



Better Society/Charity Times Partnerships Conference

On 16 March charities and corporates came together to share their experiences of creating world-class partnerships. Led by Professors **Paul Palmer** and **Lynne Berry**, speakers helped bring their knowledge of success, and some difficulties, to the audience. The following is a short distillation of this hugely informative event.

INTRO

A partnership can be many things – it can, at root – be a transactional relationship, but such a situation misses the benefits that can be given in both directions: from leadership and skills through to effective endorsement that can give leverage and open doors, to both parties. All of this, and the moral drivers, make partnerships a logical and effective purpose. Whether between two parties, or several, the need for clarity of purpose and of result is a fundamental need.

Throughout the day the message on an effective partnership was that there is more than one approach. Leveraging the unique attributes of your organisation or charity results in the best possible outcome, but there were some core messages that resonated.

The following 16 headings create a rough map of the topics covered throughout the day.

HAVE A STORY

There must be a reason for creating a partnership – it cannot be effective without one, and a person, or persons, to drive it forward. The ideal is that you have one story, where the agencies can have a clear and aligned purpose. For example, in preventing suicides on the rail network there are moral as well as economic reasons; for the good of the drivers, for the good of the economy (less disruption) and for individuals. The story communicates and contains the purpose(s), the need, the capability and



the engagement. So the need must also be clear (the because bit), the capability be what can be uniquely given, and the engagement must come from giving stakeholders a genuine role and voice. In the past some organisations have attempted to create separate bodies or foundations that deliver benefit, but these can become siloed to the organisation itself, and seen as separate.

It is a lesson one speaker was candid about in saying that their organisation had taken a long time to understand this disconnect – within the organisation and in the mind of the general public, communities and charities. This has led to a recent change of direction, and as a result a better understanding of the unique attributes the organisation can bring and results it can achieve.

ALIGN, BEND AND SHAPE

The outcomes should be aligned, however, even in the best relationships there are always some tensions as there is never a complete alignment, and a degree of bending and shaping is required. You must accept this, and hold on to a common ethos that binds the programme together. During the programme the circumstances or operations can change – even bringing in new partners. This must be managed and explained – a good partnership is always greater than the sum of its parts, with greater impact beyond the original scope, bringing change to the organisations as well as the recipients.

IF AT FIRST...

Partnerships can fail – and attempting to work out why is a vital step to moving forward. In some cases the relationship can be mended, in others the aims might be just too incompatible, and at times the solution is to abandon the partnership as it was and start again – same partners, but in a new partnership. The advice is ‘take the partners with you and create change’ and let each see themselves differently.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

A lesson that is worth remembering is that it is all too easy for the corporate to assume a ‘corporate’ way of doing things

– from appearing to ‘take over’ a project to the language used. In one honest account the speaker recalled a meeting in which they believed they had been open, straightforward and attentive. They saw themselves as an angel, they later found that they were perceived as a bull in a china shop. In fact they were called ‘rude, condescending and overbearing!’ Understanding all the differences helps lead to a more equitable and successful outcome.

MAKE IT FUN, KEEP IT FRESH

Engagement means getting people engaged – that much might seem obvious. But in order to prevent a partnership becoming stale it must innovate and be fun. This requires planning ahead and listening to the stakeholders – but if you don’t enjoy it, why would anyone else?

DEEP DIVES

Some partnerships are very local, and some speakers were vocal about the need for face-to-face meetings to derive benefits, then create a template of excellence for others. Others, by their nature must be national or international; others take a more hybrid approach, working both with national and local charities in the partnership. There is

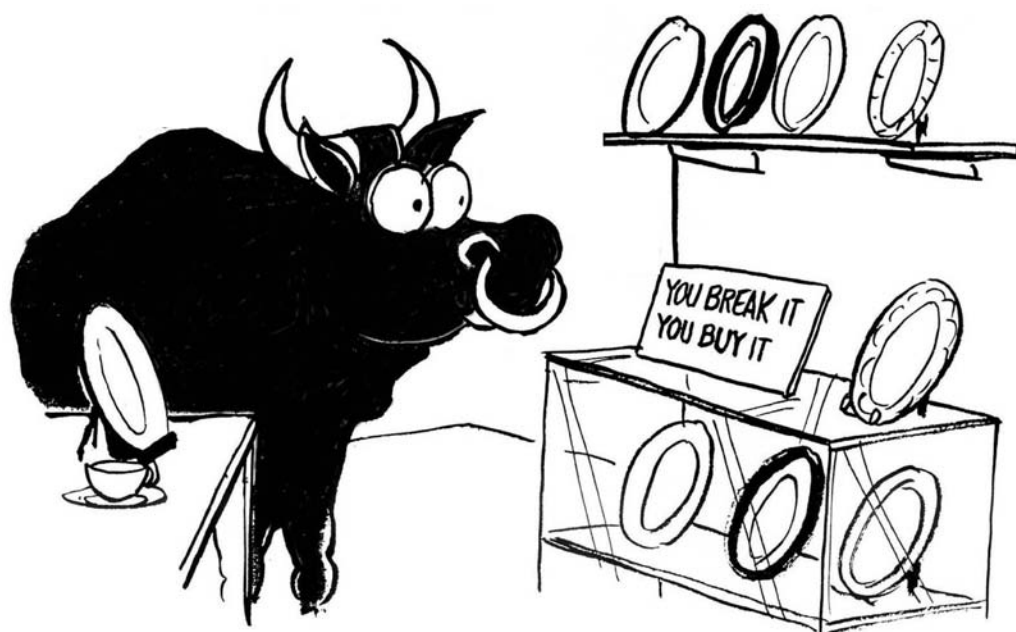
no one solution, but each type has a deep reflection of exactly why theirs is the right chosen route. It is a matter of deciding where you can make the greatest difference. In one case a new entity was formed, so that no partisan feelings could cloud decisions. In another instance a company that works on infrastructure projects across the UK created ‘partnerships on the fly’ of locally based schemes that provided benefits whilst construction was ongoing, then moved on leaving a legacy of skills, training and community. The same issues, five approaches, five directions, all attempting to create positive outcomes.

LONG AND SHORT

Long-term partnerships have some advantages to a ‘charity of the year’ approach. In most cases the ‘CoTY pitch period’ is three months long, then there is three months ‘start up’, three months of delivery and a final three months thinking about the next pitches. So only one quarter of the year has an effective partnership, and it’s an unaffordable investment to many charities.

LEVERAGING THE ASSETS

There are obvious assets – such as brand, pro bono work, volunteers, access to business networks, endorsement, but there are often more tangential assets to be used,



such as using meeting spaces or empty offices, the community of clients that can be used to transmit campaigns or reaching difficult audiences. And it is not just one way, as one corporate speaker noted – case related marketing (CRM) has ‘massive untapped potential’.

TELL THE STORY

Communication is key – but it is not always well done. You can tell people the money raised, or the value of the pro-bono work, but at the end these are just pound signs. Tell people what the value of the partnership is – tell them the nurses employed or equipment purchased and what they do. Show them the physical outcomes of their efforts. Tell them what it means and the impact it has had.

THE POWER OF SMALL CHANGES

Small changes can be built on and expanded. Whether this is providing a service or helping a charity partner through small actions – in one case, Tesco made some small changes such as reducing sugar in all its products, providing free fruit in stores to children, holding a ‘Health Month’ and holding ‘Challenge Events’, but the combined results helped improve clients’ health massively.

SHARPEN THE SOFT SKILLS

What a corporate gets in return has been identified in terms of retention, performance and engagement. But beyond that there is a massive benefit, according to this speaker, in the ability to develop soft skills in staff. It grants the possibility of national/global awareness and experience, skills in communication and motivation. It can also help the corporate clients understand the benefits of what the organisation is doing, helping develop a greater affinity. Another way in which soft power helps is the attraction to the new workforce – the millennials who seek companies that show evidence of ESG.

MEASURE

One aspect of the corporate partner’s life is a constant question of ‘why are we doing this?’. A few reasons are: client engagement, improved performance of staff, retention of staff, improved behaviours – all across the entire employee lifecycle. But, as this speaker noted, such claims sound good – but are meaningless without measurement. And these items are measurable benefits to the organisation, over and above the civic duty to help. Another speaker mentioned that its organisation benchmarks the development of staff that have volunteered with those that did not – with a positive result for those volunteering.

VOLUNTEERING FOR RESULTS

Corporate volunteering meant gardening and assorted other manual duties at one charity until they discovered that using the skills of the people volunteering created a better outcome. The skills being brought to bear created better efficiencies, and against the prevailing view the volunteers actually enjoyed using their work skills to a good end. Additionally this allowed volunteers to give small sections of time, during breaks for example, and contribute where they otherwise could not. In the case shown, this ‘busman’s holiday’ involved call centre workers contacting donors to thank

them for supporting the charity. [Watch the video here](#)

UNLIKELY PARTNERS

There are connections that are not at first apparent, but can create major impact. MIND partnered with MACE construction to help support and engage its predominantly male workforce – traditionally the hardest audience to reach on mental health matters. Likewise Macmillan partnered with Greene King, and managed to use the community hub of the local public house to create effective campaigns. A historical connection links Macmillan to npower – with the founder, Douglas Macmillan, donating coal to keep people with cancer warm in 1911.

WHEN THE CORPORATE LEAVES

Planning for departure is a vital part of the process. Corporate partnerships, especially long-term ones, are never about just ‘dumping the money’. It is a two way relationship that improves all aspects of the partners’ organisation. But there are times when the corporate will want or need to leave. This is where planning from the start is essential, to create lasting impact so that capacity has been built and benefits can continue to be delivered afterward.

PARTNERSHIPS OF EQUALS

Carillion has produced research on building better partnerships between communities, corporates and charities. The key findings tended to cover five main areas:

- Avoiding mismatches of expectation
- Effective collaboration to benefit both sides
- Establishing a contribution balance
- Greater mutual understanding to maximise potential
- Building “Partnerships of Equals”

The full research report, Partnership of Equals, can be [downloaded here](#)

A few items from the report show that:

- 75% felt that working with charities and communities made a business more successful, but 53% felt that it had been a mixed experience.
- 57% of communities and charity groups didn’t understand how businesses could help them.
- 68% of businesses didn’t really understand what charities and community groups needed.

SUMMARY and BREXIT

There is one elephant in the room – Brexit. Nearly half of respondents to a C&E Advisory survey think Brexit will have an impact, but rather pointedly the vast majority of international NGOs think it will have an adverse influence. The result is a widespread belief that partnerships will have a significantly greater importance going forward. As an aside, whilst a majority of charities see Brexit as the glass being half empty, the majority of corporates surveyed see it as the glass half full. For partnerships the issues are that of talent – either because of a smaller pool post-Brexit, or access to a more global one, and a more global outlook. It might also, one panellist noted, draw attention away from pure fundraising and unlock more innovative help.

SPEAKERS OF THE DAY

Chairs



Paul Palmer

Professor of Voluntary Sector Management and Associate Dean for Ethics, Sustainability & Engagement, Cass Business School



Lynne Berry OBE

Chair of Breast Cancer Now, Deputy Chair of the Canal and River Trust, Vice Chair of Cumberland Lodge and a Visiting Professor at Cass Business School

Speakers



Stuart Beaver

Director of Partnership & Community Programmes Lloyds Banking



Ian Stevens

Suicide Prevention Manager
Network Rail



Lindsey Crompton

Head of UK Community
Tesco National Charity Partnership



James Sutton

Business Development Strategist
Raleigh International



Clémence Francelle

CSR and Foundation Officer
BNP Paribas (Suisse)



Nick Wright

Managing Director, Global / EMEA Community Affairs UBS



Jenna Hall

Programme Director
Tesco National Charity Partnership



Manny Amadi

CEO
C&E Advisory



Rebecca Hastings

Head of Corporate Partnerships
MIND



Ed Gillespie

Corporate Partnerships Manager
Oxfam



Vanya Harris

Executive Director, Corporate Social Responsibility XL Catlin



Vicky Mirfin

Director and CEO
Heart of the City



David Picton

Chief Sustainability Officer
Carillion



Emily Shelford

Head of Partnerships Management
Macmillan Cancer Support



Greg Sage

Communications Director
Greene King



Ciarán O'Carroll

Brand Marketing Manager
ActionAid UK



Ashley Sweetland

Director, Global Director
Internal Communications & Campaigns IHG