

THINK:

Consider the reasons why the problem exists.

REFLECT:

Place yourself in your partner's position and list the possible reasons for the difficulties.

QUESTION:

Are you really listening to your partner – both to what they say and what they don't say?

Checklist:

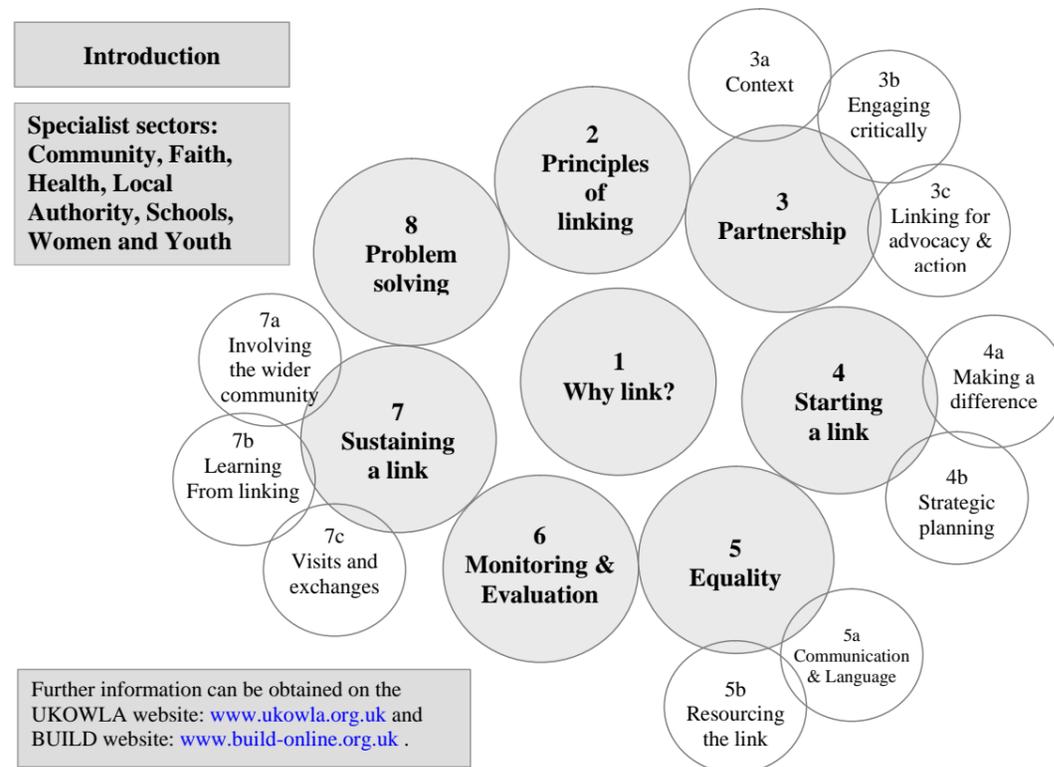
- ✓ Do your partners recognise that there is a problem?
- ✓ Have you tried to discuss the problem with your partners?
- ✓ Are you aware of any reasons why the difficulties exist?
- ✓ Have you tried to involve other community members in addressing the problem?
- ✓ Have changes taken place which may not suit your partner's circumstances?
- ✓ Have your partner's circumstances changed?
- ✓ Would a temporary break in the link help or hinder the relationship?
- ✓ If communications are a problem, have you investigated alternatives?
- ✓ Are resources part of the problem? Is there a way around that?
- ✓ Are you being realistic in your expectations?

Next steps:

When things go wrong it is important to:

- Face up to them; don't hope they'll just go away.
- Assess the situation: look at communications, at morale, at motivation and so on.
- Consider sharing the problem with your partner if you can – confidentiality if need be.
- Consider bringing in someone neutral and independent to help sort things out.
- Look at any agreements and use agreed methods of managing difficulties.
- Consider changes aimed at repairing the situation.
- Work out what you would like to happen. See if others agree.
- Think of ways to reduce further difficulties.
- Work with your partner to plan and deliver a revised programme.

Toolkit for Linking leaflets



Further information can be obtained on the UKOWLA website: www.ukowla.org.uk and BUILD website: www.build-online.org.uk.

Problems, Problems ...

All projects have difficulties at some stage in the process. Some factors can be anticipated and others completely unexpected.

However some common reasons for plans going wrong have been identified*:

- Poor understanding of the project requirements
- Missing activities and tasks identified later
- Changes resulting from modified objectives
- Over-optimistic estimates
- Assumptions not checked out and validated
- Issues not resolved – awaiting management decisions
- Poor estimating
- Missing skills and low confidence levels
- Complexity or difficulty of work not understood

*Trevor Young: *30 minutes to plan a project*. Kogan Page, 1997

Patience is the best remedy for every trouble.
Titus Maccius Plautus

Difficulties within links can be reduced if project management techniques are applied. Linking is time-consuming and demands a substantial commitment of energy, patience and resources. Problems arise for a variety of reasons and at different stages in the development of a link. Such difficulties are increased by language, communication and cultural differences; financial constraints and lack of resources; and different agendas and priorities. People often feel that they are the only ones experiencing difficulties with their link. Linking is often promoted by national institutions as an essentially simple activity, because of the lack of understanding of the complexity of the process in reality.

As with any relationship, links run into difficulties for a range of reasons. Lack of communication due to problems of distance, inaccessibility, language and partners' concerns can lead to frustration and lack of motivation. Some examples of difficulties might be:

- Partners not responding to emails, letters or phone calls
- One partner sends information to the other but the other partner doesn't respond or reciprocate
- One partner suggests work which the other partner does not feel they can undertake because of lack of time or money
- A key person leaves and there is no one to co-ordinate the work
- A partner misunderstands the other's intentions and responds inappropriately.

But remember you can change plans if they are not working, seem impractical, or a changing situation demands it. The first thing is to be completely honest with your partner. If you are having problems or think there has been a misunderstanding, let them know as quickly and clearly as possible in the most tactful way you can.

Problems with communication are one of the most quoted areas of difficulty in linking. Communication difficulties may be due to recognisable factors such as unreliable post, ineffective telecommunications and lack of access to IT equipment. Other problems may be more difficult to foresee such as identifying the person who has the authority, or who is prepared to take the decisions required. People change and new relationships have to be established.

Remember all links experience their difficulties. You are not alone. Do share with others, particularly if you have access to a link support organisation or network. Whatever the basis for the link, the mechanics of linking, the difficulties, constraints and opportunities are the same.

What others say

Where paternalism is present, a spirit of partnership and mutuality cannot function. Links also fail where there is the mistaken assumption that all the expertise needed to make a success of a development project is already present in one or other of the partner communities.

Nigel Ringrose, UNDP

We need to enable people to speak for themselves rather than about them, and this means hearing a range of perspectives from different angles.

Dan Rees, UK

When we are working with people from different cultures and value systems we have to see beyond our Northern mindset. We need to be able to debate and to 'suspend disbelief'. We have to accept that there will not be a perfect fit.

Martin Mikhail, UK

Whose agenda is it? Who's setting the priorities? There needs to be listening, there isn't enough listening.

Emma Franks, UK

Dialogue and not 'listening to': dialogue implies listening, responding and listening again so that the aims and objectives of both sides can be worked out together.

Mary Sheaff, UK

Words are like bullets; if they escape, you can't catch them again. *African saying*

If I hear anyone say "what these people need is ..., I shall put you on the next plane home". *Leader on UK visit to Gambia.*

Never criticize a man until you've walked a mile in his moccasins. *Native American Proverb*

Patience is the greatest of all virtues. *Cato the Elder, Italy*

Lack of enthusiasm by people plagued with problems of fighting for daily survival and the complacency of others, because of their fairly stable position, can both be a major problems. *Stroud Consultation report, 1988*

Sources of conflict:

Joint collaborative ownership of the link will help to prevent difficulties

Communication:

- Interpretation: misunderstandings can arise at any stage.
- Assumptions: about your partner community or about what someone is thinking or feeling.
- Practical problems: postal and telecommunications systems.
- Styles: the way people interact can create barriers.
- Language: respect others' lack of fluency and avoid using slang and colloquial language.

Tip: get a friend to check your email or letter before you send it to check for ambiguities.

People:

- Changes of key people in the link.
- Knowing who has authority to do what.
- Local politics.
- Other pressures on key people's time.
- Inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour.
- Lack of sensitivity to local people and customs.
- Differences in values.
- Differences in priorities.
- Health problems: illness can be a bigger problem in some communities than others. Be sensitive to it.

Resources:

- Running out of money: if the focus has been on fundraising.
- Fundraising: spending too much time fundraising at the expense of partnership building and other activities.
- Concepts of charity: different perceptions of aid and fundraising.
- Recognition: lack of acknowledgement of other people's contributions of time, effort and energy.
- Money: conflict over use of money and priorities.
- Funding: lack of transparency, poor accounting.
- Practicalities: difficulties with sharing information and accessing equipment to facilitate communications.

Time:

- Meetings and decision making; make sure who is deciding what.
- Exchange visits: insufficient planning can lead to problems.
- Insufficient attention to incoming visitors.

Planning:

- Lack of clarity: understanding of same information differently.
- Lack of information can leave those taking part feeling ill prepared; err on the safe side.
- Scale: being too ambitious. Keep it simple. A modest project that works is better than a complicated one that doesn't.
- Understanding: not ensuring that partners understand particular issues. Do check if you are in doubt.

Participation

- Decision- making and ownership: do be very clear about lines of responsibility and accountability – on your side and on your partners side.
- Not reaching all sectors: do involve the wider community.
- Running out of steam: loss of enthusiasm and lack of ideas. It happens. Be alert for it, and react as soon as you can.
- Lack of consultation.
- Lack of reciprocity.

Training:

- Look out for training opportunities for both partners which could strengthen the relationship.
- Sharing of expertise and understanding on a range of issues can help build capacity.

Attitudes:

- Can perpetuate and reinforce, rather than counter, patronising, racist and materialist attitudes by sustaining a climate of dependency.
- Can cause problems of ownership resulting in mistrust and jealousy.

Assumptions:

Don't assume that partners have:

- made, and are able to make, the same level of commitment to a link.
- the same skills, learning and the same approach on concepts such as democracy, gender relations, relations within families etc. Unless explored and clarified these could form barriers to communications.
- the same capacity to sustain a link.

To minimise conflict keep the link under review.

The main focus of a review will tend to be the overall purpose and achievement of the link, its failures and successes, the benefits it has brought, but it should also expose the pitfalls. The key elements to remember are:

Reciprocity: Partnership: Equality:

To what extent are they genuinely enacted through the link?

Ownership: Participation: Decision-making:

How well in practice do these match the aspirations of the linkers?

Communication:

How effectively is this sustained on all levels?

Taken from: *Community Link Handbook. Peter Batty, UKOWLA1990*

Traps: What to Avoid in a Partnership:

A view from the Scouts Movement

1. Decision-making: making decisions without involving the other partners.
 2. Developing a partnership without establishing the NEED; basing partnership on "personal friendship" and not expressed need.
 3. ASSUMING: Lack of preparation by partners to learn about others' culture and way of doing things.
 4. Not respecting NSOs* structures. Developing a partnership as a "parallel" unit, and not part of the Association's decision-making structure.
 5. Negative attitudes: "Paternalistic" by "Donor" Partner.
 6. Getting into "Action" without an agreement and hence no understanding on how to solve problems.
 7. Starting without a time-frame/Action plan.
 8. Assuming the partner NSO has the capacity to implement a partnership/project.
 9. Forgetting the CORE business of Scouting and hence forgetting the educational component and use of the Scout Method.
 10. Lack of transparency. Only a few people who know the details of the project.
 11. Changing the agreed objectives without consultation with the partners.
 12. Reporting: NOT sending reports as agreed.
- *NSO: National Scout Organisation

*World Organisation of the Scout Movement
www.scout.org*