8 REASONS THAT PARTNERSHIPS FAIL

(AND HOW TO OVERCOME THE PITFALLS)

ABSTRACT

Different cultures, expectations, priorities and goals all conspire to prevent collaborative progress. Here, I share eight personal case studies of how I have overcome partnership challenges to achieve joint success.

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INTRODUCTION

Partnerships are a great idea, right? You can get your idea to market quickly, achieve scale and mitigate risk by using someone else’s resources. The partner providing the resources gets to make a profit on them, and in turn can scale their business. Furthermore, you both learn more. What could go wrong?

Well, quite a lot! According to a recent study by The CMO Council, 85% of respondents viewed partnerships and alliances as essential or important to their businesses. However, almost half reported high failure rates (over 60%). Huxham and Vangen (2014) have found through their extensive research on collaborative inertia and advantage, that the eight most common reasons are:

1. Quantity tension – lots of stakeholders with different priorities, ideas and values
2. Protection of Interests – how does each participant guarantee their success?
3. Context changes – what works today may not be relevant tomorrow
4. Lack of ongoing leadership – Organisational leaders don’t walk the talk
5. Communication – styles and methods used may create more confusion
6. Lack of clear structure – People don’t know what they are doing, why and when
7. Lack of common aims – Misalignment between organisations and individuals
8. Arguments over access to resources – Tensions can rise during peak workloads

More than 60 % of businesses report high failure rates in their partnerships and alliances. (CMO Council, 2015)
Anyone who has ever been involved in trying to get two or more organisations to achieve a joint outcome, will likely recognise some, if not all, of these tensions. Power struggles, politics, trust issues, cultural differences, communication styles and a continuously changing environment all play their part in the assumptions and misunderstandings that often plague collaborations.

In this paper, I will share examples of where these tensions have arisen, and I how I addressed them to achieve success, from my experiences in multiple roles. These include global alliance management, setting up joint ventures, running marketing in the channel and managing an outsource marketing agency.

I will explore the role that three key themes of power, politics and trust play in determining alliance success or failure.
1. QUANTITY TENSION

The number of people involved in an alliance will indicate the number of individual agendas in addition to those of the collaboration and the organisation. The difficulty is that sometimes it isn’t always clear who all the stakeholders are, but you will soon know when you come up against blockers towards you achieving your goals.

Individuals have different motivations when a group comes together. There will likely be those who are trying to further their career, some who are excited to learn something new and those who are simply trying to keep a low profile and achieve their KPIs. Different managers may have different expectations. Some may be satisfied to see progress towards revenue goals and some may not recognise any value until the first order is placed. There will also be those who see the whole thing as a distraction. None of these motivations are better or more valid than others, they simply need acknowledging and managing if progress is to made and if these contexts aren’t to become politically fraught with quantity tension and too many cooks spoiling the broth.

Stakeholders need to be identified, managed and aligned if progress is to be made.

Case Study

When I came to my role working on a global alliance I was at a point in my career where I was stepping up and wanted to learn and achieve. Naively perhaps, I believed that my passion and enthusiasm alone would be enough to mobilise the management, sales, marketing and technical teams of two global organisations. I was about to get a surprise!

My opposite number, the alliance manager that represented the partner organisation back into my employer, was a generation older than me and had worked in alliances for a long time. Whilst I was driver/driver and keen to get traction; he was a slower burn. I regarded his reticence to engage in certain activities as him not being interested in doing the job, rather than seeing the underlying issue.
In fact, he was experiencing a cultural tension between the alliance goals and the norms and values of his organisation. Despite their being a global corporate scorecard to measure the alliance team’s success, we were working in the field where everyone was measured quarterly with fiscal targets. In my own organisation we had annual targets, albeit with milestone KPIs to indicate progress. Furthermore, the way that my organisation set goals was a mix of performance and learning goals, with a percentage our variable remuneration centred around how you did your job, not simply on revenue attainment.

In addition, as our alliance was measured on influenced revenue – we did not re-sell or embed each other’s products rather we were recognising mutual support and involvement in deals- my opposite number was finding it difficult to manage his stakeholders in any other way than doing the work that they recognised as valuable.

We addressed this issue by meeting with the primary local stakeholder in the partner organisation and creating a local scorecard, with his input, on how we measure success within country. We adapted to the sales culture and created hard metrics around pipeline and forecast to demonstrate that the alliance was making progress.

The Results

By working within the local organisational context, we ended up with a scorecard which acted as a mechanism for keeping the country sales management team updated on a weekly basis. This was wrapped into a management system to raise red flags and ask for help if progress was not being made.

Recommendation

When setting goals for your collaboration, ensure that you identify and bring in relevant stakeholders – those from who you will need air cover or resources- to provide input.

Want to find out more about building a stakeholder map?

Email me helen.rutherford@leadamarket.com
2. PROTECTION OF INTERESTS

When we enter into partnerships we discuss overt wants and expectations – increased profitability, faster time to market and reduced risk. However, by their nature, collaborations involve several people and with these come hidden agendas.

This can work well if personal agendas are aligned with collaborative ones and with those working within the alliance team. Tensions arise when agendas are conflicting.

I have worked extensively in and around co-marketing for over a decade, in roles where I have handed out, received, brokered and administered co-marketing funds. There is an ever present tension around co-marketing funds, how they are earned and how they are spent with varying rules and governance surrounding this money.

To me, the tension centres around trust; if funds aren’t closely governed, technology companies may assume that channel partners will put the money on the bottom line. However, if there are too many rules and checks around funding, the channel partner’s overheads of applying for, executing on and claiming money are prohibitive.

Technology organisations and channel partners are only trying to protect their interests, and both want to ensure that they generate enough of the right type of leads to achieve their goals. Many channel partners already struggle with Marketing Development Funds (MDF). According to IDC, partners aren’t claiming funds due to lack of marketing expertise. 93.2% of IT Services companies were founded by either a business or technology person. Their time is spent managing cashflow, people and operations, rather than marketing.

Could we address this issue of conflicting agendas if we focus on outcomes, rather than how the funds are administered? This is what I did when I was running marketing in a large channel organisation.

93.2% of IT Services companies lack the marketing knowledge within their leadership team to navigate the rules of MDF (IDC, 2014).
Case Study

Back in 2010, my marketing team were in the vanguard of implementing marketing automation. We had invested in a rules based engine, Eloqua, and had integrated this with CRM. We had cleaned and built a database of more than 20,000 decision maker contacts, captured our capabilities by interviewing our pre-sales and delivery teams and created marketing assets to promote our offering. In short, we had all the inputs we felt we needed to create quality leads. So, to ensure we retained expert knowledge and agility around this always-on platform, I brought marketing in house, rather than using outside agencies.

However, here I started running into problems with co-marketing budgets that we had earned as part of various technology vendor loyalty programmes. The reason for this is that I would be required to show third party invoices for work I was claiming for, even though I was investing in resources to deliver this in-house. These rules governing use of marketing funds was putting our ability to get marketing paid for at risk, and in turn people’s jobs.

So, I addressed this by hosting an event for our technology partners to come and meet my marketing team and learn about how we were using always-on capabilities to generate a steady stream of leads. We gave a presentation, where each of the key members of the team introduced our internal lead nurturing function, our automation and digital team, our copy writers and graphic designers. I had actually received a lot of internal push back before running the event, people telling me that technology companies that competed with each other would not want to sit in the same room. However, I was delighted that I proved the nay-sayers wrong.

The Results

The planned benefits were achieved in that the partner marketing and alliance contacts in our technology partners became supporters of our internal capability. There were also unplanned benefits in that we were asked by some of our technology partners to come and present to their organisations sales teams on our approach. They liked what they had seen and were keen to learn more.
Recommendation

Create an outcomes-focused business plan with your partner, from which can flow a marketing plan. In this way, you can agree the specific goals you want to achieve – number of deals, volume, type and size of leads and so on. This means that there will be a greater focus on results and less need for governance on what type of tactics are used, but everyone’s interests should be protected. Furthermore, invest time in building relationships between the marketing teams of technology and channel partner organisations – it’s a great way to share ideas and transfer skills and knowledge.

Want to find out more about building a partner business and marketing plan?

Email me helen.rutherford@leadamarket.com
3. CONTEXT CHANGES

Things change. What’s relevant today, may not be tomorrow. Companies might develop their own capability or acquire it. Or they could find that another revenue stream is far more profitable and retreat from the one in which they are focused in partnership with you. In the worst case, companies may fall into administration. Either way, your route to market can be disrupted due to unforeseeable changes.

Telemarketing is a good example of this. It has come under increasing pressure in the last years, due to social and technical changes that have influenced buyer behaviour. We see more online self-service as well as use of IP Telephony that requires people to log into phones, coupled with mobile devices that enable call-screening. With a more mobile workforce, standalone telemarketing campaigns achieve 75% less than they used to.

However, it still has a key role in converting Marketing Ready Leads (those prospects who have indicated a propensity to buy from on or offline interactions) into Marketing Qualified Leads (ready to be handed to sales).

Telemarketing was big in the 90s and early 2000s. As things have changed, it has now become a lesser, but still integral, part of always on campaigns which are centred around marketing automation.
Case Study

For the last six years, I have used tele operations as part of delivering omni-channel marketing campaigns. In my most recent role, running the UK P&L of an outsource marketing agency, I trialled a partnership with a well-established tele marketing company, experienced in the IT sector. During this period, in 2015, several well known tele marketing agencies went into administration and my assumption is that this partner would feel well positioned to absorb those available clients. Despite standalone telemarketing shrinking as a revenue stream, the opportunity to wrap it into always-on campaigns (although the management overhead is higher) is real.

However, this partner saw this as a warning sign to give up the telemarketing revenue stream and focus on other, more profitable parts of their business. As we had a good relationship with this agency partner, we were able to get around the table and discuss options for handling transition.

The Results

The situation provided our agency with an opportunity to take some of their tele operations employees into our own business, reducing our recruitment and training costs and improving our time to results. We concluded that due to the nature of omni-channel marketing, a tele team would be more effective if co-located with the rest of the campaign delivery team – the digital and social operation. This is something that no telemarketing agency we worked with could offer and so we brought the capability in-house.

We were open with our partner about our idea and due to the non-compete nature of what we were attempting they gave us a lot of guidance in the set up. One of the true benefits of partnerships is learning; access to their knowledge and experience.

Recommendation

It’s important to know what you are going to do if your partner changes direction, and how you will support each other in a transition period. This can be addressed by creating an exit plan. It may be the case that as your partner pulls out, you backwardly or forwardly integrate into their capability if your business model can make this work.

Want to find out more about creating a partner agreement?

Email me helen.rutherford@leadamarket.com
4. LACK OF ONGOING LEADERSHIP

On establishing a partnership, senior representatives from each company are usually involved in the launch and may state super-ordinate goals for the collaboration. Too frequently, rather than acting as a call to arms, as Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech, these rallying cries have been met with increasing cynicism in the corporate world. This can be due to partnership fatigue and because the relevant leaders, those who hold some or all of the bases of power, do not follow the goals they lay down or acknowledge those who do. This can spell trouble for a collaboration, as most of the people on whom the partnership depends are not under their direct control. Participants have to be persuaded to contribute, often through the influencing skills of alliance managers. The result of this is that the collaboration’s objectives are not acted upon, because those who contribute to its success – sales, marketing, technical, delivery – are not led to do so.

When there are lots of competing demands for people’s time and focus, collaboration teams may want to investigate how they can increase their level of power by gaining support from organisational leaders, to help galvanise resources.

According to Bertram and Raven (1958) there are five bases of power:

1. Reward: the ability of an individual to attribute desired rewards
2. Coercive: the ability of an individual to impose sanctions
3. Referent: the perception that an individual can influence others
4. Position: the perception of the authority held by an individual due to status
5. Expert: the desirable knowledge held by an individual as perceived by others
I was working as an alliance manager in a large global software company on a new collaboration with another leading technology firm. We had complementary software products with aligned development teams as well as marketing and business investment budget to create demand and get proof of concepts under way. This meant that I had one of the five bases of power covered, ability to reward sales teams with funding.

However, there were other competing alliances with more budget and a longer history of collaboration – trust had been built between the sales and management teams of both companies. Despite having alignment at CEO level, there were no in-country senior management relationships to sponsor the alliance in the field.

After struggling to get momentum in one country, I invited both general managers for that geography to a Quarterly Business Review (QBR), to gain some commitment to move things forward. These two general managers were well-respected and both had position power – they could instruct sales teams to follow a certain course. Between them, they also had the coercive and referent bases covered. One was particularly charismatic, very popular with the sales teams, and could persuade people to do things simply by asking. As they both had discretion over sales targets and individual rewards, coercive power was implied.

We agreed with the two general managers to focus on just 15 accounts locally over a six month period and that account planning sessions would be facilitated for each. They then agreed to cascade this request to the relevant sales managers, review progress on a quarterly basis and sponsor the 15 accounts.

So, here, we had four of the five bases of power – reward, position, referent and coercive – addressed but still lacked expert power. We decided to invest alliance funds in the best solution architect that we had available to us, with a background in both company’s technologies. This meant that the alliance had access to a resource that no other alliance had, and sales teams soon recognised that he could make the difference when in competitive situations.
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<tr>
<th>Base of Power</th>
<th>Role or Function</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward</td>
<td>Alliance Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive</td>
<td>P&amp;L Owner or General Manager (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent</td>
<td>GM, Sales Director or Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>General Manager, Sales Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Subject Matter Expert/Consultant</td>
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**The Results**

We went from lack of engagement to a £3 million competitive win in a strategic account within one quarter, giving the collaboration much needed momentum. The combination of alliance rewards, the positional power of local P&L leaders with the ability to influence and impose sanctions if needed and a technical expert were successfully applied.

**Recommendation**

Using the five Bases of Power as a guide, conduct a gap analysis on your ability to influence and lead those people on whom the success of your collaboration depends.

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Want to find out more about securing support from the leadership team?

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5. COMMUNICATION

With more ways to communicate than ever this can be a blessing and a curse. There are more opportunities to be both understood and mis-understood. Sometimes it is hard enough communicating frequently and clearly enough within our own organisations, let alone with a partner. Virtual teaming has never been more technically possible, yet congruence and cohesion remains elusive.

According to Google’s Consumer Barometer (2015) The UK is one of the most connected countries in the world. The average UK consumer owns 3.3 devices in 2015, up 10% from 2014, with 28% using 5 or more devices.

In addition to the usual challenges of communication - gaining mind share, cultural differences and having the time to keep stakeholders updated - the type of communication channel that we use and the data that we share has a huge impact on collaborative working.

**Data/Media Matrix for Communication**

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<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Equivocal</th>
<th>Canonical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lean Media Type</td>
<td>Call</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Video</td>
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Adapted from Klitmøller and Lauring, 2013

In partnerships we use all of the communication types above for sharing equivocal (Information that is open to interpretation and discussion) and canonical (raw data) but are you using each one appropriately? Are you using lean media (non visual) when non-verbal cues are necessary for you to understand your partner’s reaction?
Case Study

A couple of years ago, whilst running a marketing agency, we had introduced a new way method of channel development with a client using inbound marketing with a social media, content strategy and always-on focus.

Initially the weekly results of the campaign, the canonical data, were shared in a spreadsheet by email, a type of lean media due to its asynchronous and non visual nature, followed by a call. There was no doubt that on interpreting the statistics we were seeing an upward trend in impressions, website engagement and other early-stage key indicators.

However, it was clear that the client was not satisfied. We held a call to discuss the results and one of the issues was around interpretation of the data. The challenge was that we were passing results to marketing who needed to manage their sales stakeholders. Unlike when we were running pure telemarketing activities, there was no call report. Rather their internal sales team were being passed scored website interactions which were at a point that should indicate buying interest. The score, or clip level, had been agreed with the marketing team but sales did not know how to read this data.

So we scheduled a face to face meeting with the sales manager who was benefitting from these leads to discuss his needs and gather his input. Meetings are defined as rich media as we can better gauge reactions to what is being said, 93% of our communication is non-verbal. First of all, he was really pleased at the level of interaction that new companies were having with his business. However, he wanted to understand more about how the scoring mechanism worked, and after some discussion with him and his sales people (an internal business development team), agreed to lower the score as he saw it as his team’s job to develop these contacts. In this sense, he defined a marketing qualified lead as a validated contact, given where they were in their channel recruitment cycle.

The Results

Following this meeting, we re-drafted definitions of leads specifically for this sales team with the marketing team’s input and approval. We then held a weekly call to review campaign results that included both sales and marketing. The results of this were a closer working relationship between the two functions with increased levels of sales input and commitment to the ongoing campaign. The numbers of sales accepted leads increased 12x within one quarter.
Recommendation

Review your current management system with your stakeholders and consider how effective this is. Indicators might be whether people are taking action on the data you provide, whether campaigns are stalling or sales teams are querying lead quality. When you are launching new activities or establishing new relationships rich media will allow you to read non-verbal cues which are often missed during telephone calls.

Want to find out more about creating a communications plan for your alliance?

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6. LACK OF STRUCTURE

Partnerships are inherently about influencing and persuading key resources to participate and invest time in the collaboration’s outcomes. If not, companies would have to pay for hiring and training their own people and acquiring and maintaining their own assets over which they have direct control.

However, the roles and responsibilities that alliance teams and stakeholders ask contributors to take on often lack clarity in terms of what is required, when and for how long. Providing a structure of how the collaboration works, indicating whether contributors need to lead, respond, or simply keep abreast of what is happening, can help you to gain the involvement and commitment you need for success. Further, being respectful of their time, engaging them at the right moment, is more likely to yield positive results.

Case Study

I was running marketing in for an IT Services organisation, we initiated a contractual joint venture with a large telco. The aim of this collaboration was to provide white label IT services, through the larger organisation, to enable their Enterprise go to market strategy.

Our CEO and their Enterprise P&L owner were the key leaders in the relationship and to get the alliance to market, work streams were formed across the usual disciplines- product, marketing, training, operations – to launch the new venture.

A project approach

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<th>Workstreams</th>
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<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
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Time
Two project managers were assigned to ensure that the work streams were delivered on time and progress was reviewed weekly. However, problems started to arise - this is where the structure of a programme differs significantly to that of a project.

As a programme, the training department were dependent on the marketing team to produce assets that could be delivered as sales enablement. In turn, marketing were dependent on inputs from the product development teams so they could describe the offering. Product were themselves waiting for operations to provide documented service descriptions.

However, according to the project status on one particular week, marketing were on amber whilst training, at the end of the line, were on green. As a marketing team we were becoming increasingly frustrating as we were trying to balance our commitment to this important relationship with other company priorities and we were using up valuable time, reporting the same information on weekly call. So here the escalations began. However, despite their being an alliance manager assigned to this JV, they were overseeing eight other alliances and it was unclear when we get a response about resolving the issue.

So, in this case, I escalated to the CEO on my side but in doing this I risked being politically insensitive, upsetting other work streams and our partner.

Fortunately the issue was resolved and what had been structured as a project, became a programme, freeing up resources until they became required – there was no point using up marketing or training’s time on a call, when services were yet to be documented.

*A Programmatic Approach – Managing dependencies*
Despite the overall timeline lengthening, the more realistic timescale allowed focus and support to be applied to the right area at the right point. Rather than marketing chasing operations and product management for inputs to create demand generation and sales enablement assets, we adjusted our focus to helping them document their services by interviewing subject matter experts involved in delivering the capability.

The Results

With a clearer view of the timelines, service offerings were prioritised by market relevance, alliance capability and profitability. We released the right services to market as they became ready, using resources more effectively. Further, an unplanned benefit was that marketing, product development and operations developed a close working relationship, enabling us to be more effective as an integrated team as the collaboration progressed.

Recommendations

Evaluate the readiness of your joint offering. If the service isn’t articulated in terms of the product description, pricing and profitability, then marketing and enablement teams will not have the inputs they need to do their jobs. By understanding your go to market readiness, you will be able to prioritise the right activities, making the best use of resources.

Want to find out more about how to evaluate your go to market readiness?

Email me helen.rutherford@leadamarket.com
7. LACK OF COMMON GOALS

Earlier, I stated that alliances are usually launched with super-ordinate goals – rallying cries to “be the best” or “number one in x market”, aimed to excite and engage those who can contribute to their success.

However, for goals to work well, they need to be applicable at three levels: The organisation, the collaboration and the individual level. (Huxham and Vangen, 2014).

Often the organisational and collaboration aims are clear. The organisation wants to gain market share and sees the partnership as a point of differentiation, efficiency or with access to more resources than its’ competitors. The collaboration, buoyed by the plans for market growth for the partners involved, takes some performance goals, say pipeline value, and so it is clear to the alliance team what they need to achieve.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Identified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>No</td>
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However, partnerships succeed or fail based on the involvement and commitment of other key resources like sales, pre-sales, marketing and delivery teams. Unless they can identify with a common goal that is shared across, for example, all of the sales teams, then it will be hard to galvanise them and keep them engaged.

**Case Study**

About ten years ago I was part of a global team working on a new technology alliance between two vendors. The organisational goals were clear – to achieve more share in complementary areas like security and systems management and the collaboration goals were well defined with revenue targets.

However, the alliance was dependent on the willingness of account teams to work together, but both sales teams felt that they had been successful for long enough without each other. In fact, they actually feared disrupting or elongating a deal by engaging a partner and so we met with a lot of resistance.
What’s in it for me?

What became evident, is that it wasn’t clear to the sales people what was in it for them to grow the size of their deal and differentiate from their competitors by working with the partnership. So we decided that we needed to quantify and articulate the size of the prize to the sales teams so that they could identify deals that could become competitive wins or be expedited as a result of engaging.

So, we invested in building a sales revenue estimator. We modelled typical deals based on selling the maximum portfolio available, and what was needed to create value. We identified that some accounts could be more easily upsold than others by applying the partner’s capability. From here we created a heat map of priority accounts to go for, based on the customer’s propensity to buy the standalone offering versus taking them the joint alliance offering. This allowed us to show sales teams where the low hanging fruit was, and where by engaging they could directly affect near term results.

Revenue estimator – showed account teams how to Double the Deal Size

Following this, we equipped the sales teams with sales enablement material – a pitch deck on the market opportunity and how the alliance addressed it and also ran a demand generation campaign to the accounts identified.
The Results

We showed sales people what was in it for them and made engagement feel safe by starting small with a priority set of accounts, identified as low hanging fruit. In this way we were able to secure both interest and commitment. The account teams were willing to meet and plan how to jointly approach the target set of prospects.

Recommendation

If you would like to improve traction and engagement within your partnership, then perhaps you can start by analysing your install base and identify where the joint offering can have most impact in terms of renewal, up-sell or cross-sell. Then, in this target set of accounts, excite sales by quantifying the opportunity and equip them with sales enablement materials and leads to create and maintain momentum.

Want to find out more on how to engage sales people in your alliance?

Email me helen.rutherford@leadamarket.com
8. ARGUMENTS OVER ACCESS TO RESOURCES

One of the key benefits for many partnerships is having access to resources so that you don’t need to hire and manage people; you can focus all of your efforts on business development. For the partner offering the resources, certainty of utilisation rates reduced cost of sale and ability to scale their operation is the clear motivation.

This all works well in a perfect world of steady supply and demand, but of course real life brings peaks and troughs, and big demand generation efforts in the troughs often culminate in having too much work to deliver in a short time frame during the peaks. Initially this will lead to overloaded delivery and operations teams who become frustrated, overworked and demotivated by sales and marketing’s seeming inability to plan and measure expectations.

This is where the tension over resource access comes in. Suddenly power shifts to the resource owner, who may not have the same priorities as you or, indeed, has a more profitable project to allocate them to. It simply doesn’t make commercial sense for them to supply your project. However, if they don’t look after you now, who is to say you won’t find an alternative supplier for the capabilities that you need.

Case Study

In my example about leadership from when I was involved in managing a global alliance, I talked about expert power and how we had retained a leading consultant with client and supply side experience in delivering very relevant capabilities.

Following a few successful engagements, he became an in-demand resource, with account teams wanting to work with the alliance, purely to access his time, knowledge and skills to help them win deals.
We suddenly found ourselves in a situation where we could not supply the amount of demand, and some of the more vocal account teams started escalating to management to ask for access.

This had the result of our consultant feeling “completely randomised” in his words, and given his skill set he had plenty of other projects to choose from. He was considering leaving the alliance team to work full time on a single client site.

So as an alliance team we had to solicit the support of the alliance sponsors and local leaders to agree how we would prioritise access to this person. We decided that we would resource those that plan, and only those teams with a clear joint account plan and revenue goal in place could apply for support. In this way, we could get a clearer picture of what help was required, and start the process of asking for more funding to invest in an additional consultant.

The results

By communicating that we would resource those that plan, more sales teams started requesting joint account planning sessions, which helped us in over-achieving our collaboration goals. This is because the process of joint planning fosters relationship and trust building, and as account teams came together, they found more ways than we initially anticipated to grow their target customers.

Recommendation

By communicating to your stakeholders that you will resource those that plan, you will be able to get a better forecast of your own hiring and training and therefore budget requirements and you will keep your delivery team happy.

Need help with a joint account planning session for your alliance?

Email me helen.rutherford@leadamarket.com
CONCLUSION

By their nature, collaborations are messy and complex, involving different aims, needs, communication styles, cultures and organisational structures. However, the benefits that can be derived are plentiful if power and politics are managed well and trust is established. Here we have seen both planned and unplanned upside as a result of engaging other organisations in a mutually rewarding way, around three emergent themes: power, politics and trust.

1. Power

Partnerships are all about influence and persuasion, from galvanising key contributors to engage to ensuring you can access the resources that you need, when you need them. Often in alliance management we are having to rely on referent (charismatic) power and sometimes we have the ability to reward others. If you don’t have all bases of power covered, you can ensure that contributors stay engaged by structuring the alliance correctly. By only calling on people when you need them and equipping them with the inputs that they need to be successful, you increase your chances of securing co-operation and support.

2. Politics

The involvement of many people will mean that personal agendas, whether hidden or overt, are brought into the mix. The more people there are, the increased likelihood of conflicting agendas, which may never get fully resolved, rather these different views and needs require ongoing management. By aligning goals, demonstrating what is in it for all participants, and checking back regularly to ensure that all contributors needs are being met, you will increase your chances of alliance success.

3. Trust

Good communication is a key to establishing trust, and in the early days, if partners know they have an exit strategy, they may be more willing to take risks. By ensuring that the right information is shared and discussed in the right way. Further, by clearly articulating the boundaries of the partnership, for example resourcing those that plan, you set yourself up to demonstrate that you will deliver on your word.
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