



Troubleshooting

USE

To support partners to deal with internal partnering challenges

PARTNERING PHASE

All phases

Challenges and problems are a healthy part of any partnering journey. When dealing with such issues, the higher the degree of trust and the strength of the relationship, the more commitment there will be to finding solutions and moving forwards.

At the same time, the way that partners deal with challenges has the potential to build the relationship (and potentially results in changes that make the partnership healthier in the long run), or it may end up damaging or even destroying the collaboration.

1

Avoid a blame culture

If you believe you are partly or fully responsible for problem (e.g. you've failed to deliver on a commitment or made a mistake) accept responsibility and be transparent about it. If a problem has arisen in your partner's domain, in recognition of your respect for them, do not simply jump to blaming the partner, but keep an open mind.

2

Create common understanding of the issues involved

When something goes wrong, partners may have quite different understandings of the causes of the problem. The figure below demonstrates how it can happen. Firstly, partners may not have access to the same information, the 'common data', and so will be working from different information. Secondly, in interpreting the information, each partner will have its own 'lenses': 1) they make assumptions, thereby adding extra data (yellow) which may or may not be valid; 2) they will then have their own cultural or experiential interpretation of the (different) information, leading to different understanding.

To build common understanding involves working with your partner to together try to merge each partner 'track' of observation, interpretation and understanding as much as possible:

- i. Build as much common agreement on the observable data (merging the lefthand circles);
- ii. Challenge all assumptions – both theirs and yours to avoid adding in incorrect information;
- iii. Understand both your and their context/experiential lenses to understand how the lenses might cause divergence of understanding;
- iv. Come to a joint understanding as far as you can on the **root causes** of the problem and where you disagree, have clarity on exactly what you are disagreeing on and why (at what point your understanding diverges in the parallel tracks).

3

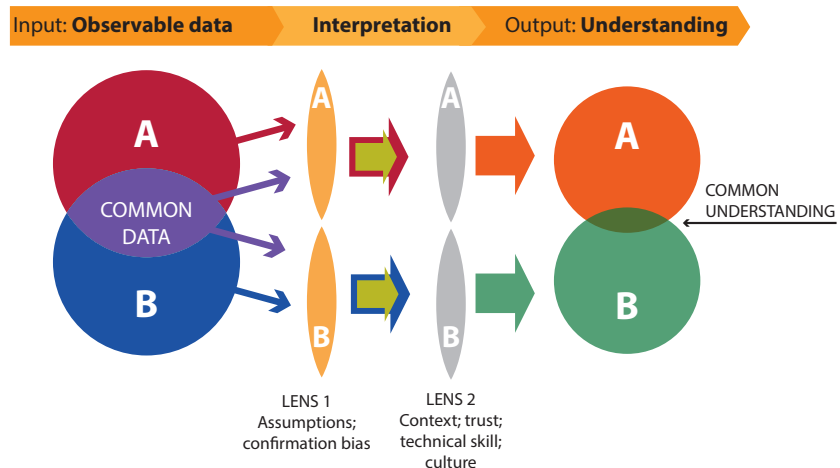
Make it a joint problem and find a solution together

A problem for one partner is a problem for the whole partnership. Even if it seems to fall squarely into the domain of one partner, there may be structural, capacity or other issues that prevent the partner from solving the problem on their own. By working on the problem together, being open, positive and forward-looking, the partners may come up with more innovative solutions, bring in additional resources or even fully redesign elements of the partnership itself in order to tackle the underlying issues.

4

Learn from the experience

Put in place measures (e.g. stronger early warning systems, communication) to avoid similar problems happening in the future.





Common partnering challenges

Challenge	Mitigation	If the problem does happen...
<p>Ever-changing personnel: The role of individuals in representing partner organisations is critical. When individuals move away, it can mean having to rebuild the relationship from scratch, even having to again make the case for why the partnership is important to the organisation.</p>	<p>Spread relationships across multiple individuals, e.g. have two partner reps for each organisation, and engage a wider network of champions beyond the representative.</p> <p>Agree protocol to ensure proper handover as soon as change of personnel is known.</p>	<p>If you are the new representative: don't judge too quickly; be respectful of the history, make a purposeful effort to build up the relationship, and ask a lot of questions.</p> <p>If dealing with a new counterpart: you may need to bring them along the whole journey from why the partnership was set up in the first place, through how it has morphed and the value it is creating for the counterpart's organisation.</p>
<p>One partner not delivering: If organisations are working together for the first time, much is taken on trust. If one organisation does not deliver it compromises the investments of others.</p>	<p>Put in place good project management with light touch monitoring so that any issues are known early.</p>	<p>Understand what has led to a partner not delivering: Lack of commitment? Lack of resources? Lack of competency? External challenges? Political issues?</p> <p>As a partnership, together find ways to solve the issue, for example through capacity building, another partner supporting the role etc.</p>
<p>Global partnerships failing to deliver in-country: International partnerships negotiated at global level struggle to be implemented at country level where the level of commitment, interest and resources of the local organisations are not sufficiently in place.</p>	<p>Build an open and transparent culture in which partners feel able to be report if they are having challenges implementing.</p>	<p>If global partnerships are not delivering in a particular location, it may be necessary to consider the local partnership as an independent entity, and take the local partner actors through a full process to rebuild the partnership around their interests, capabilities, resources and desired outcomes.</p>
<p>Too many partners: While having more partners may eventually bring greater scale and impact, it also increases risks from complexity, cultural differences, competing timescales and demands on resources and governance challenges.</p>	<p>Partnerships must be based on the local context and interests.</p>	<p>Undertake a light touch review of the collaboration to understand where value is being created, and if it could be delivered more efficiently. Consider different governance arrangements with a smaller 'core group' of organisations taking decisions, and with the wider group playing advisory and implementing roles.</p>