



What's Your Alliance IQ?

Use these questions and tools to decide if you're on track to a successful alliance.

By Ed Rigsbee

Developing alliances is rarely easy. Studies show that about 50% of alliances created in the United States fail for one reason or another.

The reasons you enter into a partnership are based on need and competencies. The need side is represented by areas where you consider yourself or your organization lacking or weak. The competency side is the opposite, the strengths you have to share. An ideal alliance situation is with a person or organization that exhibits competency in your weaker areas and need in your areas of competency. This is where your circles of interest strongly overlap—where you and your partner have the greatest chance to be of service to one another.

Forming an alliance can provide

great benefits if you do all you can to become the best partner you can be. Here are ways to boost your alliance IQ and pave the way for a successful collaboration:

Dig Deep Inside

Look closely at yourself to see if you're capable of being an optimal partner. There are many reasons *not* to partner. For example, you may view the world from a place of loss and negativity. You may feel you have the market cornered and enjoy the position of calling all the shots. You may be a loner and prefer to do things by yourself. Maybe you're even satisfied to make do with less.

If you avoid partnering for any of these reasons, be forewarned: You can't lead your organization to success without partnering to some degree. You simply can't operate in

a vacuum and survive. So if any of the above reasons for not partnering applies to you, work on changing these perceptions and turning yourself into a good alliance partner. The better a partner you can be, the more likely it is that your organization will thrive in today's world.

Make Collaboration an Organizational Imperative

Be sure your culture fosters collaboration. Here are a few ways to develop a collaborative culture:

Cultivate diversity. Be open to many different opinions and points of view.

Empower your employees by giving them responsibility. Encourage them to become actively involved in decision-making.

Embrace ethical practices throughout your organization. Have a strong

Rate Yourself as an Alliance Partner

To build competent collaborations, you and your alliance partner need at least a sprinkling of the following six personal qualities. Rate yourself from 1-10 on each attribute, and ask your partner to do the same. If you both rate low on a trait, put extra effort into developing it.

1. **Communication Skills.** Research shows that the leading reason for alliance failure is a lack of good communication. This is the most important area on which to focus. One key is to have as many face-to-face meetings as possible.
2. **Curiosity.** You must be open to all the new—and frequently unsuspected—opportunities that are part of every alliance.
3. **Vision.** Be clear on the goals your alliance will help you reach. Simply developing an alliance because it's the trendy thing to do is hardly a reason to put forth the effort.
4. **Organizational Ability.** Your ability to organize, in the form of alliance structure, procedure, and process, will have a huge impact on your collaboration's success.
5. **Compassion.** It's vital for partners to be tolerant of other people's foibles. Appreciate what your partners offer. Give them a break when necessary, and don't expect perfection.
6. **Leadership Skills.** Partnering must start at the top. The executive must drive the philosophy through both word and deed. You must be an alliance champion throughout your organization. Here, more than in any other area, your willingness to focus on getting things done, rather than obsessing on being right, will determine alliance success.

code of ethics, and enforce it consistently.

Let people know you want their input. When you receive feedback, act on it.

Create a system that is flexible and can change direction quickly when necessary.

Put energy into building relationships.

Trust and respect others.

Think Your Way to Being the Ideal Partner

Attitude can and will make the difference between partnering failure and success. It's easy to get into the mindset of "I don't care" or "I can't do it." It's your self-confidence that will allow you to become the optimal partner.

You need to like the people with whom you'll be working.

To view your daily concerns—better yet, challenges—from a new perspective, you need to shift your paradigms (beliefs, standards, or models). You must move away from what isn't serving you.

Look at it this way: When you see a tall tree from 50 feet away through a standard 50mm camera lens, you see a particular view, not all of the tree. Change to a macro closeup lens and you don't see much of anything. Now change to a wide-angle lens, and you see just about all of it. What was different each time? A new lens will transform the way you see the world. So, change your filter, your vision, and behold new possibilities.

To stretch your partnering muscles, ask yourself daily: "Would I enter into a partnering alliance with somebody like me?" and "Whom do I now trust that may serve and be served as my partner?"

Pick Your Partner Well

Look for an organization whose core competencies mesh well with those of your organization. Make

sure the organization's leader has qualities that complement your own. And don't forget that you need to like the people with whom you'll be working. When conflict arises, as it will, getting along and liking each other makes all the difference in the effort to make things work.

Follow the Platinum Rule

Instead of the Golden Rule, adhere to the Platinum Rule: Do unto others the way *they* would have *you* do unto them. Try to see things as your partner does. Learn to communicate on their terms rather than yours.

In the Korean culture, the principle of *nunchi*, the ability to look in someone's eyes and understand, allows for powerful nonverbal communication. Through this process, employees make decisions that reflect how their manager would expect them to decide. As partnering relationships blossom, this sense of understanding becomes deeper and leads to alliance harmony. Study *nunchi*. If you can develop this sense, you'll become the type of person to whom others will gravitate—the optimal partner. ■

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RESOURCES

Bush, Richard, "Collaboration and Leadership: Secrets of Success," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 24, No. 1.

"How to Partner for Success," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 24, No. 6.

Rigsbee, Ed, "Take the Collaboration Quiz," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 24, No. 3.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members. Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Strategic Alliances (www.snpo.org/lino).

Half of all alliances fail.

The Secret to Alliances that Last

To keep your partnership on track, answer the following questions *in writing* every six months. Have your partner do the same, and exchange answers. After each of you has reviewed the information, arrange to meet face-to-face and discuss the results.

This tool will help you and your partner understand each other's perspective, the value the alliance delivers to each of you, and spots that need more work. This tactic is your best help for avoiding perception challenges and dealing with small issues before they get out of hand.

1. What value has my organization received from our strategic alliance?

Has the alliance helped my organization's core competencies?

Has it helped us reduce costs?

Has it helped us reduce duplication of effort?

What new markets has our partner helped us access?

What innovations have we discovered with our partner's help?

What other valuable benefits have we received?

2. What value do I believe my partner has received from our alliance?

How have we helped our partner's core competencies?

How have we helped reduce our partner's costs?

How have we helped reduce our partner's duplication of effort?

What new markets have we helped our partner access?

What innovations have we helped our partner discover?

What other benefits have we delivered to our partner?

3. What actions do we plan to take to improve our performance in the alliance relationship?

4. What steps would we like to see our partner take to improve the alliance relationship?