

How to Lead Partnerships

As members of Christ's body, Christians are called to collaborate, yet working in partnership with other churches or ministries can be difficult and painful. This practical workshop will take you through a simple framework for thinking through some of the most important questions when setting up a partnership. It will help you figure out how to move things forward when a partnership arrangement is struggling.

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I. Introduction

- A. Reasons to partner (why bother?)
- B. Reasons not to partner (why it's never simple)
- C. What it takes to make it work
 - 1. Being fit to Partner (our own organization)
 - 2. Preparing to Partner (avoiding a bad marriage)
 - 3. Healthy Partnership (the joint relationship)
- D. Leading Partnerships is challenging (leadership qualities)

II. Being Fit to Partner

- A. **Fit with Vision, Mission and Strategy:** do you really have a clearly-defined rationale for proceeding that is consistent with your overall business objectives.

- B. **Alternative ways to achieve this:** Partnerships are hard work. Could you do this solo or buy this capability in instead?

- C. **Internal assessment:** Understand your own capabilities, strengths and weaknesses to ensure that you know what you do and don't bring to the table, and stand ready make best use of the abilities of your partners.

III. Preparing to Partner

- A. **Assessing the opportunity:** What can we achieve together that we could not achieve separately? Is there genuinely a realistic chance of achieving outcomes or benefits that justify to effort and cost?

- B. **Assessing the appetite:** Where does this partnership/project fit amongst the priorities of the respective organisations? How much top leadership time and energy will it get? Is it 'too big to fail' for either organisation? Will there be similar levels of commitment to the project? If not, are we happy to live with that?

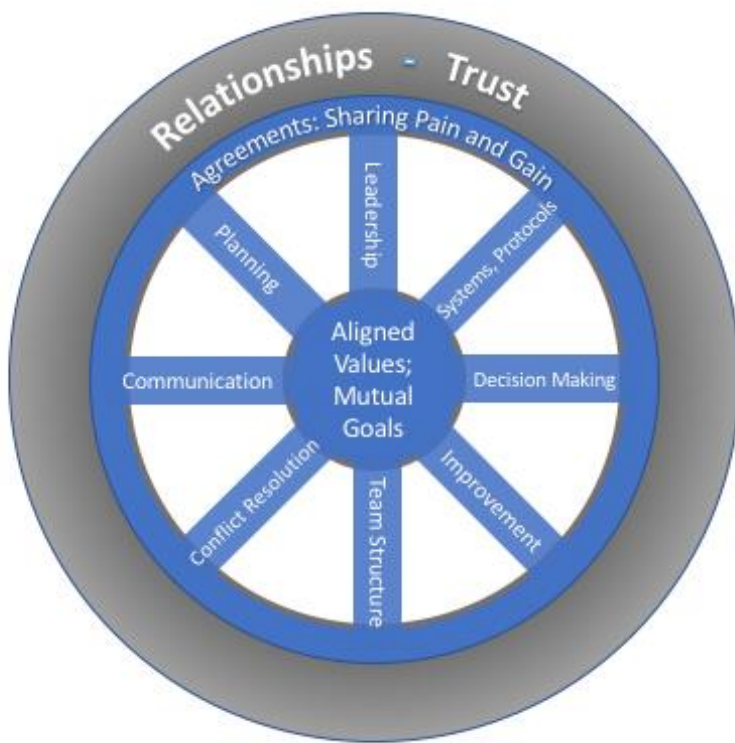
- C. **Assessing each other:** Test hard for alignment of values. Assess the culture, capability, capacity and performance of each other. Press hard to achieve honest about strengths and weaknesses. Meet and assess the key people who will be involved day to day: are they credible and reliable? Is the chemistry going to work?

- D. **Creating the formal framework:** Documenting the partnership will often expose small but important differences in expectation: Work through this phase carefully! Define in writing the goals, the structure, the questions of IP, the commercial deal (who brings what to the table, who takes what out later).

- E. **Exit strategy:** Define potential exit strategies at the outset of a collaborative relationship. It will also help to anticipate and manage risks, and ensure that disengagement at the end of the collaboration is mutually respectful.

IV. Healthy Partnership

The ‘Partnering Wheel’ below provides a diagnostic framework for reviewing the overall health of the relationship as it develops. Expect each element to change over time:



Expect each element to change over time. You could create a ‘maturity matrix’ setting out how you intend for each element to mature over time. An extract/example is shown below:

| Partnering Maturity Matrix | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|------|--|------|--|------|--|------|---|------|
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| Scoring Instructions: Each ROW represents a different aspect of partnering maturity. For each row please score TWICE as follows: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Where we are now | | | | | | | | | | |
| Where you believe we need to be for the next stage of the contract | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Beginning | | Developing | | Performing | | High performing | | Excelling | |
| Mutual objective and goals | Leaders have their own goals, but do not know what they want to achieve together. | | Leaders have shared their respective goals but there is no mutual objective for the partnership. | | Throughout the partnership leaders understand each other's goals and share a clear mutual objective. | | All individuals involved in the partnership understand the goals of each partner and are committed to the mutual objective. | | All stakeholders understand the goals of each partner and are committed to the mutual objective. | |
| | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next |
| Leadership | Leaders act contractually and do not support or challenge collective performance. | | Leaders occasionally raise performance issues but mainly focus on their own responsibilities. | | Leaders work effectively across organisational boundaries. | | Leaders work together to improve longer term partnership performance, actively challenging performance and removing the barriers to improvement. | | Leaders develop joint policy that delivers transformational change and significant strategic benefits. | |
| | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next |
| Team structure | Team structure and individual roles are unclear. | | Team structure and individual roles are discussed by leaders but are not agreed. | | Team structure and individual roles are clear and collectively agreed by the partnership. | | Team structure and individual roles are clear and the best people are selected from across the partnerships to fill them. | | Team structure and individual roles are clear and adapt rapidly and effectively to the changing needs of the partnership. | |
| | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next |
| Decision making | Partners make decisions independently of each other. | | Partners consult each other before making their own decisions. | | Partners work together to make decisions, develop plans and manage risks. | | Partners work together to identify and manage longer term risks and opportunities. | | Partners make decisions and build plans together to pursue strategic opportunities. | |
| | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next |
| Conflict resolution | Issues are avoided leading to conflict and mutual blame without action to resolve them. | | Issues are identified, discussed and managed as they arise. | | Issues are identified, discussed openly and resolved together. | | Potential issues are raised, discussed openly and resolved together using an agreed issue management process. | | The toughest issues are used to transform understanding and create new learning through courageous leadership. | |
| | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next | Now | Next |

You can see a more fully worked example [here](#).

V. Leading Partnerships

Leading a partnership is inherently more complex than leading within a single organization, because you are dealing with more variables but have less direct control.

| Scan | Relate | Act |
|------|--------|-----|
| | | |

From many years of working with strategic partnerships, the 'extra' qualities observed in those who succeed in leading partnerships include:

- Greater self-awareness and self-management than most
- Combination of confidence and humility
- Exceptional interpersonal skills
- Influencing – a wide range of influencing style; low need for formal power to get things done
- Intellectual agility – ability to see things from multiple perspectives, seeing under the surface and around the corner. Move between big picture and detail

Don't assign the person who 'doesn't quite fit your organization' to lead a partnership!