

The Collaboration Spectrum

Defining partnership

Just like team-working, partnering is about building trust and sharing responsibility. But in partnering, the relationships can be more complex. We'd say that the defining characteristics of a partnership are that all parties:

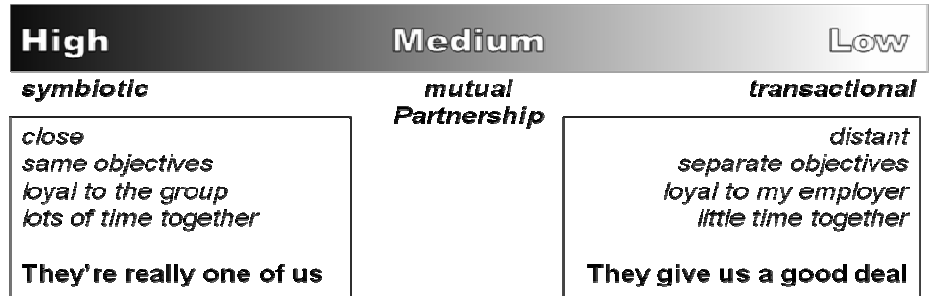
- *belong to separate organisations (although they may be in the same company)*
- *don't actually spend much time together, but have a long-term relationship*
- *share some risk and reward*
- *may have little or no choice but to work together because switching isn't contractually or politically realistic.*

Building a highly effective team is about creating common ground (shared values and ways of working) and closing any gaps. That degree of almost tribal proximity just isn't appropriate for a partnership. Partners have divided loyalties – and they shouldn't feel guilty about that.

The collaboration spectrum

At Socia, we find it useful to look at partnering relationships as being on a collaboration spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is the traditional team model, and at the other is the simple supplier relationship. Where a partnering relationship fits on the spectrum depends on how much the parties need to collaborate, where their loyalties lie, and how much time they spend together. Partnering is about getting beyond the transactional, but doesn't mean we live and die together. These days, almost every supplier calls itself a partner and many partnerships call themselves teams.

Amount of collaboration



What the collaboration spectrum shows is that different types of partnering arrangements are appropriate for different sorts of relationship. Our experience is that trying to get a partnership that's in the middle of the spectrum to operate as a traditional team wastes resource and often leads to disillusionment.

This is more than a debate about terminology. A lack of clarity about the form of a relationship can severely affect its success. At one end of the spectrum are relationships in which each party depends on the other for its survival. At the other are relationships based on effective transactions.

Acknowledging difference

We've been using the collaboration spectrum as a diagnostic tool with our clients to help them improve how they interact with their partners. Surprisingly, a lot of the problems they face stem from an almost instinctive need to impose the principles of team-building on their partnerships. This leads to unrealistic expectations, which in turn can lead to break-downs in trust.

We believe that successful partnering demands that people:

- recognise that partners don't all have the same aims and don't act as if 100% alignment exists
- don't try to change partners into their own likeness
- don't judge each other because of their differences.

A new model

Team-based and contract-based relationships have their place, but for true partnerships, we need a new model of interaction based on the right Governance, Operations and Behaviours. The collaboration spectrum is a useful way to help identify if partnering is the right approach for your situation.



Central Court, 25
Southampton Buildings,
London WC2A 1AL | t +44
(0)870 787 6202 | e