

H-I Partnering Survey

The use of partners is an area where most large companies focus activity at some point in their Innovation journey. In February 2010, H-I Network undertook a partnering survey amongst its members to understand the dynamics of partnerships. The survey addressed what value organisations got out of partnerships, how they structured these relationships, measured success and what lessons have been learnt. The following is a summary of the conclusions from the initial sample survey.

When asked about their partnering activities, most companies reported that they typically enter into a standard type of contractual relationship although the term of the contract, for the majority of the companies, is relatively long (in excess of 12 months). A few companies reported that they had used a results-based contractual model although they did not explicitly report on the relative success of this type of relationship.

Most of the relationships seem to be maintained at 'arm's length' and focus on output (activities) rather than outcome (transfer of skills or knowledge). Interestingly, 60% of respondents reported that they carried out a post-engagement review and marked the scale and effectiveness of the relationships as relatively low (2.4 out of 5).

Successful relationships have similar dynamics in that there has to be an understanding between the two parties of the value each brings – very much around pooling of knowledge rather than one party being 'dominant'. Clear deliverables and objectives are important to a successful engagement, as is a willingness and openness to share information etc.

Where relationships have not worked well there appeared to be a lack of clarity about what was expected and who owned the outcome. Further issues in this area were the quality of delivery and skills from the third party. Customers' expectations were significantly higher than what was delivered.

Most partners are sourced by recommendation, although the second most used source has become the internet. Partners were predominantly either from academic institutions or independent consultancies with larger consultancies and venture capital organisations in third place.

Partnering still seems to be an active and attractive area for organisations looking to introduce new ideas and solutions into their organisation. It is surprising that skills transfer and coaching were not reported as a result of these relationships.

The survey results will be distributed to a wider group in February. Further analysis and a formal report will be produced and presented at the

Innovation Research workshop at the Royal Society in London on 29 April.

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