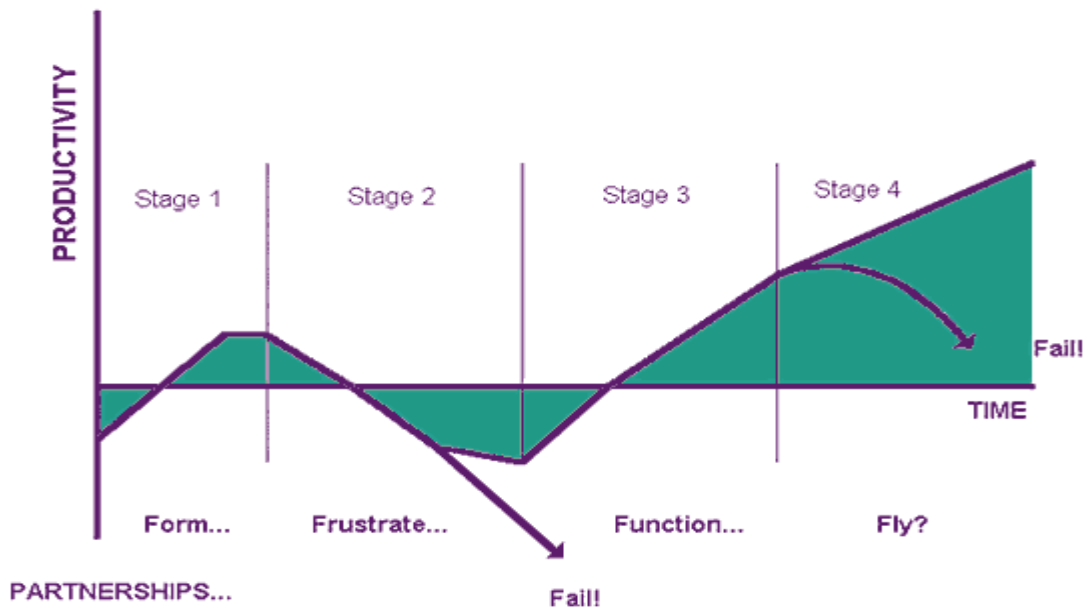




The Partnership Life Cycle

It is sometimes helpful to think of partnerships as going through a series of stages, during which particular tactics are most appropriate to ensuring partnership progress and success. These are similar to the stages that any team is likely to go through, as people come together to achieve common goals.

The Partnership Life Cycle



Typical characteristics of each stage:

1 Forming

- common cause, arising from shared interests, opportunities, threats
- early enthusiasm: new challenge, new relationships
- exploring what's needed, what's possible
- nature of commitments unclear

2 Frustration

- partners feel "in a fog"
- disputes or tension over priorities and methods
- individuals questioning purpose of the partnership and reasons for being there
- hidden agendas influencing what partners do
- doubts about what each other brings to the party
- partners competing for credit and control

reproduced with permission of the Department for Education and Skills from "[Five Vital Lessons: Successful Partnership with Business](#)" (authors: [EDuce Ltd](#) and [GFA Consulting](#)).

3 Functioning

- renewed vision and focus
- progress through joint project teams
- partners talk in terms of "we" not "you"
- clear roles and responsibilities
- full accountability to each other for actions

4 Flying

- successful achievement of partnership goals
- shared leadership
- partners changing what they do and how they do it to achieve partnership objectives
- trust and mutual respect
- partnership priorities central to partner activities

5 Failing

- disengagement
- lack of commitment
- recurrent tensions
- breakdown or frittering away of relationships

The Partnership Life Cycle in Practice

Some partnerships may never get beyond this Stage 2 of Frustration, and may skip directly to Stage 5 - Failing (the downward arrows on the graph). This is where the partnership disintegrates, eg, for want of a sufficient common cause, changes in people involved or a failure to work at partnership.

Partnerships need to work through the stages of the life cycle in order to function with greatest effectiveness (or "fly".) Even in the best partnerships, there is a tendency for partnerships to falter and perhaps fail, unless the partners consciously manage their progress through the critical stages of the life cycle.

Quite often, partnerships find themselves in a "crossover" zone between Frustration and Functioning. In these cases, partners may have a heightened sense of the partnership failings, and may doubt the point of the partnership. Radical action may be needed to get the partnership on track, refocusing on the partnership potential and vision, benefits and some early wins to build confidence and commitment.

HINTS AND TOP TIPS

If you're at this stage...	consider...	Is this action relevant?
1. Forming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create opportunities for people to get to know each other • encourage partners to focus on a common vision, the difference they want to make together • define tasks and tangible outcomes • shepherd the process of building the partnership agenda - including through use of research • ensure neutral meeting ground 	
2. Frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revisit the common ground - allow time to redefine issues, purpose, etc • maximise opportunities for practical involvement • implement actions which demonstrate progress ("little victories") • encourage open expression and constructive disagreement • clarify benefits to individual partners • promote mutual appreciation of what each other can contribute • fix the problem, not the blame 	
3. Functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree clear objectives, milestones, responsibilities, success measures • establish principles/ protocols for collaboration • encourage shared leadership and accountability • develop common methods and quality standards • seek learning consciously through cross-partner project teams joint training and reviewing activities 	
4. Flying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anticipate future challenges and build partner capacity to respond • take stock of how well the group is performing • keep working at communications • avoid any unnecessary partnership working • ask: does the partnership still serve its purpose? • ensure that all partners are getting the benefits they expect • continue to celebrate success 	
5. Failing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • go back to Stage 1? 	