



Even a Doghouse Needs a Blueprint - Part 2

Partnership Design Assessment Tools & Tips

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What do this doghouse and your partnership have in common? Today, the term “partnership” is so widely used that almost any kind of relationship is called a “partnership”. Partners usually bring different ideas to the creation of a “partnership”. In cross-sector partnerships, in particular, partners from different sectors often have considerably different ideas of what a “partnership” means. So unless your group successfully worked out individual differences to come up with one mutually agreed upon blueprint for your partnership, it may now look like this badly constructed doghouse.

Part 1 of this article presented partnership design assessment as a new approach to assess a partnership’s functioning through a design perspective. Now Part 2 will discuss (1) key elements for partnership design assessment and (2) some tips for conducting partnership design assessment.

1. Key components for partnership design assessment

As explained in Part 1, partnership design assessment is a new approach to assessing partnerships. It evaluates the partnership’s functioning by focusing on areas such as partnership structure and modality. Key components* for design assessment include the following:

- Mission, goals, activities and beneficiaries of the partnership
- Formality and continuity parameters
- Separation and integration continuums
- Relationship types which include internal relationships (partner-engagement models) and external relationships (stakeholder-engagement models)
- Roles and responsibilities, including definition and distribution
- Governance structure, including decision-making mechanisms, financial management mechanisms, and so forth.
- Organizational structure and model of operations



- Coordination modality and process
- Communication modality and process
- Resource issues which include requirements and options for project financing and partnership management financing

These key components for partnership design are just like a doghouse's foundation, roof, and beams. They support its structure and functioning. Just like a badly constructed doghouse, if these key components are not properly laid out based on a well-thought-through blueprint, the partnership will be a disaster.

Of the above key components, those concerning relationships and resources require special attention. People and money are two of the most crucial factors in any partnership but these issues often require delicate handling. Taking sufficient time to address issues involving people and money goes a long way.

2. Some tips for partnership design assessment

Below are some tips with a doghouse analogy for each. These tips will help you to get started on your design assessment. They are particularly useful during the last step of your assessment, helping you to fine-tune or re-design your partnership.

Know your design constraints

If your budget for building a doghouse is only \$5.00, a \$5.00 doghouse is what you will get. In theory, you can choose from every type of design option for your partnership. However, in reality there are always some limitations in terms of range and types of design options available to you. For example, no matter how lofty your partnership's mission and objectives, your available resources broadly determine the design framework for your partnership.

Know your design options and the pros and cons of each

If you want a sturdy doghouse, choose good materials which tend to cost more and take more time to put together. On the other hand, if your dog just needs a temporary shelter, a cardboard box will do.

Partnership design components always have pros and cons. Study both the pros and the cons and weigh them. Then choose a set of design components based on your partnership's requirements. The key is to select them consciously and methodically.

Know your partners and partnership

If your dog happens to be a dachshund which is a very long dog like the image above, typical doghouse blueprints will not help you build your doghouse.

No two partnerships are the same, so knowing your partners and partnership is crucial.



You can still learn from other blueprints by taking them as sample design solutions, but copying them is not likely to work. Make sure to tailor your partnership to suit your partnership's specific requirements.

This article highlighted key elements for partnership design assessment. It also provided some tips for partnership design assessment. Partnership design assessment can enhance your partnership's effectiveness by systematically assessing the partnership's design components.

You are now ready to conduct your own partnership design assessment by following the four-step approach presented in Part 1. In case your partnership was created without a blueprint, it is not too late. You can still adapt the four-step approach and methodically re-design your partnership.

*For details concerning these key components, please refer to the author's position papers posted on the MelonAge Website.

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