

Partnership proofing – smoothing the pathway to success

What do we mean? *Partnership is about people/ communities/ organisations working together to achieve what would be difficult or impossible alone*

The road to successful outcomes through partnership is littered with the skeletons of failed partnerships, whose downfall is often the ‘rush to deliver’. The idea of “partnership proofing” is to ensure that all key stakeholders are engaged, have ownership, commitment and capacity and that as a result the development to hand can be developed and delivered collaboratively.

Taking time out to think about what’s needed to make a partnership successful is therefore time well spent. *Characterising* your partnership is a good starting point. On a *consensual-contractual continuum* from “informal network” (nice to meet, share experiences and information) through to “merger” (we are one) a whole range of organisational structures and relationships make for different approaches to successful partnerships.

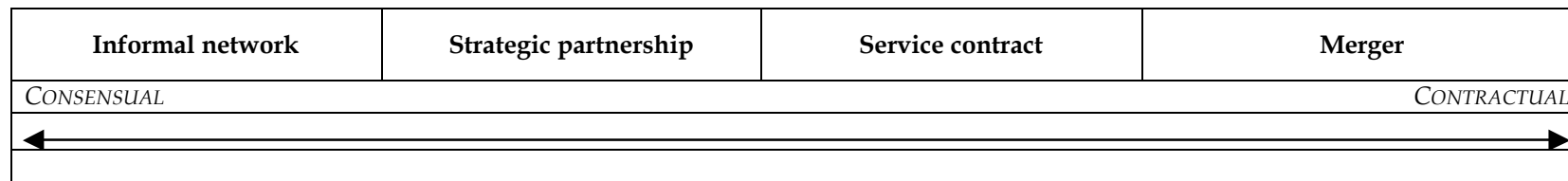
Partnership typologies along this continuum include both **strategic level partnerships** - where equality in status, shared decision-making and accountability are at a premium; and **contractually based partnerships** - where clear hierarchies, a focus on defined outputs, and financial incentives or even penalties feature. The emphasis on what’s to be achieved may be different, but the results are just as important.

Common to both is the commitment of time and resources to getting the infrastructure and hidden wiring right so that delivery can take place unhindered by confusion, misconceptions, assumptions or half understood relationships.

Checking out your partnership

The two *partner-self checklists* that follow can be useful to understanding where you are now, what your strengths and weaknesses are, and what you need to do, or what support you should call on. And it may be best to do it with your actual/ prospective partners. But be honest about it - problems cropping up later will get in the way.

- 1.) **Identify, roughly speaking, where you see your partnership on the *consensual-contractual continuum*** (NB. The 4 typologies are examples only, given just to help identify ‘staging posts’; they do not represent all forms of partnership on the continuum).



2.) Indicate how well you feel your partnership scores on the following indicators of partnership working – and note any actions needed and support required. As a broad measure, scores of 1 and 2 suggest a degree of weakness, or worth paying attention to; 3 & 4 suggest things may be moving in the right direction.

	<i>Weak</i>		<i>Strong</i>		Action required
	1	2	3	4	
Its purpose is clearly understood and stated					
Outputs to be delivered are clearly understood, defined and accepted					
Partner & individual roles & responsibilities are clear and stated					
Performance expectations (outcomes and standards) jointly specified, and balanced with the capacity to deliver					
Partners are fully prepared to be <i>jointly</i> accountable					
There are arrangements for managing the partnership’s formal affairs, including administration, relationships and reviewing performance					
There is a willingness to share (e.g. information, ideas, resources) and personal relationships are good					
Partners refer to their partnership in community terms					
There is genuine openness & trust in communicating & working together					
Mechanisms are in place for resolving any disputes between partners					
A problem solving approach to issues - rather than seeking to apportion blame					