



Intelligent Partnerships

Partnership is a very fashionable word. It seems to be used by us all whenever we are thinking of co-operating in any way with others. In loose dictionary terms this may be perfectly correct, but Ian Watson and Tim Mason believe that over-use of the word and/or failure to understand the benefits of a real partnership, can lead to failure to achieve the true potential of such relationships.

Background:

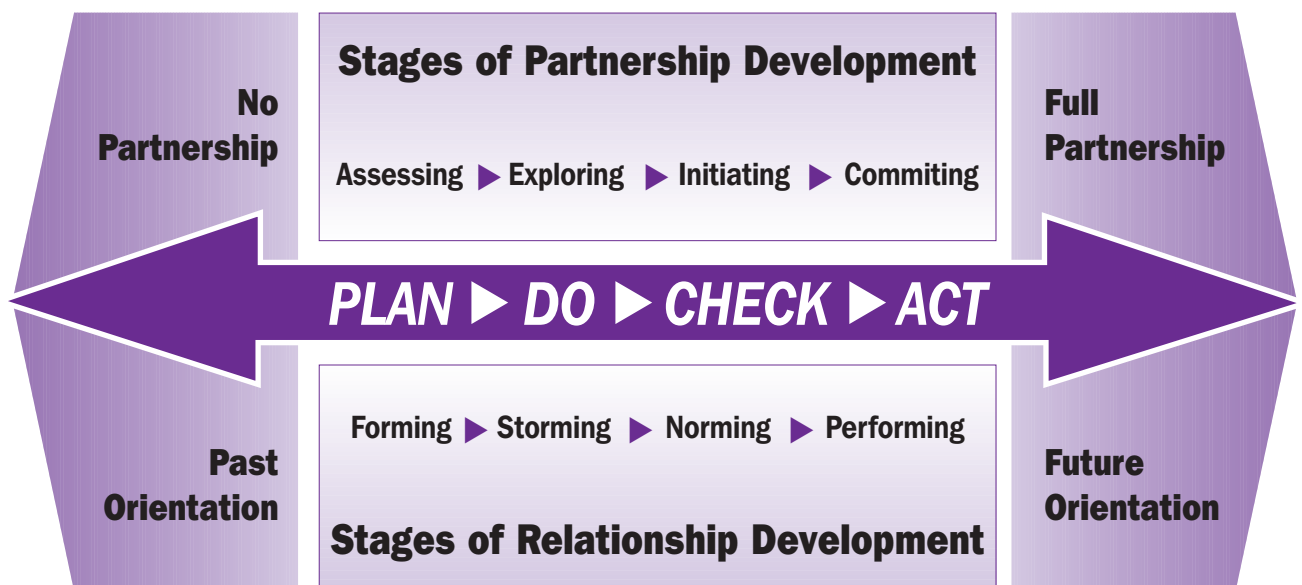
When we set up ServQ two years ago, we were looking for sound and proven approaches which we could apply for the benefit of our customers to deliver our vision of achieving sustainable levels of excellence. Part of what we sought lay in processes - including partnering processes - which allow the user to monitor results continuously so that change can be measured and appropriate action taken through a structured review cycle. This is standard project management practice so far as the hard deliverables of schedule, budget, quality and so on. Excellent software packages are available which allow us to set down plans, monitor them, perform gap analyses and put corrective actions in place. Setting up a joint project in this way, with common goals and using common project management tools and an agreed review process probably defines the word 'partnership' in most cases. We would like to suggest that such an approach is only tackling one set of issues - the 'hard' or 'project' or 'task' related ones. And we would further like to suggest that to have a partnership working at its optimum level, we also need to address the 'soft' or relationship issues with at least equal vigour. To have an effective or 'smart' partnership, we need to function effectively at both levels, and we need to have the tools and processes available to help us achieve that.

The Partnership Model

Stephen M. Dent and his Partnership Continuum Inc™ organisation in the USA have developed a comprehensive approach which they call the Partnership Model. This provides a detailed process for the development and nurturing of partnerships. The approach examines both the 'hard' issues - the Stages of Partnership Development - and the 'soft' issues - the Stages of Relationship Development' in an holistic but entirely practical manner.

The Partnership Model brings together the elements required to establish the most effective or 'smartest' partnership available to the parties. It achieves this through a disciplined approach using proven techniques to the 'hard' issues in the upper portion of the diagram:

- **Assessing** - understanding whether you need a partnership, and if so, what you want from it
- **Exploring** - identifying the right partner(s) and establishing mutual benefit - the win/win
- **Initiating** - once the right partner has been identified the next step is to secure commitment to work together and initiating a controlled first joint activity to build trust
- **Committing** - finally determining long term viability and committing to full partnership.



The lower portion of the diagram addresses the development of the relationship. The Form/ Storm/ Norm/ Perform stages may well be recognised as Tuckman's standard work. Partnership Continuum™ has adapted this static descriptor to a group dynamic.

Moving through these stages will be facilitated by the understanding and use of the 'Six Partnering Attributes' which in fact are the components of 'Partnering Intelligence'.

The concept of Partnering Intelligence

Partnering Intelligence is the ability of an organisation to succeed in establishing strong partnership relationships. Through his own management experience with major international corporations and his professional knowledge as a psychologist, Stephen Dent concluded that we can identify, measure and improve our skills as partners. He developed an indicator called the Partnering Quotient (PQ), which enables each of us to know and understand our partnering performance in a given set of circumstances. The assessment is repeatable, allowing us to examine routinely during our interactions with other parties how our behaviours are, and how they impact upon our partners and the performance of the partnership.

As noted above, Partnering Intelligence is assessed in terms of the six key attributes which collectively help partners to build highly effective and enduring relationships:

- **future orientation** - not letting past experience dictate current decision making. Past failures should be sources of learning not predictors of future outcomes. Equally, approaches which worked in the past may not work in the future
- **win/win orientation** - getting rid of the desire to win at another party's expense and embracing solutions that will have a positive outcome for both sides
- **ability to trust** each other and to be trustworthy
- **comfort with change** - recognising that while change can be uncomfortable, it may be necessary and can be a good experience if properly managed
- **comfort with interdependence** - relying on a partner for support, assistance and success, and moving to a consensus decision-making style.
- **willingness to be open** - being comfortable with self-disclosure and receptive to constructive feedback.

Each of the six attributes is measured for the individuals involved in building the partnership, and re-assessed periodically to allow progress to be monitored. In most cases measurements are done on a confidential basis, and results are used anonymously in group discussions. It is important to stress that having a 'high' or 'low' PQ is not good or bad but that it helps all concerned to understand the relationship dynamics which have a significant impact on the performance of the partnership. It is also very important to stress that PQ – unlike IQ – is based upon learned skills, and can be improved. For example:

- during '**Forming**' the first steps are taken to building a relationship, when parties come together to understand needs
- in the '**Storming**' stage the needs of the parties are asserted and opportunities to achieve a win/win are created

- '**Norming**' gives the partnership the opportunity to work together to accomplish the task and to build trust
- when '**Performing**' is achieved the success of the partners becomes aligned, and creativity and productivity soar.

The six attributes are used progressively through the four stages of relationship development, supporting each other towards the final goal of comfort with interdependence.

In the centre of the model lies the continuous improvement cycle (Plan/ Do /Check/ Act). Success in a process requires us to plan some action, do it, check the results and act on any gap between planned and actual outcomes. We find the PDCA cycle simple and effective.

In the final analysis the difference we propose is that successful partnerships are made by design rather than by evolution, and are made by people with learned partnering skills.

The Partnering Intelligence web-site (www.partneringintelligence.com) has a short on-line assessment where you can measure your current level on each of the 6 attributes. It also contains more information on the Partnership Model and the resources available to help users out the model into practice.

How the Partnership Model could help

Partnership development is not rocket science so it's perhaps surprising that many organisations don't seem to do it well and some don't seem to know where to start. The Partnership Model is therefore a welcome conceptual framework and training tool for something that is becoming increasingly central to the Government's agenda for delivering effective public services.

The formation of partnerships is not just about developing the right process for ensuring that local initiatives meet identified needs. It's also about identifying who are the best organisations to partner with, building a trusting relationship and bringing the best from each organisation without losing their individual identity. Too often the big players dwarf the small ones and then wonder why smaller organisations are not willing to join partnership or consortia groups. The Partnership Model can help the voluntary and community sector, the private sector and the statutory sector to explore together how they can respond to identified needs with better solutions than any single organisation could produce and thus ensure the available resources are used to their full potential.

No, partnership development is not rocket science, but in today's world where competition is so great, and big is not always beautiful, maybe we need methods to help us achieve a better way of working together.

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