

The Relationship Spectrum

When deciding to ‘partner,’ it is important to have mutual understanding of the sort of relationship you are trying to develop together. The ‘relationship spectrum’ sets out a continuum of relationships from ‘transactional’ to a genuine ‘partnership’.

Each end of the spectrum will have its advantages and disadvantages and there is no value judgement intended on where in the spectrum a relationship would best fit – it all depends on context. You may decide to actively try to move the relationship across the spectrum.

Characteristics

Transactional		Partnership
One party decides the programme based on their knowledge / experience	↔	Co-generation based on joint knowledge / experience
One party purchases a service from – or donates to the work of – another	↔	Partners bring together complementary resources (including those such as social capital which may not be ‘for sale’)
Clear activities and outputs decided at beginning	↔	Clear agreed expected outcomes, flexibility over how to get there
Limited engagement from parties beyond the agreed activities	↔	Stronger engagement and commitment beyond the agreed activities
Each party stays in its comfort zone, doing what they normally do	↔	Partners together create new ways of working
One-way accountability	↔	Mutual accountability
Each party expected to have full capacity to deliver	↔	One partner may support capacity development for another to deliver more effectively
Based on formal contracts	↔	Thrives on trust

Advantages

Transactional		Partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-defined and manageable commitment Lower management and administration costs – requires significantly less investment in relationship building Clear decision-making authority and unambiguous contractual relationship Predictable procedures and outcomes Clear lines of authority and accountability Comfortable Less risk of clashes between organisations’ culture, procedures and values 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger potential for innovative and transformational solutions More appropriate/implementable approaches More adaptable to changing realities Better-informed decision-making Stronger commitment from partners – willing to go the extra distance Wider potential for influence and change Stronger overall accountability Greater potential for mutual learning