

FRIENDSHIP Connections Training Course

Context

Projects and programmes that result from participation in Contact Making Seminars, Partnership Building Activities or similar, tend to come about because of a shared interest in a common theme or, as is more likely, the strength of relationship that evolves between participants that 'click' because of a similarity or similarities in personality.

The success of each initiative more often than not relies on that relationship which is 'forged' over time; but what happens if that relationship breaks down, or the foundation of relationship was never that strong in the first place and fades over time, or one of the participants move on to another project or organisation?

One of the flaws at the outset of any partnership, is the assumption that the natural rapport between individuals or the energy and ambition generated in the project development phase be that at the Contact Making Seminar or similar, or a combination of both, is the gel that binds the partnership together.

Without any real exploration of what it actually takes, in real terms, to maintain the relationship between representatives of each partner organisation, or the various structural elements that construct the partnership, e.g., contracts, roles and responsibilities, tasks, schedules, and so on, partners overlook what is effectively a 'design flaw.'

Addressing the 'blindside'

Often the project succeeds not because each partner organisation fully understands the commitment they have taken on, or because it fits with the annual plan, or it meets priorities of local needs and so on, but rather because of the drive and ambition of individuals who are fully committed to making it work because they have invested in it, personally.

Reputation, 'know-how,' previous experience, faith in individual ability, personal value systems, ambition, ego, belief that everything will be ok and commitment to seeing the project through can 'blindside' even the most experienced individuals to the possibility that it might all go 'pear-shaped' so to speak.

This training programme will address that 'blindside' by engaging participants in a deliberate process that 'forces' them to focus the 'fundamentals' of the relationship rather than the project.

Design Flaw

The measure of any relationship or partnership is not when it's going well but rather when issues arise and how these are dealt with and how the relationship then endures or is maintained. That however, is the design flaw in many relationships - issues are often only dealt with when they arise as opposed to anticipating where they might arise from the outset.

No-one tends to focus on 'tricky' issues, or have uncomfortable conversations because it might 'dampen' the natural enthusiasm or sow seeds of doubt when the natural rapport that gives the relationship its richness or its very own unique dynamic is in 'full flow.' Of course, it is not natural to discuss these at the beginning of a relationship, yet when issues arise, hindsight tells us that is exactly what we should have done.

Essential Factors

A number of essential factors are key to the success in any relationship or partnership: trust, respect, acceptance, tolerance, an embracing of diversity, honesty, integrity, a desire to share learning, a commitment to creating opportunities for learning, a commitment to understanding, a strong value base and the search for common ground.

Whilst these 'essential factors' are common to each of us, every individual is very much their 'own person'. People are very much unique (and quite diverse) in their own way not only with regard to the skills that they have but in as far as their own personality is concerned. This potentially brings great complementarity when it comes to practice enabling individuals to 'bounce off' one another which helps maximise what is 'on offer' to groups they work or will work with.

The Concept

FRIENDSHIP (Friends Really Interested in Engaging and Navigating Development of Shared Humanistic Initiatives and Programmes) Connections is a new and simplistic methodology that is easy to use and designed to maximise the resources, time commitment and energy of practitioners in order to achieve the best results when proposing to work together.

FRIENDSHIP Connections is a recognition that colleagues within 'the field' become friends and tend to (want to) work together for obvious reasons, e.g., it's easier to work with those you get on with and/or share a common interest, or share similar opinions, ideas, worldview etc. Essentially, you will work with those you connect with rather than those you don't connect with. It is of course obvious but that's inherently where the design flaw lies – the natural rapport gets in the way of checking how the relationship will be managed and as result, friends just get on with being friends.

'Relationship in Reverse'

Participants will begin to understand why it is necessary to begin the 'relationship in reverse', i.e., address potential issues rather than wait for the issues to surface before trying to mend or repair damage that occurs. This means asking participants to do something that is unnatural to them, i.e., talk about how the relationship is managed as if they are in the third person, rather than 'being in' the relationship and living and embracing it.

A different starting point, i.e., how is this relationship going to work and what happens if....? is rarely if ever tried. It's quite an unnatural starting position but once any relationships start to strain, a period of reflection, the use of hindsight or '20/20 vision' tends to follow and those involved wish they had approached things differently from the outset. Or at least, protagonists commit to applying themselves differently to any future relationships only to often make the same or similar mistakes.

Applying this 'relationship in reverse' approach, we can support the development of a new and emerging practice. 'FRIENDSHIP Connections' helps us adjust our thinking in order to understand how we can set the relationship from the outset, where it is 'programmed' to succeed by reducing the need for a process of 'trial and error.'

The practice that underpins 'FRIENDSHIP Connections' is the 'TRIUMPHED' model and this effectively becomes a way to approach relationships in the future, i.e., relationships that form the basis of a mutually beneficial arrangement between two or more parties. It can be used in formal partnerships between organisations, or equally, it can be applied in Mentoring, Coaching, Supervision, or similar.

Aim

To raise the value and quality of partnership working by demonstrating how to create and make a more meaningful and lasting connection between partners by prioritising the 'fundamentals' of 'the relationship' as opposed to focusing the development of programmes or projects in order to ensure more resilient, successful and longer-term co-operation.

Objectives

We will achieve the above by:

1. recruiting and selecting targeted audiences willing to commit to an intensive period of learning by immersing themselves in focused, considered and deliberate processes geared towards getting the best from trans-national collaboration;
2. engaging participants in a continuum-focused journey that promotes progressionary learning;
3. introducing participants to a new and innovative way of building partnerships through an in-depth approach to nine key areas - Trust, Respect, Integrity, Unity, Management, Personality, Honesty, Equity and Dignity;
4. providing participants with a five-phased, 13-stage process experiential learning process that underlines the importance of the relationship as central to a successful partnership;
5. supporting participants in working out what is essential to:
 - (i) breaking down barriers
 - (ii) building rapport
 - (iii) identifying essential qualities
 - (iv) identifying issues and linking them to 'the relationship'
 - (v) carrying out a public appraisal
 - (vi) ensuring success
6. creating space and time for each participant to consider their individual approach, their professional approach, the work of their organisation and the issues and challenges they face in the process and the implications of each to the success of project(s) they develop and/or are working on;
7. creating space and time for individual reflection so as to maximise learning and appreciation of commitments, obligations and expectations;
8. engaging participants in a process of self-assessment so as to identify goals, milestones and outcomes;
9. using a wide variety of non-formal methodologies to fulfil programme objectives;
10. ensuring outcomes-focused delivery.

Learning

Participants will have a better understanding of the 'FRIENDSHIP Connections' concept, its methods and the conversations required to carve out more successful relationships and in turn partnerships, in order to ensure greater levels of success and quality.

Participants will come away with a deeper understanding of the tools and techniques that make the relationship work rather than focusing on 'the moments' that create the story of the relationship. For example, participants will look at things like needs, expectations, boundaries and values, whereas normally, people discover these through 'trial and error.' Participants will examine what makes others tick, what they will accept or not accept, what frustrates or annoys them, etc.

The impact of this is that participants emerge from the process with much greater insight into those they work with. They understand much more intimately their personality, their beliefs, their various senses, their 'triggers' and so on, and in doing so learn about and value to a much greater extent, the importance of listening, empathy, patience, compassion, being sensitive and so on. They take this knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour with them into their current and future relationships, and their working practice, and they begin to share and 'teach' this approach with others.

Each participant will emerge as a more complete individual, better able to relate to others, more willing to offer support, is more patient and co-operates more freely. Each will be less dogmatic in their beliefs, increase their capacity to compromise, and will become better at articulating and asserting their needs but in a way that is sensitive and still leaves room for manoeuvre.

Ultimately, participants will become less likely to 'walk away', withdraw or give up on challenging or difficult situations that arise in any relationship that they have an interest in, or need to be part of as required by a third party.