



Creating Effective Partnerships

From concept to delivery BeeAgile consultants enable both sides of a service partnership to maximise success, whether it be constructing a rigorous framework for working together, managing changes across the partner organisations or troubleshooting to improve the effectiveness of existing partnerships at reducing cost and increasing quality and delivery.

When do you need a partnership?

External sourcing and internal shared services are now a fundamental part of most companies' strategy. This is especially true of IT, which still has the lion's share of the market with business process sourcing and services growing fast.

The challenge is not just what to outsource to whom, but how to exploit internal and external managed services so as to control costs while increasing quality and delivery.

Some sourcing relationships are essentially transactional (for example operational services or infrastructure). These can be managed well through contracts, service level agreements and so forth. But if they also aim to add value to the client business, some form of partnership is vital to provide the understanding, responsiveness and innovation that create a success story - especially when complete business processes, not just systems, are at stake.

The question is how can you make space for the creative opportunities while still keeping a firm hand on costs and service levels? Often "partnership" is no more than a "get out clause" for one party or both, and apparently friendly partnerships turn sour the minute a problem arises. This usually results in all parties reverting to a contractual approach, which is more concerned with avoiding blame than solving and learning from the problem.

This is a shame, because effective partnering is the best route to achieving and sustaining the magic combination of affordable cost, excellent delivery and innovation.

The BeeAgile approach

BeeAgile works with customers, suppliers and consortia to construct successful partnerships and improve performance. We are primarily concerned with how the partnership is set up, managed and governed – as opposed to aspects such as the legal framework and supplier selection.

We use four deceptively simple rules to sustain success:

BeeAgile Partnership Golden Rules

- Rule 1: Ensure shared vision, goals, plans, processes and allocation of responsibilities are deeply understood and drive the partnership.
- Rule 2: Build in realistic and proportionate gain and risk sharing – in both directions.
- Rule 3: Design a joint organisation, goals and plan.
- Rule 4: Manage transition to the new partnership arrangement as a change on both sides.

These rules sound simple and obvious but it is surprising how often they are applied only superficially or not at all.

The case studies below illustrate the steps in constructing partnerships that embody the golden rules – and show how this has paid off for all parties.

The first two used a method called QFD as the basis for designing partnerships around a rigorous and shared vision, goals and plan. Responsible managers from the different parties built this together, going into sufficient detail to specify processes, performance targets and responsibilities within and across the organisations. This set up a management system with measurable targets geared around the goals all parties valued and provided a basis for gain sharing.

The team workshop approach creates openness and ensures everyone understands the dependencies and owns the joint plan, thus laying the foundations for change management. Leadership and cultural aspects of change are as important as the systematic approach.

Selected case studies

Microsoft UK Partner Services Group

Mike Clargo, a founder member of BeeAgile, used QFD to structure a workshop-based joint planning process between Microsoft and 5 partner organisations as a foundation for successfully growing businesses together. The QFD methodology drove a much deeper understanding between the partners, enabled more creative synergies to be formed, provided a basis for effective joint management of the alliance, and led to a marked improvement in productivity and results – in one case doubling the overall performance.

Retail Point-of-sale Joint Venture

A major retailer needed to turn around deteriorating working relationships between the client and IT company teams (150 people in total) who were jointly developing a new point-of-sale system. The joint venture was becoming mired in mutual blame accompanied by a tendency to specify everything in more and more detail. QFD was used to structure a “virtual organisation” working to common goals and agreed ways of delivery within the two companies.

Computing Firms

Following a global merger, two computing firms wished to integrate their operations. Working to the joint board and programme director the consultants supported planning and execution of post-merger activities and provided specialist input in product innovation and supply chain management. The merger was completed successfully resulting in harmonization of 30-40% of their product lines, moved two manufacturing facilities to Eastern Europe and the Far East, reduced total headcount by 20% and succeeded in meeting 10% per annum market growth targets.

BeeAgile people

BeeAgile specialises in delivering complex change successfully – and partnerships are one key aspect of this. The key people behind the BeeAgile concept – 11 highly experienced senior executives and leading professional consultants - include former directors of Dixons, Marconi, Tektronix and Unilever, and senior managers / consultants from Accenture, PWC, Ernst & Young, KPMG and PA Consulting. BeeAgile is also supported by the extensive resources and business expertise of many of the UK's leading independent management consultants.

Our clients

Here are some of the organisations where our consultants have worked.

Partnership and programme / change management expertise

- AA
- American Express
- Atkins
- Barclays Bank
- British Airways
- CERN
- Compaq
- DEFRA
- DTI
- DuPont
- Employment Service
- Ericsson
- Fujitsu-Siemens
- General Motors
- Gillette
- GlaxoSmithKline
- Home Office
- Inland Revenue
- London Underground
- Mars
- McAlpine
- Microsoft
- Metropolitan Police
- MOD
- National Power
- Office of Deputy Prime Minister
- Philips
- Shell
- Tate & Lyle
- Unilever

If you are struggling with adversarial partnerships, or simply want insight into how to avoid them in future, please contact us on a no commitment basis. We are always keen to share experience.

For further information please contact:

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