

Organisational Partnerships

Session summary paper for EMCC UK Annual Conference 2010

Introduction

As organisations grow the complexity of selling and delivering a service or product to customers increase dramatically. The traditional way of “dividing the labour” originating back from Adam Smith in the late 1700’s and progress of the scientific management methods born of Frederick Taylor’s and Frank and Lillian Gilbreth’s ‘time and motion’ studies in the early 1900s have undoubtedly led to efficiency improvements. Combined, however, with the prevailing hierarchical management structure approach, they have also led to increasingly complex value chains, with numerous ‘silos’ as responsibilities are ‘handed over’ along the value chain.

With the move towards outsourcing in the late 1900s complexity has increased to a new level.

Barriers

Creating strong partnerships between the client organisation and its key strategic outsourcing providers are essential to success, but they often struggle due to the many barriers presenting themselves including:

- People not having the right skills or mindset
- Incompatible systems or processes
- Silo mentality
- Complex processes with little visibility of the end-to-end process
- Misaligned business, team and individuals goals
- Performance measures which drives the wrong behaviours
- “Need to know” communication
- Mistrust between partners
- Relationships measured and driven by Service Level Agreements (SLA)
- Hierarchical management structures
- Disempowering leadership approach
- Different cultures breeding resentment



It is not only between the client and the outsourcing provider that there can be such barriers. There are often as many barriers between departments within each of the partners’ own organisations.

Unfortunately the end-results can be

- A poor inconsistent service experience for the customers, with feelings of confusion and bureaucracy
- A ‘them-and-us’ blame culture with lack of communication and an abundance of wasteful activities.
- Staff from all areas being focused on fire fighting, conflicts and confrontations with a prevailing sense of lack of ownership
- Managers resorting to ‘policing’ the deal with increasingly detailed measures of performance
- Lawsuits as the relationships descend into the hands of lawyers and the courts.

Turning it around

To help organisations turn around partnerships (whether we are looking at just internal functions or across several organisations) we use a four stage approach.

1. Create the case for change through **raising awareness**. This is done by building a comprehensive picture of the current situation - typically through structured feedback from people across the client organisation, the outsourcing provider(s) and customers. The feedback will be collated and summarised so key barriers to the partnership emerge, allowing a focused, practical approach to improve the partnership going forward.
2. **Build ownership and energise**, starting with senior management from both the client and the outsourcing provider(s). We reflect back the feedback from staff and customers, and facilitate management to take ownership for finding ways to alleviate the barriers and move the partnership forward
3. **Create the partnership team**. Our approach is to think of partnership as a team building exercise – see next section.
4. Help the organisations **learn** from the experience, **sustain** the improvements and continuously **improve**. The world will keep on changing around the partnership and it is essential to build the ability to reinvent how they work together, the processes and their relationships.



Partnership team

At Quiver Management we approach the partnership building stage as akin to building a team across all levels of the organisations. In essence we apply many of our standard methods for building high performing teams, but recognise that the complexity is much higher.

Even the basics of establishing who is involved in the partnership team can be difficult i.e. who is involved in the value chain / service? Some may only be involved part-time; some may have responsibility for multiple clients etc.



The methods for creating the partnership team vary, but typically include:

- Creating **shared goals** that commit the PLT (Partnership Leadership Team), but also make sense for middle management and front line. It can be extremely challenging to devise and implement these shared goals as significant levels of trust are required
- Building relationships at all levels, **connecting team members**, creating empathy and understanding
- Helping everybody think '**end-to-end**' service, so it becomes customer centric and people along the value chain take ownership for the end-customer experience (as opposed to the 'internal customer' mindset)
- Removing barriers e.g. IT , structure, communication, performance measures, processes etc as describe above
- **Engaging widely** so senior management listen to, involve and get buy-in from all levels and all areas of the partnership.

The coach's role

There are clear overlaps between consulting and coaching in this approach. In certain areas, however, we apply a distinct coaching approach:

- We will typically provide team coaching to the Partnership Leadership Team (PLT), where we work with the cross organisational PLT to build relationships, empathy, shared goals and strong working relationships. This can be a particular challenging task, as the individual team members may struggle to find common ground and will arrive with very different motives and mindsets.
- We will provide 1:1 coaching of key members of the partnership e.g. senior operational and relationship managers, project managers etc. Through 1:1 coaching we help and challenge each manager to deliver on the partnership building activities within their areas of responsibility and influence
- In addition we also tend to use coaches for the data gathering process in the 'Raising Awareness' stage as we find that coaches are better interviewers than traditional consultants. Coaches come to the coaching conversation with a more inquisitive, open mind than traditional consultants, who we find tends to look for solutions too early in the process
- We take a coaching and facilitative approach to all our interactions, as we help the organisations involved find their own approach and solutions to the problems. We bring frameworks, tools and structures that may be useful for helping the organisations make sense of their reality, but these will often be adapted by the project team to fit the particular circumstances of the partnership.

One comment worth mentioning is that we subscribe to the idea of "systemic transformational coaching" as described by Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith. Coaching is as means to further the partnership, so the questions we ask ourselves as coaches go along the lines of:

- What needs to change in the wider partnership system? And in turn
- What shift does this require in the PLT as a team and the individual I am coaching?
- What shift in mindset and feeling does this require in the coachee(s)?
- So – what questions do I need to ask to make this happen?

Benefits

We have experienced very substantial and sustained benefits from this approach. It is very practical and result orientated, while still working at the behaviour and mindset level necessary to enable real change in how people manage and build strong, trusting partner relationships.

Some of the benefits often highlighted by the client and outsourcing providers include:

- Substantial improvements in customer service through stronger customer orientation and end-to-end service thinking
- Shared purpose across the partners in the value chain. These help drive improvements in service, effectiveness and efficiencies
- High increase in staff motivation and pride
- A shift away from silo mentality and blame culture, with fire fighting being replaced by exploring opportunities together
- Improved relationships across functions within the organisations as well as between the client and partner organisations
- Development of a leadership community with strong ownership for making it a success
- A successful model for other partnerships

Outsourcing providers also cite:

- More business and increased profits from the partner relationship
- Improved contract retention due to stronger personal relationships plus better and more costs effective service – thereby providing a higher entry barrier for new bidders

Conclusion

Large outsourcing supplier relationships are big strategic commitments from all parties' sides. The failures can be spectacular when not done well, but also provide a huge competitive advantage when true win/win partnerships are created.

Partnerships are very complicated affairs and require real insight into organisational systems and human behaviours – exactly the space where executive coaches can make a real difference.

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Quiver Management
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About Quiver Management



Quiver Management provides coaching related services to leaders and leadership teams in large corporate and public sector organisations.

Quiver Management is at the cutting edge of using coaching within organisations to increase performance, support senior executives, build high performing leadership teams and create organisational partnerships.

Quiver Management also provides coaching and mentoring qualification courses for leaders and professionals.



Experienced team

Our team of coaches all come from successful senior executive careers with blue-chip organisations and public sector bodies. Collectively we bring experience from a broad spectrum of disciplines in public, private and not-for-profit sectors. We have lived and worked with organisational cultures spanning five continents.

With leadership experience up to director level from blue-chip companies and public sector agencies, we bring empathy for the challenges faced by our clients, and understanding for the complexity of the environments in which they operate.

Passionate

We have a passion for people and the impact they have within organisations. As colleagues we are brought together by our belief in coaching as the most powerful driver for changing mindsets and behaviours. We believe that coaching must be result-orientated and make a practical difference – on many levels – for the coachee, their team, and their organisation.

Impressive customer list

Founded in 2002, we have worked with an impressive list of large private and public sector organisations including Lloyds Banking Group, British Gas, Fujitsu Services, Scottish Water, Tesco Bank, NHS and many more.



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