Partnering

Key elements of a partnering relationship

By Jim Everett and Jane Dixon – Think180™ (formerly Endeavour Business Learning)

Partnering is a process, and a good partnering relationship takes time to develop and mature. It starts with a desire or reason to partner, and builds from there. The relationship must be developed over time with buy-in from both parties and clear objectives for the partnership.

A company wanting to partner with a vendor on a program should keep this goal in mind when the company begins identifying the requirements for this program. Vendors are not automatically partners.

Keys to Effective Partnering

Successful partnerships begin with a common understanding of what it takes to create a successful partnership. Both parties must be committed, and there are critical elements that must be present.

Listed below are the three keys for effective partnership, adapted from Neil Rackham's book, *"Getting Partnering Right"*:

1. **Vision**
   - What the partnership can become
   - Potential development and outcomes
   - Steps needed to realize this vision
2. **Impact**
   - Reducing duplication and waste
   - Leveraging companies' core competencies
   - Creating new opportunities
3. **Intimacy**
   - Building trust
   - Sharing information
   - Creating partnering teams

All three, vision, impact and intimacy, must be balanced to create an effective partnership.

Value of Partnering

Taking a partnering approach can be beneficial to both parties. Below are several examples:

- **Better planning and control** – in the areas of operations and user or customer experience
- **Greater, more pervasive influence** with the partner or client
- **Loyalty and commitment** to your company and product or service
- **Greater speed** in introducing changes, or solving problems that arise
- **Greater scope** for partner to be proactive
- **Advance warning** system on product or service issues
- **Barometer of issues** – in the areas of customer service and problems
- **Partner is an advocate** with your users or customers
- **Consistent, focused experience** for your users or customers

Partnering is Not for Everyone

Partnering may not apply to every vendor or client. The nature of the work may be a standard deliverable that is easily quantified and relatively constant. The vendor runs their business; the client uses their services. There is a good relationship and neither party benefits from partnering.

Not all vendors or clients see the value in partnering. This may be based on company culture, which prefers to maintain distance; or the vendor may be in a position of power to ask and get top dollar when they dominate a market, and that is their goal.

If there is value in partnering with an organization that does not share the perceived value, it is possible to create partnering relationships with key contacts that favor partnering. Or the vendor, recognizing that partnering is good business, may assign partner account managers as advocates for a client; even though the larger vendor organization does not embrace partnering.

Conversely, a top-level agreement to partner, with the right words built into the Master Agreement or an exchange of letters, may simply be a press release partnership. This type of partnership requires skilled execution at the program manager level to ensure that it works.

Summary

Approach partnering strategically – take into account the need and objectives for the partnership, the climate to sustain a partnership, its potential value and the overall viability.

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Think180™ (formerly Endeavour Business Learning) is based in Los Angeles and focuses on enhancing effective and productive client-vendor relations. We work with companies, large and small, on both sides of the equation – those who are using vendors, consultants and contractors, and those who want to enhance the services they provide to clients. Think180 provides workshops and consulting on "Managing External Resources" and "Creating Effective Partnerships".

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