

# Evaluation Case Study: Business Partnering

## Building Business Partner Capability

Against a background of public sector funding cuts and the drive for 'smarter', more efficient working practices, there have been a number of re-organisations leading to shared internal service functions and the use of a more system wide methodology to make cost savings and to work more effectively with a greater breadth of understanding across a sector.

We have worked with clients in the health and public service sectors to establish new ways of working that maximise the use of internal service providers. In many organisations, business partnering is about enabling corporate functions to understand what it means to operate as a trusted business partner. The key corporate functions of finance, HR, IT and legal teams may need to work across organisational or geographical boundaries to provide a consistent shared service. In health care, business partnering skills are required across the clinical teams, often working in triumvirates, providing collective medical, nursing and managerial leadership at service level.

In both cases, business partnering focuses on developing the ability to work in a way that deepens the relationship with the internal or external partner. Building relationships, understanding others' perspectives and being able to work collectively to build trust and advise appropriately on their area of expertise leads to strong leadership solutions that are shared and have joint accountability and ownership.

## 1. The Objectives

The aim of the business partnering programme is to develop collaborative working practices, encouraging collective thinking and the development of ideas, building trust and deepening relationships to support the overall aims of the organisation.

Working as a business partner may necessitate individuals working jointly on a project with more senior colleagues, acting as an expert in their field. Having the credibility and confidence to contribute fully whilst also shifting traditional mind sets is part of this new way of working.

Communication skills are very important and being able to understand others' perspectives in order to put forward a view in a way that is meaningful to the recipient is part of the business partner skill set.

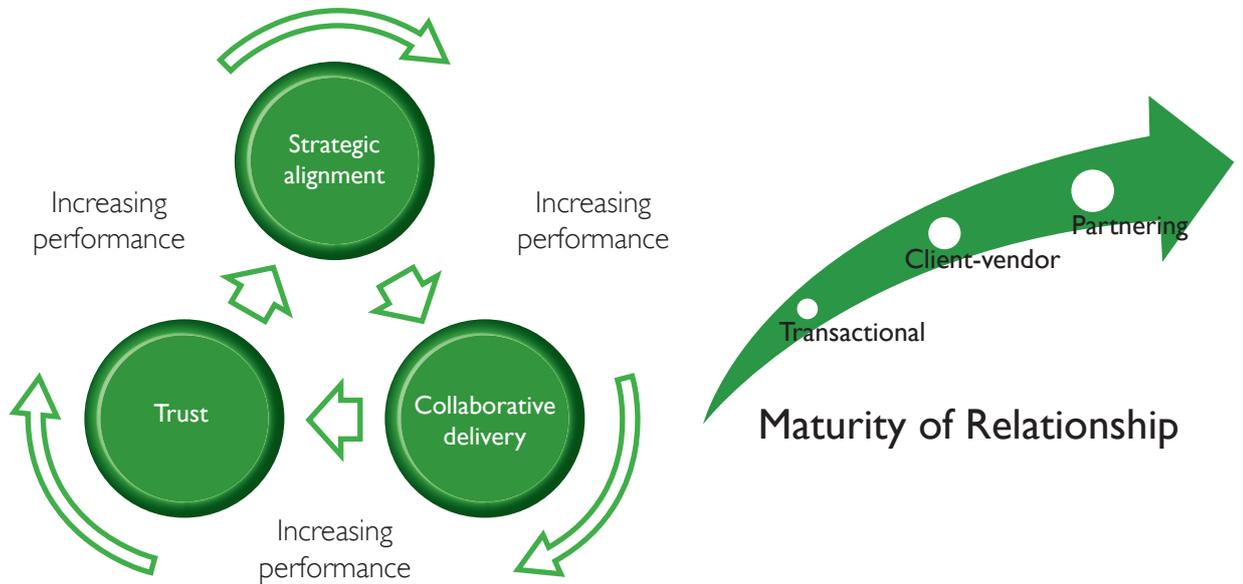
## 2. The challenge

The Beech Centre has worked together with a number of clients and the challenge is to build the internal capability to adopt the business partnering approach and also to influence the wider culture so that the skills and approach are adopted across functions.

It is not just the technical skills of developing excellent consulting, facilitation and coaching skills. Business partnering, at its core, is about your values and beliefs. This approach was implemented in the health and public service sector for the same purpose; to give leaders the confidence to contribute fully and to influence new working relationships in order to work towards a shared goal. There is also the role of business partner to challenge colleagues if they feel that there is a more beneficial way of working and this can be difficult but is essential.

## 3. The Beech Centre Solution

The programme was split into 3 1-day modules with two action learning sets interspersed between the 3 days. A half day launch day and half day evaluation session were part of the plan. The whole programme was used to model a business partnering approach. Module 1 was entitled 'What is business partnering' and covered the concept, the approach and contracting. We used the first session to contract for what the participants wanted to achieve, how they wanted to work and the way they preferred to work together. Modelling a contracting process and demonstrating the importance of trust was key to the first module and is the crux of the business partnering method of working. Module 2, 'know yourself as business partner', looked at what shapes who we are, how we think and how we balance advocacy and inquiry. Module 3, 'The business partner relationship' looked at where the crucial relationships are in a network, how to influence and how to handle difficult relationships. The action learning sets embedded the learning, gave an opportunity to share good practice and discuss barriers and possible solutions and also developed close working relationships within the sets.



## 4. Evaluating the results & return on investment

We captured the learning and best practice in feedback sessions as part of the second action learning set. We contracted for feedback to be shared with the senior team and also asked for any additional feedback that they preferred to keep within the group.

The impact of the programme:

- Networking and communication improved within the service
- Time to reflect was felt to be beneficial-‘time to stop and think differently about what is happening and what is going to happen’
- There was a heightened awareness of the business partnering element of their roles and how they would work together
- ‘It has put us on the same level’ . Working on common goals and recognising how they could work collaboratively
- It improved the quality of feedback, listening, openness and trust
- There was a recognised shift in accountability and personal confidence
- There was ‘more of a buzz’ about the idea of business partnering
- There was a greater acceptance that it was ‘ok’ to be questioned and to challenge what they saw.

The key elements that were felt to be most beneficial were the practical application sessions in the modules and the action learning sets. After the third module, the action learning sets were self-facilitated by the groups and have continued as part of their peer support.