An Introduction to BS 11000 - Collaborative Business Relationships

By Jason Hier

You are interested in making your business relationships create more value, aren’t you?

Wouldn’t you agree that having a collaborative business relationship with people who you do business with, is important if not critical?

For many years I have been trying to win projects and then deliver them successfully as a consultant and as a business leader internationally. The one key area that I have learnt to focus on is the developing, nurturing and maintaining of relationships with people who I have worked for and with.

For some of us this aspect of business comes more naturally, while for others we have to work at it.

Well now we have a framework to help guide you and I, on how to develop collaborative business relationships with other people and organisations. In October 2010 the British Standard Institute - BSi, launched its specification BS 11000 collaborative business relationships - Part 1: A framework specification.

For some people creating a specification on how to develop collaborative relationships, may appear to mechanistic for such a "soft issue". That maybe true to a degree but if we look at the 3 words in the title "collaborative business relationship", especially collaboration, maybe it helps to overcome that point to a degree.

Let me share with you how I think you can use this specification to create mutual value for both you and your collaborative business partner by breaking down the phrase "collaborative business relationships".

What do we mean by collaboration?

Sometimes people confuse collaboration with communication. Communication is part of collaboration.

In general terms collaboration is when people agree to work together to deliver an agreed outcome. Based on this there are four parts for collaboration to happen:

- Communication: talking about what we are going to do.
- Contract: agreement on how we will behave and operate
- Action: what we do to deliver.
- Outcome: creating value which we could not have done by ourselves - the reason to collaborate

The other two words in the title "business relationship" can be viewed in the context of a strategy map and the two internal perspectives - Learning and Growth (Organisation, People and Data) this is the "relationship" and are intangible assets. The second perspective is Internal (Management Processes) this is the "business" and are tangible assets.

You are part of a business, which has both tangible and intangible assets that can be used as resources to support and deliver a project, new products and services that you have decided to develop and deliver with another group of people or organisation.
Your tangible "business" assets will include the physical buildings and equipment along with the multitude of business processes that you use to execute your work. Harnessing and reusing these so you can integrate them efficiently and effectively with your business partner, is going to save you both time and money and increases your joint capability to deliver successfully.

The intangible "relationship" assets, which are your Organisations culture, leadership, alignment and teamwork; the People who work with you - their skills, knowledge and experience; coupled with the information management systems that you use, covers the Learning and Growth perspective of your business. Incidentally, this typically represents 70% of your businesses value and is going to have the biggest impact on whether you are successful or not.

Realising these intangible and tangible assets is crucial and can be used in a collaborative way to deliver value propositions and create added value that you and your partner have agreed and set as an outcome.

Creating a framework to help you integrate these tangible and intangible assets together with another organisation, in a collaborative way I believe, is a good start in the right direction, what do you think?

**So what is BS 11000?**

Well, the standard is divided into three phases and includes eight stages. These are listed below by phase:

1. **Strategic Phase**: Stage 1 Awareness (Clause 3); Stage 2 Knowledge (Clause 4) and Stage 3 Internal assessment (Clause 5)
2. **Engagement Phase**: Stage 4 Partner selection (Clause 6); Stage 5 Working together (Clause 7); Stage 6 Value creation (Clause 8)
3. **Management Phase**: Stage 7 Staying together (Clause 9) and Stage 8 Exit strategy (Clause 10)

Each of these phases and respective stages are captured within a Relationship Management Plan (RMP). The RMP is the end deliverable in the form of a document which evolves as you work your way through the various stages. The RMP can be used initially as the baseline document within your business to record the corporate processes, especially those that already exist. This corporate RMP becomes a template for any specific project and future business partnering relationship.

The scope of BS 11000 is to help you identify, develop and manage collaborative business relationships between discreet organisations, functions and groups that you have identified. You can apply it to any size of organisation and will need to configure accordingly to suit the kind of relationship levels you are focusing on - small to large, simple to complex so that it improves operational performance and develops relationships that add value for you.

**BS 11000 Stages**

Below I have summarized the 8 stages for you so you become aware of how easily you could apply BS 11000 to your business and potential collaborative relationships.

1. **Stage 1 Awareness**: Clause 3 helps you to consider and develop your corporate policy, identify the processes that form a basis for you to incorporate collaborative working as an active process that adds value and becomes part of your organisations culture.
2. **Stage 2 Knowledge**: Clause 4 helps you to concentrate on discovering the knowledge that exists against an identified opportunity so you can create a
business case and benefits analysis, This is similar to a gap analysis with a Go/No Go action at the end.

3. **Stage 3 Internal Assessment**: Clause 5 provides you guidance on how to complete a gap analysis with regards to your current capability and maturity to successfully engage in a collaborative initiative. Although this is Stage 3, it is worth considering doing this first.

4. **Stage 4 Partner selection**: Clause 6 now you have strategically decided to move ahead you will need to create a process to identify, evaluate and select appropriate partners. From my experience I have seen this done differently, if at all within the same company with varying degrees of success.

5. **Stage 5 Working together**: Clause 7 once you have selected a partner(s) you need to make sure you have the correct operational structure, governance and RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Inform, Consult) to effectively deliver the business case you developed in Stage 2.

6. **Stage 6 Value creation**: Clause 8 you need to keep the relationship alive, dynamic and beneficial so that it continues to deliver sustainable value by implementing the appropriate processes and approaches.

7. **Stage 7 Staying together**: Clause 9 after you spent time and effort in developing this relationship you need to measure and monitor the relationship so that its performance is fully optimised.

8. **Stage 8 Exit strategy**: Clause 10 everything has a shelf life and you need to be prepared so that you can disengage efficiently when appropriate making sure you secure business continuity and the "door is left open" for future business relationships.

As you probably have realised this is not a step by step process but an iterative one as lessons are learnt, opportunities present themselves and as new information is obtained.

**The benefits of working collaboratively**

Can you imagine using this framework and how it can successfully help you create more collaborative and higher value business relationships?

Putting this framework in place will overtime increase your capability to deliver joint efficiencies, innovate and explore new ways of working and enhance the culture of your organisation into a more open and transparent business, empowering your people to be more challenging and performance focused.

BS 11000 is not a "silver bullet" for business relationships. It is a framework to integrate your tangible and intangible assets in a collaborative manner and when applied in conjunction with training and development of people, supported by the right collaboration technology; you will be able to create high value, viable and strategic business relationships both internally and externally.

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Discover how you can easily create collaborative business relationships and get your [FREE BS 11000 Consultation](http://bs11000-collaboration.roelto.com/free-bs-11000-consultation/)