

Strategic Partnerships

Working in partnership is now acknowledged to be a key criteria for thriving in both the private and public sectors. The benefits include a greater critical mass, giving the ability to deliver beyond the capabilities of any one partner, the opportunity to draw on more resources, the ability to find new and better ways of working, the ability to spread risks and to reduce/share costs. However, establishing highly effective partnerships can be complex and frustrating.

For example:

- Are you troubled by the gap between the aspirations of your partnership and the realities of partnership working?
- Are you struggling to mobilise the behaviours that lead to effective partnership working?
- Do you feel caught in the dilemma between inclusivity and manageability?

Challenges and tensions we have noticed and helped partnerships work with include:

Challenges

- people, skills and resources
- engaging with different organisational cultures
- avoiding tokenism
- getting meaningful involvement

Tensions

- strategic versus operational issues
- decision-making processes
- roles and responsibilities
- maintaining motivation
- fear of letting go

These tensions and challenges, when not acknowledged, can hinder the development and impact of partnerships. When partnerships are open to exploring their performance and placing effort into their development as a group and as individuals, the synergistic effects originally sought by the formation of a partnership can be released.

Bath Consultancy Group has experience of supporting partnerships, both in the formation stage and later in their development. We employ a range of interventions to effect change and performance improvement. This may include the following:

- establishing (and in some cases, re-establishing) purpose, vision, goals and objectives
- mapping roles and responsibilities (including interdependencies)
- personal development and coaching to improve contribution
- facilitated events to move the partnership forward
- development of strategy, leadership and culture

At the heart of our work is the development of meaningful relationships where interdependency is based on mutual trust and understanding, where difficult decisions and resource sharing is based upon jointly-agreed goals and aspirations and where partners feel able to support and challenge each other in the spirit of common goals. Bath Consultancy Group itself uses a model of partnership working and so we can empathise with the stages of development and potential barriers many of our clients face, using our experience to help unblock and create the positive energy required for partnerships to be successful.

Example

BCG has worked for over a year with the Public Service Management Wales (PSMW) Team, which is hosted by Welsh Assembly Government. The team aims to develop the capacity of public service managers and organisations to work effectively in collaboration across boundaries in order to improve public services for and with users, citizens and communities.

We have helped shape the innovative programmes and projects that PSMW commissions to support the aim of citizen centred services. Some of the key PSMW activities which BCG has helped shape are:-

- Connect 4 Cymru – a ground breaking programme designed to support and develop middle managers involved in driving cross boundary change.
- People Exchange Wales – facilitating interchange opportunities between public sector organisations.
- Action learning sets for senior managers across public service.