

Collaboration and Partnership Working

Delivering better together

Third sector organisations are increasingly being encouraged to collaborate – with each other and with public sector providers. This may be driven by financial constraints, by commissioning, or simply to achieve better outcomes for beneficiaries. It can even go as far as merging two or more organisations to form a new one. Whatever the situation, collaboration and partnerships are easier said than done.

I'm trained in BS 11,000, the British Standard (soon to be international) for collaborative business relationships. This standard shares and promotes best practice in partnerships and other forms of joint working, applicable to all types of organisations.

For most charities and social enterprises, the standard is more detailed than they could reasonably apply in practice. Key principles still apply though, and can be summarised with the acronym **COUPLE**:

- **C**ommitment: Do you really want to do this? Do you and your partners have shared values that you both believe in? Is there a real commitment on both sides to a truly collaborative joint working?
- **O**utcomes: Are you clear what you are trying to achieve? What's in it for everyone involved? Do you know how you will measure success, and how you will demonstrate the difference the partnership makes?
- **U**nderstanding: How much do you know about your partner organisations and how they work? What issues does this raise and how will you address them?
- **P**rocesses: What are the practicalities of working together? How will you design and agree working methods, recording or IT systems, and the procedure is needed for effective day-to-day working?
- **L**eadership: What does leadership for the partnership look like? Who is responsible for what, and how will joint decisions be made?
- **E**xecution: Now make it happen! Can you plan, monitor, review and improve how the partnership will work to sustain its success?

Many successful partnerships have been achieved, within the third sector and beyond. But many more organisations have found this difficult to achieve – particularly where “forced marriage” might be a better description than “partnership”!

Need help? Contact me at andy@real-improvement.com