



A HKU project supported by The Hong Kong Jockey Club

Strategic Collaboration between Nonprofits and Business

The Case of St. James' Settlement and Octopus Cards Limited

“Strategic Collaboration between Nonprofits and Business” is a case to introduce the complexity of cross-sector collaboration at a new stage, which goes beyond check writing and engages corporate volunteers. Such transformation presents new challenges for some NGO practitioners, with a role change from a front-line social worker to a facilitator and collaborator.

This case features the collaboration between St. James' Settlement (SJS) and Octopus Cards Limited (OCL) on a joint program to enrich educational opportunities for children from low-income families. The case intends to capture how an NGO manager tackled the challenges by adapting to the business culture and developing new skillsets on the job. The target audience of the case would be NGO practitioners and MPA students, ideally with relevant work experience. It could also provide valuable exposure to undergraduate students regardless of their disciplines.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the missions and values as well as business / service models of the two organizations, explore their respective weakness and strength, and finally identify the enablers of successful strategic partnership.

Through the initiation, implementation and ongoing dynamics of the collaborative practices, the students would be able to envision the practical issues involved in the process with a real sense, and conceptualize the key factors that drive such cross-sector partnership to apply to their future careers.

Sketch of the Case

This case is written in a storytelling style, featuring a protagonist through whose personal lens the collaboration challenges and coping strategies are demonstrated. Cheng Miu Wing, an NGO manager at SJS, has experienced



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an enormous shift in the nature of her job transitioning from a social worker helping the children to a project manager collaborating with corporate partners. The two partnering organizations in the case are St. James' Settlement, a Hong Kong-based social service agency serving the disadvantaged population, and Octopus Cards Limited, a smart card payment systems operator in Hong Kong. SJS and OCL found over-lapping social purpose in improving the educational prospect for children from low-income families, and shared the motivation to do more than just charitable donation - to utilize the unique perspectives and manpower of the corporate volunteers as well as the expertise and network of the social service providers to create greater synergy.

The case highlights the 3 central challenges from the business partners, including the short attention span and focus on immediate results, tailor-made requirement of program design and high turn-over rate of CSR personnel. From the perspective of nonprofit management, it also demonstrates the essential skills to deal with organizations in the private sector and the culture differences.