

MAKING, MANAGING AND DELIVERING AGREEMENTS

Making, managing and delivering on agreements is one of the key skills in creating successful partnerships. In fact, all organisational initiatives depend on effective agreements to build shared commitment and maximise support.

We make agreements everyday. We sit in rooms together and agree what we will do. Then we walk out of those rooms – and find reasons not to do what we just agreed. The impact of this cycle of behaviour – of making & breaking agreements – is organisational chaos, confusion, & conflict.

We often justify our behaviour by saying that the agreement was forced on us, or rushed, or lacked substance or was just plain stupid. Occasionally we admit that we were too tired or too scared to disagree. Many of us would rather sign-up to an inappropriate agreement than risk being open & honest or admit we didn't understand. So we keep our heads down & our mouths shut.

Managing Agreements is more than passive acceptance. A successful agreement ensures that what needs saying is actually said. Such agreements involve a clear process in which even the difficult bits have their place.

An enduring agreement is supported by relationships based on trust, meeting each other's needs and having a shared commitment to ideas, issues, values, and goals. Agreements provide the context that promotes active collaboration and on-going learning.

Effective agreements also reduce organisational conflict and strife. When conflict arises, the resulting chaos is wasteful not only of time and money, but seriously damages relationships. All too often the process of reaching agreement is seen as an adversarial process – one in which each side tries to win. The alternative is

to manage agreements through a joint process that incorporates an inclusive vision of desired outcomes.

The ability to craft agreements is essential for everyone involved in fostering effective partnerships with colleagues, bosses, support staff, suppliers, and potential partners. The aim is to make agreements that focus on results while staying flexible & creative, that build strong relationships by dismantling the blame culture, and deliver optimum solutions that meet the real needs of all concerned.

As part of their review and learning process, the partners involved in a major construction project spent an afternoon working with a specific agreement making technique called a 'pre-mortem' – which involved looking at all the ways the current agreement might conceivably fail. That the ensuing discussion raised some sensitive and difficult issues, was more than offset by the various partners talking through how they could co-operate to dismantle potential problems before they ever appeared.

If you have an interest in developing yourself, your team, your project or your organisation's competence to make, manage and deliver agreements please contact either Michael Jacobs or Simon Vaughan.