

## Diagnosing the Health of Your Partnership in Difficult Times

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Sometimes, partnerships reach an impasse. The impasse may be due to strained relationships or to obstacles the partnership can't overcome to accomplish its goals. Partners need to generate answers to some of these questions separately, and others they should discuss together, to diagnose the health of their partnership in difficult times. The diagnosis may result in a decision to alter the arrangement between the two partners. It may also result in a decision to take a break from the partnership or end it.

### Questions to Answer On Your Own

#### *About your relationship to the partner*

- If you often get annoyed at your partner organization, do you pause to determine what the problem is?
- Are the strengths and capabilities of the partner organization still valued and appreciated?
- Are the partner organization's needs and problem are still of concern to you (i.e., solving them is still worth it to you because partnership is still valuable to you?)
- Are you able to keep yourselves from driving an issue to a painful point over the same issue repeatedly, without resolution?

*If you answer "No" to one or more of these, your partnership might be in trouble.*

#### Relationship of Self to the Work

- Is the work nearly always exhausting, or does it still energize and inspire you?
- Do you regularly "overcommit" to the work to meet partners' needs, even when you don't have time or resources to do so?

*If you answer "Yes" to one or both of these, your partnership might be in trouble.*

## Questions to Answer Together

Are we meeting regularly, or have meetings dropped off in number and frequency? If we are meeting less regularly, is this because we've not felt the need or because we don't feel that meetings are productive?

To what extent are the needs of each partner organization being met by the partnership?

If the answers to these questions about needs are "no":

Do we have the willingness and authority to adapt within the broad framework of the partnership's aims or to adjust the aims to better meet partners' needs?

If the answer is "no," Ask: Could the relationship change to some other collaborative agreement, such as one identified in Chapter 2?

If the answer is "no," Ask: Might we need to go separate ways, at least temporarily? And is there a way to establish what conditions would re-engage us as partners productively?

If the answer is "yes," then set a timeline for check-in, based on the nature of precipitating events (e.g., pending outcome of some new reorganization or if new policy X evolves to not be constraining in ways that have led to an impasse in the work).