



Even a Doghouse Needs a Blueprint - Part 1 Partnership Design Assessment

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Chances are this doghouse was built without a blueprint or there were some errors in its design. In either case, the end result is that the doghouse does not fit the dog. What does this doghouse have to do with your cross-sector partnership? The root cause of your partnership problems may well be its design and blueprint. This article first presents partnership design assessment and its benefits. Some typical partnership design disasters will be followed by a four-step partnership design assessment approach.

Partnership Design Assessment

Partnership design assessment looks into 1) how partnerships are designed and 2) how they are functioning based on their specific requirements and original blueprints. The key focus of partnership design assessment is design issues, such as partnership structure and modality.

Design issues are crucial in evaluating the overall functioning and impact/outcome of partnerships. Yet, they are mostly overlooked or not addressed distinctively in conventional partnership assessment or appraisal. The need for partnership design assessment is particularly great in cross-sector partnerships due to their complexity.

Benefits of Partnership Design Assessment

Partnership design assessment can be compared to fixing the doghouse to suit the dog rather than trying to fit the dog in the doghouse. It can improve your partnership's functional efficiency by re-designing or fine-tuning your partnership's structure and modality. This new approach to assessment also can reduce waste/costs by optimizing resource allocation. In short, it can ensure optimal performance in a cost effective way.

Partnership Design Disasters

Partnership design disasters happen mostly due to the following:

- A partnership created without a design process and a blueprint at the creation stage,
- Some design errors slipped in at the outset,
- Mismatch between the original blueprint versus changed circumstances.

The following are typical partnership design disasters with a doghouse analogy for each.



Case # 1: A doghouse is too small to fit the dog.

A partnership's structure or modality is inadequate to achieve its intended goals or activities. It can be due to some design errors or the growth of the partnership. The original modality or structure is no longer adequate.

Case # 2: A doghouse is supposed to last but it is made of straws so it soon becomes inhabitable.

A partnership is created with little time and effort devoted to designing it at the outset. Its shaky modality and structure is unable to support the partnership's proper functioning.

Case # 3: A doghouse built by an uncoordinated team so there are flaws all over.

A partnership is made and run by parties without clear definition and distribution of roles and responsibilities among them. There are unattended areas and gaps on the one hand and overlap and waste on the other.

Four-step Partnership Design Assessment Approach

1. Review the original design and blueprint

The first step is going back to the original partnership design. Review the partnership's original mission, goals, design process and blueprint.

2. Examine the current functioning of the partnership

The second step is to look into the current functioning of the partnership. Be sure to get on board with new developments and requirements that come into play over time.

3. Identify partnership design issues

The third step is to analyse information gathered in Steps 1 and 2. Identify the scope of design issues arising from the above. No two partnerships are the same, so be sure to address your partnership's specificities.

4. Develop strategies to fine-tune or re-design the partnership

Now you are ready for the fourth step, which is to fine-tune or re-design your partnership. Set priorities taking into account resource availability and time frames.

This short article looked into partnership design assessment. Typical partnership design disasters were highlighted. The four-step partnership design assessment approach presented here can help you in re-designing or fine-tuning your partnership in a methodical way.

Partnership design disasters often are overlooked until they are too late to fix. The best remedy is, of course, prevention: take sufficient time and effort in designing your partnership at the creation stage. Consciously selecting partnership modality and structure through a methodical design process goes a long way.

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