

# Some Practical Next Steps to Grow Local Cooperation

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## Abstract

Increased local cooperation is a well understood processes used by experienced regional development and/or local capacity building practitioners (practitioners) to help stakeholders with local capacity building. However, there are some situations, like for example, tourism development in areas, with little or no experienced practitioners available. Thus this paper outlines a starting point for new practitioners in such situations, to improve local cooperation based largely on readily accessible material. In practice it matters little where the new practitioners start, it matters much more that they actually start to increase cooperation between locals (Monypenny, 2008).

The wisdom that current practitioners have is an excellent support to new practitioners in terms of:

- The drivers of regional development.
- The drivers of local cooperation.
- The practical next steps that locals could consider taking to help them grow local cooperation.

We encourage new practitioners to seek the wisdom of more experienced local practitioners.

## Introduction

In the Australian context most Local Councils have development officers and thus increased local cooperation between stakeholders is a well understood process used by the more experienced regional development and/or local capacity building practitioners (practitioners) to help stakeholders increase local capacity building. Increased local cooperation is a very board term that includes all activities and tasks that locals can do much easier or much better when they cooperate between each other rather than if or when they attempt to do them on their own.

However, there is now increased interest by stakeholders in situations that historically have not usually been associated with regional development and/or local capacity building, for them to also acquire these practitioner skills so that they can obtain benefits in similar ways to the industries with well established experienced practitioners.

Two such situations are first, the tourism industry, and especially when tourism is seen as a tool to help poverty or disadvantage reduction either in Australia or overseas, see for example Moscardo (2008), who recommends that capacity building needs to be one of the very early stages in the development process. The second, are situations in Australia that have at best limited access to more experienced regional development and/or local capacity building practitioners especially because of remoteness and/or because of disadvantage.

This paper outlines a starting point for those who want to improve their regional development and/or local capacity building skills. This starting point is based largely on readily accessible material.

There are a number of drivers of successful regional development. There are also a number of drivers of successful local cooperation. This paper will:

- Outline the drivers of regional development. This outline will help those who want to improve their skills to develop a priority learning list.
- Outline the drivers of local cooperation. This outline will help those who want to improve their skills to develop a priority learning list.
- Indicate some possible practical next steps that local stakeholders could consider taking to help them improve local capacity building.

## **Drivers of Regional Development**

One of the most important findings from the regional development literature is that each community needs to start with what they already have and then to progress gradually towards achieving their objectives (Dollahite et al., 2005; Greenfields and Home, 2006; and Salinger, Sivakumar and Motha 2005).

Increased local cooperation is one way to help stakeholders focus on what they already have as they start on the road towards improved local capacity building and sustainable regional development. We see that improved local capacity building, sustainable regional development and increased local cooperation as just three different perspectives of a local community's desire for a better future. Increased local cooperation is usually driven by a significant local community issue. For example by an illness like AIDS (Brown et al., 2005) or when the problem requires wider cooperation like regional planning (Zaferatos, 2004).

The current practitioner wisdom on regional development (Coombs, 2001) is:

- Sustainable development in small regional economies is like a combination lock, certain factors need to be in place before it happens.
- Regions should do what comes naturally to the region.
- There are opportunities in all regions; they have not all been picked-up through arbitrage.
- Regional development is about more than just economic development. Sustainable regional development in economic, social, environmental, technological and political terms is what is needed.

- Regional development critically depends on regions themselves leading the process of developing strategies and plans for realizing their region's potential.
- There is nothing unique about the general drivers of sustainable regional development. Small regional economies (like all economies) basically grow or decline according both to the demand for and the supply of the natural and human resources to which they have access and according to the investments that businesses are prepared to make (in the region).
- The institutions, policies, and social and cultural values of the community, the way in which firms and individuals organize to work together, and how firms and individuals relate with the external environment; these factors are the fundamental drivers that form the structure or framework within which incentives are created for bad or good local economic, social, environmental, technological and political behaviour.

This current practitioner wisdom supports the formal knowledge of the drivers of successful regional development. The following sections outline some of the drivers of successful regional development that can be used to help local stakeholders improve local capacity building. The sections are:

- Systems thinking.
- Industrial clustering.
- A baseline for/of progress.
- Increasing project facilitation skills.
- Combination of social and private capital.
- Sustaining competitive advantage.
- Good governance, not good government.
- Collaboration.

In our experience, in practice it matters little which driver of regional development that you use to start helping local stakeholders to improve local capacity building, it matters much more that you actually start to improve local capacity building.

### Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is one of the main tools that practitioners can use to help them improve their understanding, and management of complex systems. Beginners should not be too concerned with the fact that there is still no unifying theory of systems thinking. Monypenny (2001 and 2003) argues that systems thinking skills (of any of the varieties that are available) are critical in helping practitioners to prioritize which variables are more and which variables are less important in terms of the specific challenge that they currently face, for them to achieve their medium term objectives. These skills are important because in the real world everything is usually related to everything. Systems thinking skills help practitioners prioritize which of these relationships should be considered in looking for a solution to the specific challenge that they currently face, and which relationships should be taken as being low enough down the priority list to be ignored for the moment.

There are many good sources of systems thinking skills that you can use for local capacity building. Some of the main books are Checkland and Scholes, 1990; Flood, 1990; Maani and Cavana, 2000; and Senge, 1990 but two very good primers are

Aronson (1996-8) and Three Sigma (2002). Two very good web sites are <http://www.systems-thinking.org/index.htm> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems>. However, good systems thinking skills are also widely available in the local community, even though they are not likely to be referred to as such. All that matters is that the person has good skills to prioritize which variables are more and which variables are less important in terms of the specific challenge that they currently face. We suggest that you allocate some resources in capacity building programs to the enhancement of systems thinking skills.

Two related concepts to systems thinking are action research and experiential learning, see for example: Ohl (2006); Stokols (2006), but we suggest that beginners leave these for later.

### Industrial Clustering

Industrial clustering and cluster theory is often used by practitioners to help them provide an economic policy that is widely accepted for increasing production efficiency. A good understanding of industrial clustering can be seen as a precursor to increasing regional development, especially in industries linked to international trade. Increased cooperation between locals can be seen as one of the early stages in the development process that might lead in the medium term to the establishment of a formal cooperation agreement or to an industrial cluster. The potential benefits of the implementation of industrial clustering and cluster theory are extensive and well documented in the literature (Lines and Monypenny, 2006). Further industrial clustering readings include: Carrie (1999); Genoff and Sheather (2003); Maskell (2001); Porter (2003); Porter and Stern (2001); Roberts and Enright (2004), but we suggest that beginners leave these for later.

### A Baseline for/of Progress

One of the first steps in increasing the effectiveness of regional development is to establish just what is already available locally and/or just what has worked well locally and what still needs your attention so that you can continue to improve your whole of community outcomes (Arlett and Monypenny, 2006). Setting out to establish a baseline for progress is really not the appropriate aim. What you really need to develop is a baseline for each of those few variables that you require to support informed decision making on the next few significant issues and/or questions upon which you want to be able to make an informed decision. Developing these baseline variables is only the first step in an ongoing iterative process of action, evaluation, renewed action and renewed informed decision-making.

The available evidence from both the Australian and the overseas literature suggests that there is usually the need to gather baseline data to support only a few significant issues upon which informed decisions need to be made. Baseline information is largely only relevant as an outcome of a wider policy decision making process so we suggest that you leave this for later. Thus, the next significant step that beginners need to make related to actually developing baselines is in fact to identify those few variables that will be used or should be used in any program to increase cooperation between locals.

### Increasing Project Facilitation Skills

Improved project facilitation skills can be seen as an important precursor to increasing cooperation between locals. Increased cooperation between locals is seen as one of the early stages in the development process that might lead in the medium term (5-8 years) to the establishment of a formal cooperation agreement (Monypenny, 2006).

Improved facilitation skills can be more easily achieved by mentoring or coaching in actual real world tasks, that is, learning by doing in actual projects (Monypenny, 2006). Mentoring usually happens within a given organisational, institutional or community context. Mentoring is more likely to be successful when the context provides a very positive environment within which to mentor and to facilitate the early stages in the development process towards the establishment of a closer cooperation agreement or an industrial cluster. From an organisational, institutional or community point of view, mentoring is a relatively low risk venture. But more importantly from the local organisational, institutional or community point of view, mentoring can be used as an opportunity to explore the potential contribution that locals could make in using the improved skills achieved through local mentoring. One of the expected outcomes from mentoring locals is that they will have not only improved their project facilitation skills, but they will have also taken local ownership of their project facilitation skills and can see these improved skills as a precursor to them making a contribution to increasing cooperation between locals.

#### Combination of Social and Private Capital

A combination of private and social capital is often required in the case of large public infrastructure regional development projects that are usually the backbone of regional communities. See for example: Coombs (2001); Porter (2003); State Department of Development and Innovation (2005a); and State Department of Development and Innovation (2005b). These projects are usually more complex than private capital projects because they typically have a number of main stakeholders (Scheuber and Monypenny, 2006).

The current widespread practice of supplying public capital to introduce 'sustainable' models of service delivery into regional centres where 'normal market forces' have failed, with the view that this funding will be withdrawn once the service is 'up and running' needs to be rethought (Adema and Ladaique, 2005). Often the predominate reason that market forces have failed in the first place is because the size of the target population is too small to support the sort of sustainable business case required for the potential service providers to enter that particular market segment in the first place. For some of the relevant wider policy issues related to the combination of social and private capital, see: Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee (2005); Queensland Government, Queensland Health (2002); Queensland Government, Queensland Health (2005); and Queensland Health Systems Review (2005).

Some of the issues for these projects, following Scheuber and Monypenny, (2006), are:

- There is usually an on-going mismatch between stakeholder expectations and reality.
- This mismatch between expectations and reality is an important factor that needs to be understood when considering the local economic, social, environmental, technological and political underpinnings that are usually associated with local regional development.

- This mismatch between expectations and reality is clearly evident when it comes to education, transport, and the many other public infrastructures, that form the backbone of regional development in most regional communities.
- This mismatch between expectations and reality are usually underpinned by one or more of the following trade-offs in local decision making:
  - Between the amount of private capital and of social capital to be used.
  - Between short term and long term objectives to be achieved.
  - Between the magnitude and impact of private costs and private benefits.
  - Between the magnitude and impact of public costs and public benefits.
  - The most usual trade-off is between the magnitude of short term private costs and the magnitude of long-term public benefits.

However, good local, ongoing, working relationships between the main stakeholders will usually help bring this sort of project to fruition. Developing a local working partnership and complementarities between the private capital contribution and the social capital contribution is easier when there is an effective mechanism for first expressing and for then arriving at appropriate local policy decisions and policy implementations.

#### Sustaining Competitive Advantage

We live in a rapidly changing competitive environment where individuals, organizations and the region are all vying for a share in often-scarce resources to sustain their competitive advantage (Castorina and Monypenny, 2006).

All regions have some basic factors that influence the growth of their region. But some regions perform better than others. So what drives a region to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and economic growth? One way that we find useful in looking at the drivers of competitiveness in a regional system is that they usually have the common thread of being local: local knowledge, local relationships, local connectivity, local productivity and local social cohesion (Arbonies and Moso, 2002; Porter, 1998). These factors are those found in regions that are innovative and entrepreneurial in their efforts to sustain their competitive advantage. These regions understand that they are in control of their fate and they know the importance of building strategic alliances, networks and partnerships that will allow them to develop the new products (goods and services) for the global market that will afford them a competitive advantage that will then sustain their growth and development. One way to encourage communities to sustain their competitive advantage is by increasing local cooperation.

#### Good Governance not Good Government

The fundamental factors of regional development are the driving force of establishing incentives that reward good economic behaviour. This is bought to bear through strong democratic relationships between government, private firms and the community. Regional development has in the past, often been characterized by a top-down, central approach led by government. However, it is now governance not government that will promote sustainable economic development of regions.

When there is confusion between the meaning of government and governance there is likely to be important practical consequences. Government can be seen as a set of institutions. On the other hand, governance is about how governments and other social organizations interact, how they relate to citizens and how decisions get taken in an increasingly complex world (Plumptre and Graham, 1999). Good governance is usually done by coordinating the efforts to achieve a blending of the economic, social, environmental, technological and political resources for increasing the socio-economic welfare of the population (Coombs, 2001).

In the real world of several levels of Government, it is sometimes convenient to suggest that regions control their own economic growth and development. To some degree that is true but we would be remiss if we thought that they did it entirely on their own. Government does play an important role in sustaining regional economic growth by providing low cost public services, infrastructure, an efficient tax system and providing social goods that the private sector does not supply or undersupplies. Globalization of the world economy and increased competition means that the role of Government has changed. Government and its institutions are now charged with influencing the capacity and willingness of firms and households to meet the challenges of changing economic conditions. Changing attitudes and culture are difficult but paramount in the pursuit of sustaining regional economic growth in an increasingly competitive global economy.

#### Collaboration

Collaboration is a broad term like many others used to explain people working together such as partnership, cooperation, or network. All are used indiscriminately and quite often interchanged. In the basic sense collaboration can be described as a vehicle that organizations are trying to use to reinvent their business and maintain their competitive advantage (Bititci et al., 2004). The same literature suggests most definitions of collaboration are based on the following assumptions. Collaboration is:

- Taken to imply a very positive form of working in association with others for some form of mutual benefit (Huxham, 1996 cited in Bititci et al., 2004).
- A distinct mode of organizing that implies a positive, purposeful relationship between organizations that retain autonomy, integrity and distinct identity, and thus, the potential to withdraw from the relationship (Huxham, 1996 cited in Bititci et al., 2004).
- A number of companies linked to create and support a product (good or service) for its service life, including final disposal (Jordan and Michel, 2000 cited in Bititci et al., 2004).
- A focus on joint planning, coordination and process integration between supplier, customers and others partners in a supply chain; and also involves strategic joint decision-making about partnership and network design (McLaren et al., 2000 cited in Bititci et al., 2004).
- A process in which organizations exchange information, alter activities, share resources and enhance each other's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose by sharing risks, responsibilities and rewards (Himmelman, 1992 cited in Huxham, 1996 cited in Bititci et al., 2004).

Many different types of business structures are formulated around collaboration to gain access to new or complementary competencies, technologies and opportunities

(Pittaway et al., 2004 cited in Beacham et al., 2005) but the culture of collaboration should remain the same: mutual trust, respect, sharing of information and open communication.

The important issue regarding collaboration to sustain competitive advantage is in understanding when and with whom it is best to collaborate and when and with whom it is best to compete? Competition is an interactive process where individual, and thereby organizational, perceptions and experience affect organizational action, and thus affect interactions between competitors (Bengtsson and Kock, 1999).

To close this outline of the drivers of regional development, we want to leave you with the following two points:

First, that at the beginning of this section on the drivers of regional development, we listed the current practitioner wisdom on regional development, Coombs, (2001), the following three merit re-stating because they are where beginners should start.

- Regional development critically depends on regions themselves leading the process of developing strategies and plans for realizing their region's potential.
- There is nothing unique about the general drivers of sustainable regional development. Small regional economies (like all economies) basically grow or decline according both to the demand for and the supply of the natural and human resources to which they have access and according to the investments that businesses are prepared to make (in the region).
- The institutions, policies, and social and cultural values of the community, the way in which firms and individuals organize to work together, and how firms and individuals relate with the external environment; these factors are the fundamental drivers that form the structure or framework within which incentives are created for bad or good local economic, social, environmental, technological and political behaviour.

Second, that in practice it matters little which driver you use to start, it matters much more that you actually start to increase cooperation between locals.

## **Drivers of Local Cooperation**

In our experience, one of the most important findings from current practitioner wisdom about local cooperation is that each individual community needs to take small practical steps to make progress in increasing local cooperation.

Increased local cooperation is one way to help stakeholders focus on what they already have as they start on the road towards improved local capacity building and sustainable regional development. We see that improved local capacity building, sustainable regional development and increased local cooperation as just three different perspectives of a local community's desire for a better future.

In our experience, the current practitioner wisdom on local cooperation is:

- Local cooperation usually happens because a number of local individuals in the local community undertake activities as a small group.
- Local cooperation is always hard work because we usually need to listen more than talk.
- One of the difficulties for all communities is that the environment in which local cooperation now operates is much more turbulent than it was in the recent past.
- One of the benefits from this increased turbulence is that there is likely to be an increase in opportunities that arise from serendipity.
- However, if local cooperation is not organizationally equipped to be able to take advantage of such opportunities they will be of little use in increasing local well-being.
- Identifying the next practical step that the small group will take in increasing local cooperation is in part about copying what others do well but it is also about differentiating what the local community does from what others do.
- Two of the implications from each small group taking small practical steps are that most of these steps are relatively unique to the specific small group and that they often only become obvious with the benefit of hindsight.
- Increased local cooperation is experiential and largely context specific.
- Increased local cooperation is a continuous activity. The sophistication of the task undertaken increases from the stages in which there are few, if any, local organizations available with which to leverage off; to the well-developed stages with many capable local organizations. When there are local organizations, local networking can be encouraged by leveraging off the organizations that are already in place. The more local organizations that exist; the easier it is to leverage off them.

The following sections outline some of the drivers of successful local cooperation that can be used to help local stakeholders improve local capacity building. The sections are:

- Understand the dynamics of individuals in a small group.
- Look after group maintenance.
- Maintain your (internal) communications network.
- Manage your outside communication network.
- Leverage off what is already available locally.
- Learning by doing.
- Reflection.

In our experience, in practice it matters little which driver of local cooperation that you use to start helping local stakeholders to improve local capacity building, it matters much more that you actually start to improve local capacity building.

#### Understand Small Group Dynamics

The behaviour of small groups has been well understood for some time. Awareness of this understanding can help people manage their group. The management of a small group can range from, on the one hand, where there is a clear authority figure to the other hand where there is total collective responsibility. The basic level of understanding is the stages that groups go through such as forming, storming etc. (Jessup, 1992; Taraschi, 1998). More advanced levels of understanding helps the

group (or the group leader) to minimize the difficulties that arise in managing small groups and to maximize the strengths and the high levels of productivity that can be delivered by small groups (Crowe and Hill, 2006; Hurley and Allen, 2007). One extension to this more advanced understanding is the group being able to actually incorporate action research into their own development and into the design of their own learning, see for example: Ohl (2006); Stokols (2006).

#### Look After Group Maintenance

It is relatively easy to start a small group to work towards a given objective. It is also relatively easy to understand and to use an understanding of group dynamics to help manage a small group; however, the maintenance of the group is often ignored or overlooked. Group maintenance activities can be formal, for example a training session facilitated by an external facilitator. Group maintenance activities can be informal and can be incorporated in normal group activities by the group leader. It is often good practice for a member of the group, other than the group leader be given the task of on-going group maintenance. A well functioning small group can survive without formal group maintenance activities in the short run, but in the medium term the lack of on-going group maintenance is likely to create behaviour in some group members that is similar to that displayed in the Storming stage of small group dynamics.

#### Maintain Your (internal) Communications Network

Most small groups require a communications network. The form of the communications network that is most suited to a given small group could be as varied as there are small groups. On the one hand it could be very centralized in the hands of one individual. On the other hand it could be very diverse with individual members' communicating with different individuals for different purposes. It matters little how each small group arranges their communications network, but it does matter very much that the communications network does work well. The communications network needs to work well because if it does not it is likely to create behaviour in some group members that is similar to that displayed in the Storming stage of small group dynamics.

#### Manage Your Outside Communications Network

It is relatively easy for a small group to develop and maintain a communications network between all members of the small group. One extension to the internal communications network is to initiate, develop and maintain communications with individuals and networks that are external to the core activities of the small group. External communication is usually very demanding in time for one or more members of the small group. This time demand is in large part because of the information overload that is very likely to exist both externally to the group and to the core activities of the group. There is very likely to be a large amount of external information that is only slightly relevant to the core activities to the small group but that could very easily dilute the group's ability to process external information and easily dilute the group's energy to focus on their core activities.

However, there are usually significant potential benefits from maintaining an outside communications network, in terms of access to new ideas and experiences. One way to manage the usual information overload is by using an information gatekeeper. Information gatekeepers are widely used in managing external communications because they are usually a single person or at most a small group of people so that they can all be aware of all the information. Usually the information gatekeeper is charged with filtering out the information that is useful and then passing it on to relevant individuals for their action, see for example: Blake (2002); Ettlie and Elsenbach (2007).

#### Leverage from What is Already Available Locally

Local cooperation will at least need access to local resources. Some local resources will be easier to access and some will be difficult to access. One way for locals interested in increasing local cooperation to gain access to local resources is to leverage off existing local groups or local organizations. Two of the resources that both local groups and local organizations have, that others may not have, are a base from which to operate and from which to expend from and secondly, they have individuals who have experience from having worked in a group or an organization. The cost of using resources that are available locally will often be very little. For example: using an existing meeting room that is not in use, to hold a meeting.

#### Learning by Doing

Increasing local cooperation will usually be largely by doing, rather than by learning before you have to actually do the task. There are two important features that support learning by doing: First, having a process to capture and evaluate good small new ideas and secondly, having a process to regularly reflect on how to do better next time?

One extension to learning by doing is for the group leader to explicitly structure “doing tasks” so that first, learning does actually happen, rather than the person just doing the required task but without them having any cognition of the required learning that they are expected to achieve. Secondly, that the structure of the tasks is such that the learning achieved is enhanced. A longer term extension to learning by doing is to plan for the formal learning usually required for the next generation.

#### Reflection

Reflection is a very productive tool to help the small group progress its medium term objectives. Reflection is a significant part in increasing local cooperation because reflection skills usually permeate and underpin most of the other drivers of local cooperation. Reflection is important because it helps groups, and individuals within a group, to explore ways by which they can do a given task better next time than it was done the previous time. Reflection is an important tool to help increase local learning.

To close this outline of the drivers of local cooperation, we want to leave you with the following three points:

- Local cooperation usually happens because a number of local individuals undertake activities as a small group.
- Local cooperation is always hard work because we usually need to listen more than talk.

- Increased local cooperation is a continuous activity. The sophistication of the task undertaken increases from the stages in which there are few, if any, local organizations available with which to leverage off; to the well-developed stages with many capable local organizations. When there are local organizations, local networking can be encouraged by leveraging off the organizations that are already in place. The more local organizations that exist; the easier it is to leverage off them.

## **Some Possible Practical Next Steps**

In our experience, one of the most important findings from current practitioner wisdom about possible practical next steps is that small groups usually find that taking practical next steps are always easier with the benefit of hindsight.

Taking practical next steps, is one way to help stakeholders focus on what they already have as they start on the road towards improved local capacity building and sustainable regional development. We see that improved local capacity building, sustainable regional development and increased local cooperation as just three different perspectives of a local community's desire for a better future.

In our experience, in practice it matters little which practical next step you use to start helping local stakeholders to improve local capacity building, it matters much more that you actually start to improve local capacity building. The development of improved local capacity building usually happens because a number of local individuals undertake activities as a small group and they do so on a project-by-project basis.

The main challenge in achieving this increased local capacity building is in maintaining the size of projects undertaken to make progress such that they keep pace with the required local community capacity building; because the level of local community capacity available will largely determine the appropriate size of a given project. On the one hand the projects need to be small enough to be able to be implemented with the available local community capacity but on the other hand to be big enough to be able to provide for ongoing community capacity building.

Thus the challenge for practitioners is to learn how to apply the appropriate size of project to each individual community at their current stage of community capacity building. The reality is that each community needs to start with what they already have and then to progress gradually towards achieving their objectives. Key possible practical steps that the small group could take are:

- Ask 2 or 3 group members to look for individuals (in the group or in the wider community) who are optimistic and talk with them about what they could contribute to the group.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to look for good examples. Within your local region look at the links that already exist between stakeholders for examples of the characteristics of firms and stakeholders that are functioning well.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to look at what your region does naturally. It is helpful for you to understand what your region actually does naturally: what assets and community values exist that form the basis with which to exploit

and to improve your competitive advantage. Extending the networks, partnerships and collaborations that already exist into a regional cluster will surely strengthen the region's economy and contribute to your growing into a vibrant, healthy region.

- Ask 2 or 3 group members to improve their understanding of the dynamics of how individuals behave in a small group. Especially, the interaction between these dynamics and the processes used in project management.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to improve their understanding of the processes of group maintenance. Especially, the interaction between these processes and the needs of individuals in the group to receive support by the group for what is going on in their life outside their activities in the group.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to identify and then engage with 4 or 5 individual community members. Sustained regional development is easier, the more of the wider community is engaged. The private sector needs to see that it is to their advantage to work collaboratively to achieve a competitive advantage, to look locally for support and to ask for the right things from the Government so that together you can all promote growth. That is, not to simply receive subsidies from different levels of government that ultimately only artificially shifts the level of market competition.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to research the characteristics of regional clusters and of the involvement required by individuals, organizations and the region to transform the local challenges of a rapidly changing competitive environment into a sustainable, competitive advantage that creates value and cultivates a vibrant, healthy regional economy.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to research into the formation and development of regional clusters, and then to suggest one task that would help advance the concepts into reality.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to lead a discussion by the whole group into those aspects of the group's internal communication system that are working well and identify those aspects that need improvement. Especially, pay attention to the interaction between the required improvements and the opportunity to undertake some group capacity building.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to lead a discussion by the whole group into the group's recent experience in managing the groups outside communications network. Especially, pay attention to the experience in emerging areas of information needs that are expected to have to grow to support the group's medium term objectives.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to research the group's access to resources that can be used to leverage-off locally. Especially, those resources that are expected to be needed to support the group's medium term objectives.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to research the group's "doing tasks" used to enhance the group's learning by doing. Especially, to improve those "doing tasks" that are expected to be needed to support the group's medium term objectives.
- Ask 2 or 3 group members to research the group's reflection skills. Especially, those reflection skills specifically used in project management. This is because these reflection skills can easily become all pervasive and can thus easily drive the group in achieving their medium term objectives.

- Ask 2 or 3 group members to research how the group can put in place both systems to capture the value added of the group's activities and systems to actually measure the level of success achieved.

To close this paper we want to leave you with the following points:

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- There is nothing unique about the general drivers of sustainable regional development. Small regional economies (like all economies) basically grow or decline according both to the demand for and the supply of the natural and human resources to which they have access and according to the investments that businesses are prepared to make (in the region).
- The institutions, policies, and social and cultural values of the community, the way in which firms and individuals organize to work together, and how firms and individuals relate with the external environment; these factors are the fundamental drivers that form the structure or framework within which incentives are created for bad or good local economic, social, environmental, technological and political behaviour.

Second, from the section on the drivers of local cooperation, the following points merit re-stating because they are where beginners should start.

- Local cooperation usually happens because a number of local individuals undertake activities as a small group.
- Local cooperation is always hard work because we usually need to listen more than talk.
- Increased local cooperation is a continuous activity. The sophistication of the task undertaken increases from the stages in which there are few, if any, local organizations available with which to leverage off; to the well-developed stages with many capable local organizations. When there are local organizations, local networking can be encouraged by leveraging off the organizations that are already in place. The more local organizations that exist; the easier it is to leverage off them.

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