trust can grow.

“I have to say that once those kinds of discussions started with the industry partner, they did significantly change and, thankfully, the industry partner and I were pretty much of the same view… there was a kind of research agenda that we could both see developing.”

“I can’t put it down much more than to the ability to listen to what they want, and to be prepared to explain why the research is of value, to be able to stand my ground a bit and to convince them… to be able to define the mutually beneficial aspects of the collaboration and not lose sight of those.”

(b) Learning to collaborate
It is clear then that learning to collaborate is one of the multiple challenges of developing a successful research partnership.

The quotation below articulates how some misconceptions about a collaborative partnership can develop.

“Well, you’re here to put the money up, I’m here to do the work. When it’s all over, I will tell you what was going on!’…Which, of course, is absolutely kiss of death. You can’t do that sort of thing!”

Clearly, there has to be a genuine willingness on both sides to invest in the collaborative process itself. In a successful partnership the collaboration has to be genuine, not token. But collaboration has to be learned, and this certainly appears to be one of the most significant challenges. One of the crucial elements here is the willingness to spend time and effort on the collaborative process itself, and to listen and learn.

“I think one of the real problems… with collaborative work, is sometimes that people underestimate the time commitment that it might just take to have those collaborations working.”

“But you can’t be only curiosity-driven, because the partner is not just going to give you money and walk away. So you’ve got to be prepared to put time into: why do you want to have a relationship with these people?”

University researcher
"It needs a lot of careful work right at the beginning, ... making sure we've got a clear understanding of all parties what the aims are, what we are trying to achieve."

The investigators stressed that keeping an open mind is essential in any collaboration. One has to be prepared to be challenged by different points of view, different perspectives and priorities.

"I suppose the skill that you really need to have in big quantities is the skill to almost embrace something that's a little broader than your particular comfort zone! So that involves a lot of listening, not being so attached to your own particular point of view."

(c) Misconceived assumptions
The following quotations, the first from an academic chief investigator and the second from a partner investigator, clearly outline the possibility for misconceptions about making a research partnership work from the perspectives of both academy and industry.

"We found it very difficult at first to convince our partners that this was a research project, and that it wasn't contract work."

"I’ve found it quite shocking to be confronted with the idea somehow that expertise and research exists only in universities! And the idea that we don’t know the literature or that we don’t have the research skills."

Some academic investigators have found it difficult to explain what ‘research’ means to their industry partners. Many industry organisations have worked on a one-to-one contract basis with specific researchers. But the purpose of ARC-funded Linkage Projects research goes beyond that of conventional notions of contract research, where an organisation hires an academic researcher to carry out research with predetermined aims and applications. Linkage Projects, on the other hand, is explicitly designed to acquire new knowledge and innovation, a process which always involves risk.

Industry partners need to come to terms with this more open-ended definition of research, and to be convinced of the perhaps less immediate but broader benefits that such research may produce.

Academic investigators, on the other hand, sometimes make the erroneous assumption that they possess a monopoly on knowledge. However, in the knowledge society of today knowledge production has become much more widely distributed, taking place in many more types of social settings and organisations, in a vast array of different relationships. As Gibbons et al (1994, p. 81) put it, “The boundaries between the intellectual world and its environment have become blurred.”

This situation is precisely what makes collaborative research partnerships potentially so fruitful and conducive to innovation. New knowledge may be generated through the productive interaction between academic and industry researchers.

This clarifies why notions of trust, mutual respect and willingness to listen and learn from each other are so important to the process of learning to collaborate.

(d) Different professional cultures and environments
Different professional cultures and institutional environments can also pose potential challenges to research partnerships. Many industry partners are foreign to the culture of academia, and vice versa. The relative freedom and flexibility of academic culture are often a cause of friction. As one academic investigator observes:

"I think industry has a problem with the culture of academia, which frankly is seen as being not particularly well-organised, a bit all over the shop, not terribly outcome-driven. More process-oriented. And there’s this idea that there’s no time scale."

One could argue that the process-oriented nature of academic research is precisely what provides researchers the intellectual space to come up with innovative and creative ideas. It is ‘free’ thinking space that has long been recognised as necessary for the generation of new knowledge. At the same time, changes in university governance and a growing emphasis on performance management has made academic research culture more focused on outcomes. The perception expressed in the quote above therefore is a stereotypical generalisation.

On the other hand, from an academic point of view the culture of industry is often seen as restrictive.

"It’s very rare to find an industry partner who thinks in anything longer than twelve month time frames, in my experience. And often, their time frame and needs are driven by imperatives that are very immediate, and might be in response to political pressure, for example, or the demand to have some kind of output to meet certain objectives in the very short term."

One academic investigator reflected on her various partnerships with industry, observing,

"They want to be able to say, ‘Well, this has solved this problem’, in a very basic, sensible, practical way."

Tensions may also arise about the nature of the outcomes of the project. Industry partner investigators generally have to be sensitive about how these outcomes are going to be received within their own organisations, and they need to communicate this to their academic collaborators.

"If the project is about to come out with things that are intensely critical of your organisation or your Minister, then people will want to know what you did about that. And you’ve got to negotiate that. People can make the points they want to make but not make them perhaps in such a direct way that they cause the problem."

Such differences in professional culture and institutional environment are of course not easy to overcome. These differences are often structurally embedded within the divergent interests and roles of organisations in society at large. These differences need to be made explicit and, where they manifest, all investigators need to be aware of the need to work towards mutual adjustment and agreed compromise.
2. MAKING PARTNERSHIPS WORK

Challenges to partnerships include universities’ and industries’ implicit assumptions of one another, and seeing difference as a deficiency. Overcoming the multiple challenges in making partnerships work necessitates respecting the conventions of good communication, developing conscious strategies of negotiation and consultation, and paying attention to goal differences. All partners bring particular strengths to their projects, and persistence, trust, openness, project management, and explicit communication strategies are means to inform each other in productive ways. Many respondents and interviewees attest that addressing these issues in the very early stages of a project is imperative to accomplishing mutually agreed-upon outcomes.

(a) Good communication

“What would lead to the failure of collaborative research very easily, would be a complete lack of communication, people going off and doing their own thing, not reporting back on what they’re doing, then turning up after having done something and they’ll say, ‘That’s not what we want! That’s not what we understood you were doing.’ Or, ‘How on earth are we supposed to use this?’”

The above quotation captures the very essence of the need for good communication. Obviously all parties need to be honest about their interests and points of view, as well as being very clear in identifying what they want to achieve. Good communication lines are therefore absolutely central, not just given lip-service. Good communication is also a technical matter of setting up conventions and protocols. Formal opportunities for communications, such as regular scheduled meetings, can be built into a partnership contributing to a communication framework from the very outset of the project. Several investigators stated that these formal protocols are important especially if collaborators are not very well acquainted with one another.

“A regular pattern of meetings, and a proper documentation of those meetings, and I think clarification of what we each expect from each other in terms of responding to comments and feedback, participation in fieldwork, people’s contribution to the writing up of research and reports.”

(b) Productive teamwork

At the most basic level, teamwork means working together toward a shared goal and a shared agenda. It is the material expression of collaboration. Conducting the project as a team, not just the sum of a collection of individuals, is central to a successful partnership. The following quotations succinctly state the essence of productive teamwork:

“So there was an interesting learning period, where we spent a lot of time finding a shared language that we could use so that we understood what we were on about... it was, at times, difficult, but we had such a commitment to the worth of the project.”

“The effective things that worked for us were getting together in groups to discuss the application long before it went in... Engaging someone else with the idea. Engaging people whom I trusted and respected, asking them for advice, and then taking it.”

Productive teamwork is, of course, about people working together. In this sense, as one interviewee said, “People and their personalities are central”.

The importance of attending to internal relationships within the team cannot be underestimated – and this is also something many researchers have to learn.

“Much of the hard work is actually to do with people management, just trying to negotiate the kinds of things which, conventionally, we Humanities scholars were rarely, if ever, taught to deal with.”

(c) Project management

Protocols for good communication, people management – they are all aspects of overall project management. Project management is key to keeping a research collaboration on track, and interviews revealed a need to adopt a more professional approach to project management. The rationales for this are many, ranging from the need for appropriate resource management to the complexities imposed by bureaucratic structures. Often, good project management just makes plain good sense, for example in establishing what may be called a ‘project memory’.

“There can be poor project management... it’s a very common thing for people engaged in research not to scope very carefully the resources they’ve got to do a particular project, particularly when you’re dealing with creative ideas people. They think, that’s a good idea and that’s a good idea and that’s a good idea... We haven’t been funded to do those things, but wouldn’t it be great, so out we go and do them!”

“[It’s useful] towards the end of the project to revisit those minutes and say, ‘Well, hang on a minute, two years ago we agreed to do this.’ It would have been quite difficult, not because there was any kind of real ill-will on the part of our partner, but simply because we were basically engaged with professionals who were also really very busy, personnel would come and go, and there’d be changes in corporate memory.”

Good project management is essential especially as Linkage Projects become more complex in scale and focus, involving more investigators and partners over longer time periods. This is of particular relevance to projects in which there is more than one industry partner involved.

“It’s actually much harder to work on a grant with two or three partners than one. I think it makes it much more difficult to have clear and streamlined outcomes.”

“Getting them together wasn’t that hard, because I had worked with many of them over the years, but the whole business of dealing with six people, and six institutions is very, very difficult and requires very serious amounts of time on relationship maintenance.”
The more industry partners you bring in, presumably the better it is in many respects, but the more difficult it is to get the actual process correct, because every industry partner may not be able to put in a similar amount of money.

One of the key management things is about branding your project. Project branding is something I never thought about until I started to do Linkage projects, but it is actually very important. In one Linkage project that I was involved in, I forgot to acknowledge one of the partners in a public seminar, and they almost pulled their funding as a result of that! So, acknowledgement and branding: Management Issue Number One!

Project management was mentioned regularly in the interviews. This means a much more structured process to planning, resource management, branding and the setting of milestones throughout the life of the project. In many ways this is a significant departure from the more diffuse research practice of the individual academic scholar, but as the experience with research partnerships accumulates, many scholars are adjusting to a more structured method of engaging in research via good project management. This issue is not specific to projects in the Humanities and Creative Arts, but applies to any industry-academy collaborative research, as found by Turpin et al in an earlier study (DETYA, 1999).

(d) Skills development
All the above issues underscore the fact that, for collaborative partnerships to work, the partners need to have some essential skills. These skills need to be developed if collaborators do not already have them. One academic investigator recounted how he had to learn all sorts of new skills beyond the mastery of traditional academic research.

I found it interesting, because I was thrown in at the deep end, and I'd effectively gone from being an historian in a kind of traditional craft model, with very small grants to write away on things that really interested me, and now suddenly I found myself having to really deal with all kinds of issues.

At the same time, on the industry side there may also be a need for skills development, especially in relation to what it means to engage with academic research.

I think there are gaps in skill in the industrial side that are very strongly exposed by collaboration. I can’t speak of all industries but just the ones I am most familiar with, but there is a tendency for people not to keep their skills up. They came out with a Bachelor’s degree 25 years ago and they have not gone near a university since, and it shows. I think there is certainly a gap in skills training for our students, when they are dealing in industry. It's a lack of experience more than anything else.

A very concrete skill that several interviewees commented on was the skill to address a multiplicity of audiences.

Producing outputs for different audiences from research like this, I think there are some challenges there. It’s difficult to find research assistants who can address the multiplicity of audiences in a fluent way, so who can write for an academic journal, a policy document, a business report?

I think that will be an interesting thing for her to learn, the different ways of packaging information for the audience. And I don’t think that’s a bad thing to be learning as a student.

In many ways the ability to address multiple audiences is central to collaborative research partnerships. For academic researchers, it is the skill to communicate beyond their own specialist peer group into the broader community.

(e) Clarity of purpose
Finally, all the good processes to make the partnership work must be underpinned by a clear idea of the very purpose of the project, and of the partnership itself. Given that most Linkage projects are relatively long-term (three years or more), there is ample scope for a complex range of activities during the life of the project. But it is important, especially for the industry partners, not to lose sight of the overall, ultimate purpose – and the outcomes and benefits they can expect from the project.

The main concern we had at the start was a lack of clarity about the purposes. And in particular, the outcomes of the project. That seemed a bit of a moveable feast at times. I mean, there was never much clarity about that at the beginning, and that lack of clarity resulted in a lack of direction for the project.

See, the task of getting the money wasn’t the problem, it was defining the field, what was do-able in this sort of project, what kind of skill sets we needed to do it, and what would have been appropriate outputs.

Establishing clarity of purpose is perhaps the most fundamental task in a project, it can make or break the outcomes and benefits it will generate – and therefore the success or failure of the partnership.

3. OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS
Perhaps the most important findings of this study come in the form of change in research practice. Clearly, the new research environment – of which the ARC Linkage Projects program is a key expression – is beginning to have a significant impact on the way that Humanities researchers engage in research. As a result of collaborative research with industry, Humanities researchers have begun to conceive of their research practice differently. In a like manner, industry collaborators noted that they are getting better at engaging with academic researchers in collaborative research projects. There has been an inevitable and essential period of learning. Often, interviewees who have received more than one Linkage Projects grant have noted that the second time has been a much better experience because of what was learned in the first. What then have been the main outcomes and benefits of these collaborative projects? Interviewees’ responses to this question can be summed up in the following categories: creating relevant knowledge, engaging impacts, and interdisciplinary and innovation.
(a) Creating relevant knowledge
Creating relevant knowledge means going beyond something that is just a good idea. Research partnerships are formed with the pursuit of knowledge in mind that is useful in some way; that is of benefit in particular social or professional contexts. ‘Relevance’, however, is a multidimensional concept. Many industry respondents viewed the idea of relevance as applicability in a practical sense. But importantly the relevance of knowledge constructed through these research partnerships goes beyond direct applicability dictated by the immediate requirements of the industry partner. Relevance here can be defined more broadly and in the longer term: other than in the case of contract research, the value of Linkage Projects research lies precisely in the delivery of more fundamental, often challenging, new knowledge that can lead to further innovation and change.

“I don’t think it’s the case that all industry partnerships are built on obsequiousness and subservience to the industry needs… I think the best industry engagement is very critical and it’s challenging to both – all sets of players.”

One industry partner describes how Linkage Projects-based research outcomes can be used as a currency to reflect on current policies and practices, and to conceptualise and effect change.

“It’s very important that we can use these research processes as a way of challenging our thinking, conceptual renewal, developing new expertise. In some cases it leads to having some better government strategies and policies. In some cases we decide, as a result of the research that we do, to fund or implement services differently and directly. In some cases, we’re using the research to talk to our colleagues in other agencies and ask them to do things differently. Sometimes what we are able to do is to turn the insights from the research into guidelines that distil what we can regard as the current wisdom of particular issues, and sometimes, as part of the process of launching research reports, you can actually raise the public profile of an issue, at least for a short time.”

In broadest terms, the relevance of a project can be measured in terms of its creation of knowledge as a public good, of benefit and interest to the general community. This is why media coverage is often considered important:

“I think the project’s strength is that it’s something innovative, it’s certainly had an enormous appeal to the media, which is for us an important part of the research, because we want people to think about the issue…and they’re talking about the issues.”

(b) Engaging impacts
In reflecting on their experiences, several interviewees mentioned that working in a collaborative partnership has encouraged them to think about the impacts of their research in different ways. As one interviewee put it, “It lends a little bit more Realpolitik to the products of research.” Significantly, this kind of research propels academics to think beyond the academic world itself when delivering the outcomes of research. What is crucial here is engagement: a sense of responsibility for what the industry partner can do with the research outcomes. As one academic researcher puts it:

“It’s made me think much more constructively rather than just critically. Rather than sitting back and providing this critique of why the museum got it all wrong, it is: How can I provide something which says, ‘well, this is how we do it’, or ‘this may be the way to go’. So I look at it as a positive outcome as well.”

When the academic researcher frames the new knowledge in an engaged manner, the impact of the research on the industry partner can be far-reaching:

“I’ve been working in this field for a very long time, about thirty years or something, and these research projects have really caused me to have a fundamental rethink about the nature of the work that I’ve been doing, and that’s fabulous – to actually really think that there’s something different happening from what I thought was happening, and I think it’s taking us to a different direction.”

Sometimes, this engagement is seen as crucial to the very sustainability of academic disciplines themselves.

“I think the sorts of history that’s being produced as a result of outreach and collaboration is what sustains the profession. To the extent that people think history has relevance, it’s because of its ability to connect with other areas, and with contemporary issues and agendas.”

Importantly, the opportunity for engagement presented by Linkage Projects is also of benefit to research students, the next generation of researchers. As one research student attached to a Linkage project observed:

“It’s educating me in a way that could never have happened, I don’t think, through some other form of study. There’s a combination of the theoretical and the practical which is, hopefully, educating me in a way that will be utilitarian! And in general terms, clearly it’s got to be a good thing for the silence to be broken down, you know.”

In short, HCA Linkage Projects partnerships are proof that Humanities researchers are not just ivory-tower scholars, but through their research contribute constructively to the solution of problems and issues in the real world.

(c) Interdisciplinarity and innovation
The most difficult aspect of the Linkage Projects to deconstruct was what made interdisciplinarity actually work in a proactive and fresh way. Investigators noted that it was an ability to be “mentally flexible” and participate in a research project that was “enormously stimulating”. A few interviewees were likewise cautious in unquestioningly embracing the notion of interdisciplinarity giving responses like “it’s a kind of buzz, but people will move into areas where there isn’t real knowledge or strength” or “you end up with a Jack of all trades and a master of none”. We must therefore not be over-enthusiastic about interdisciplinarity. As a large report on international collaboration has noted, “understanding collaboration better allows us to get closer to understanding what allows for true interdisciplinarity, a
scholarly objective that is paid much lip-service but is rarely ever made manifest.”
(SSRC, 2000, p. 1)

Nevertheless, interviewees do testify that through cross-disciplinary collaboration, new knowledge was created. It was not something that was undertaken easily, but instead involved a lot of communication and discussion (early on and throughout the projects), persistence, and individuals that trusted one another. It involved supervising postgraduate students to produce discipline-relevant theses, but still be able to think outside the boundaries of their disciplines. It also involved reevaluating their own disciplinary backgrounds and being flexible with research design after the projects were funded. The following quotations highlight that it is the creative interaction of different disciplines that produces new knowledge and innovative approaches to research.

“I’d put it as a positive challenge rather than necessarily something negative, because I do think that when people are engaging in interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary approaches to projects, they’re open to new perspectives, or otherwise they wouldn’t be engaged in it.”

“That’s what makes it unique, that it’s been able to marshal a team of people that are hard to bring together. Because normally in the academe, like speaks with like, and everybody talks in their own circles and in their own language. Well, we’re grappling with breaking that down, but that’s not to say it’s an easy process.”

“I think (interdisciplinarity) put the soul back in my research. I think it’s put the spirit and the human back in my research to realise that there is something beyond a reductionist approach.”

“The counsellors aren’t visual designers, and the visual designers aren’t the counsellors, but their interaction was what formed a lot of the new knowledge, the research, the R&D that went on in this actual process.”

“If the complexities can be resolved, the partnership between the two diverse traditions of the bureaucracy and academy can produce dazzling breakthroughs in our theoretical and practical knowledge: indeed knowledge that transcends the theoretical/practical dichotomy.”

These comments confirm what proponents of ARC Linkage and other collaborative programs have asserted, namely that research partnerships involving interaction across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries encourage creativity and innovation in very concrete and practical ways. In the words of one interviewee,

“The biggest outcome was the collaboration itself.”
Case Study: Exhibitions as Contested Sites: The Role of Museums in Contemporary Australian Society

Researchers: Professor Stephen Garton and Dr Fiona Cameron (University of Sydney) and Lynda Kelly (Australian Museum)

Is it morally wrong for a museum to showcase body scarring, piercing and tattooing? Should pieces of the planes used in the September 11 attacks in New York be featured in exhibitions? Should museums court controversy, or should they stick to the same safe, ‘tried-and-true’ displays?

Through an ARC Linkage Projects grant, Humanities researchers at the University of Sydney and the Australian Museum are now helping museums to critically examine their public role in the dissemination of new ideas and expansion of knowledge, especially on contentious issues.

The study Exhibitions as Contested Sites – the role of museums in contemporary society has demonstrated that museums around the world have a vital role to play as forums for public debate on contentious issues. But it can be a delicate balancing act, especially when the exhibition content appears to challenge traditional perceptions on what a museum should be.

The different expectations of stakeholders may be one of the greatest challenges museums must overcome in order to shake off the conservative ‘old and fuzzy’ image.

In one such case, the Australian Museum wanted to reflect and participate in contemporary culture by appealing to a younger demographic that didn’t traditionally go to museums. The resulting Body Art exhibition in 2000, featuring cultural body piercing (including genital piercing), tattooing and scarring, broke with traditional views of what material was appropriate for a museum display. It raised the ire of church groups, who condemned the exhibition as a “foray into sexual deviation”, and the resulting controversy echoed through the media.

Other museums around the world have also experienced similar backlashes from sectors of the community when presenting information that challenges traditionally held beliefs or ideals.

The research has found that part of the conflict arises from how museums view their role in society. Many museums view their role as impartial brokers of perspectives, rather than sites for serious dialogue and engagement with stakeholders on contentious topics.

However, focus groups conducted as part of the Contested Sites research have revealed that audiences identify museums as one of the few forums available to them where discussions on ‘difficult histories’ or contemporary issues can take place. They’ve also pointed to the need for a range of balanced viewpoints, rather than one static (and perhaps politically correct) view of an historical event.

Audiences are generally receptive to highly emotional and confronting material (such as fragments of the planes used to strike the World Trade Centre on September 11) being included. The study has also revealed that audiences are becoming increasingly savvy in how they interpret information sources and want to make up their own minds on the information presented, rather than being told what to think.

This innovative collaboration between Humanities researchers and museum professionals has opened the door for critical changes in the way museums interpret their collections and in the development of new thought-provoking exhibitions that challenge conventional thinking and encourage fresh perspectives on controversial issues.
This study has demonstrated that the experience of collaborative partnerships between Humanities researchers and industry has been overwhelmingly positive. While all participants in this study have made it clear that conducting research under the umbrella of ARC Linkage Projects does involve a range of challenges and difficulties that need to be addressed with care and skill, the very opportunity to work together with people from different sectors and industries – professional ‘strangers’ – has generally proved to be an exhilarating, horizon-broadening experience. More importantly, these projects prove that the expertise of Humanities scholarship and research can be made relevant and useful in a variety of contexts of application.

What then are the future prospects and possibilities for Humanities partnerships with industry? In this final chapter we will briefly reflect on the impact of the Linkage Projects program on both industry and academe, and lessons for the future we can draw from it.

1. IMPACT ON INDUSTRY

On the part of industry partners, there is a resounding enthusiasm for the new opportunities provided by the ARC Linkage Projects program. In general terms, what they especially appreciate is access to high quality research capacity. The Linkage Projects scheme enables industry partners to leverage funding through collaboration with academic researchers who can add value to scarce resources through their unique intellectual input and expertise.

“In a nutshell the most important contribution that the Linkage program makes for us is that it gives us a research capacity in conjunction with the universities that we just absolutely wouldn’t have. We wouldn’t be able to do any research that has any legitimacy to it if we were confined to the resources that are allocated within government for research.”

Overall, the very emphasis on industry-university collaboration has resulted in increasing cross-sectoral interconnections between people:

“A most particularly valuable part of it is the development of new relationships with the academics that are involved in the proposals, it’s an expanded network of building up connections no matter what actually happens with the project.”

In short, over and above the particular outcomes emanating from specific projects, Linkage Projects has been effective in encouraging longer-term collaborations. This is a major cultural change that is of key importance in a networked knowledge society. Partner organisations are becoming
increasingly aware of the benefits of these networks and of collaborative research with Humanities academics.

2. BALANCING INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES

As collaborative research partnerships are becoming more common, an overarching lesson to be learned from the experience so far is that there has to be a balance between industry and academic objectives and perspectives. In fact, securing that balance is what makes Linkage Projects both so challenging and so innovative. The best Linkage Projects research is neither purely industry-driven contract research nor purely curiosity-driven academic research, but a negotiated balance between the two. As this study has shown, the complexity is inevitable: collaboration will always involve the ongoing negotiation of difference. Learning to live and work with this fact is part of the cultural change produced by Linkage Projects. One investigator describes this in terms of different knowledge regimes:

“We want to produce work that is credible to industry, and to policy makers, and we want to produce work that is credible within our own academic environment, to our peers. Very different knowledge regimes. Challenging stuff.”

Producing new knowledge and innovation while also engaging with very real industry developments on the ground is not easy. But it is precisely this that Humanities researchers and their industry collaborators have learned to do in the context of Linkage Projects.

3. CHANGE IN THE HUMANITIES

The growing participation of Humanities researchers in collaborative partnerships of this kind signals a change in the way research is conceived, conducted and communicated by Humanities researchers. While this change is slow, it is nevertheless significant and of crucial importance to the capacity of the Humanities to contribute to the national innovation system in the 21st century knowledge society. This change has a number of dimensions, including:

• The practice of research. Collaborative work with partners in industry allows one to develop many more skills than the individual scholar would ever learn. Humanities researchers are learning to work in teams, and to develop their research agendas in collaboration with colleagues from both within and outside academia.

“...industry partner
1. TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL (ARC):

Recommendation 1
Promote research funding opportunities such as the Linkage Projects program more widely throughout industry, and emphasise the R&D benefits that collaborative research with Humanities and Creative Arts researchers can bring by providing in-depth new knowledge.

Recommendation 2
Develop reward mechanisms for a greater diversity of research outputs, in collaboration with the Department of Education, Science, and Training (DEST). Scholarly publications are still cited as being the primary output of Linkage Projects research, but other, non-academic outputs are often crucial for the communication of results to industry and the broader community. Moreover, the collaborative effort itself should be substantially rewarded.

Recommendation 3
Create mechanisms that support Early Career Researchers in pursuing collaborative research with industry, for example by allowing researchers on fixed-term contracts (e.g. postdoctoral research fellows) to apply for Linkage Projects grants as Chief Investigators.

2. TO THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES (AAH) AND THE COUNCIL FOR HUMANITIES, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (CHASS):

Recommendation 4
Work with universities to promote the benefits of programs such as ARC Linkage Projects throughout the Humanities and Creative Arts research community, for example through capacity building workshops that will enhance the skills, interest and participation of Humanities and Creative Arts researchers in pursuing multidisciplinary research in collaboration with industry.
“As a co-ordinated group – we were looking for opportunities, to continue to work together.”

University researcher

Recommendation 5
Recognise the significant contributions of industry, for example through annual awards, through industry participation at the proposed workshops, and through the media. Involve industry bodies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), the Business Council of Australia (BCA), the Business Higher Education Round Table (BHERT), and the Australian Industry Group (AIG).

Recommendation 6
Develop networking programs where academic researchers, especially early career researchers, can meet with and get to know potential partners from a wide range of partner organisations.

Recommendation 7
Promote greater understanding of the nature of collaborative research with industry, for example through an education and publicity program that emphasises the importance of an appropriate balance between academic and industry perspectives and objectives.

Recommendation 8
Establish best practice in collaborative research through the development of professional project management protocols from the beginning of the project, including agreements on division of labour, timelines, deliverables and outcomes.

Recommendation 9
Recognise that a variety of project outputs is important in terms of producing work that is credible to industry, policymakers, and academics. Each stakeholder has demands and expectations that are external to the project itself. Contributions of all stakeholders should be given equal weight throughout the course of the project.
REFERENCES


It was a leap of faith that paid off, and I think it was the goodwill between the partners that got us through the complexities.