

## Partnering and Teambuilding Reasons, Pitfalls, Best Practices

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**Excerpted from Chapter 1,  
The Partnering Solution:  
A Powerful Strategy For  
Managers, Professionals  
And Employees At All Levels**

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## **Chapter 1. The Babel Problem, The Partnering Solution**

Everyone has encountered the Babel Problem, the tendency of organizations and alliances to fragment into different and often warring factions. The factions speak different languages, hold different interests, pursue different goals. As a result, the whole shrinks to become less, often much less, than the sum of its parts. The Babel Problem wreaks havoc in the companies we work in, the associations we belong to, the colleges that educate us, the hospitals that care for us, the government agencies that protect us. The first half of this chapter examines the Babel Problem in detail: its pervasiveness, the forms it takes, the symptoms that signal its existence, the root causes that create it and the economic forces that fuel it.

The second half of this chapter explores the Partnering Solution: its sources, its history, its core content, how it differs from other forms of teambuilding and why it works. The Partnering Solution solves the Babel Problem. Based on our work in over two hundred projects, the Partnering Solution is a structured method that improves communications and bottom-line performance in organizations and alliances of all kinds: large corporations, small associations, outsourcing, mergers, customer relations, strategic alliances, government, and non-profit. The Partnering Solution provides insight, strategy, skills and tools for managers, employees and members at all levels.

This chapter concludes with notes an overview of how the book is organized, how readers can use the book to identify and understand their own Babel Problems, and how readers can develop their own Partnering Solutions.

### **The Babel Problem**

The CIA announced that they plan to cooperate more openly with the FBI. They just haven't told the FBI.  
*Jay Leno*

Remember: When the lion lies down with the lamb is when Marketing will cooperate with Accounting.  
*Sign posted over Accounting Department coffee pot*

Some two thirds of mergers either fail or fall far short of expectations.  
*David C. Crey and Dayton Ogden, The Human Side of M&A*

I discovered that the college was run as a kind of organized anarchy.  
*James March*

The first step in using the Partnering Solution is understanding the Babel Problem: its pervasiveness, the forms it takes, the symptoms that signal its existence, the root causes that create it and the economic forces that fuel it. The first half of this chapter

The Babel Problem attacks not only large corporations and strategic alliances but small businesses and civic organizations as well. It affects churches, professional firms, labor unions, hospitals. It wreaks havoc not only with bureaucracies but also with small groups, teams and collaborations of just a few individuals:

“We lost a major customer. Programming blames Marketing, Marketing blames Support, Support blames Quality Assurance. We’re putting much more energy into attacking each other than we are into solving the problem”

*Software Company Vice-President*

“We were so certain they were the right company to outsource our facilities management to, they have so much experience and look so good on paper. But they just did not understand our priorities, and they were too difficult to work with.”

*Bank Facilities Manager*

“This is supposed to be a place that follows a Higher Order, the Golden Rule, but our internal politics can be brutal. The Worship Committee fights with the Pastoral Task Force, and the Social Committee fights with everyone.”

*Church committee member*

“The merger looked so strong on paper. We all stood to make a lot of money from it. But the two companies failed to work together. We talked past each other, never listened, never worked together. Our cultures were just too different.”

*Engineering Firm President*

### **Forms Of The Babel Problem**

The Babel Problem thrives in large organizations and small ones, formal bureaucracies and informal groups. It is so pervasive, so much a part of our daily lives that it we may fail to register appropriate concern when it occurs. The Babel Problem takes predictable forms. Recognizing those forms provides an initial foothold in solving the problem:

- *Departments At War.* In this, the most visible version of the Babel Problem, two organizations or departments that claim to be partnering are actually at war with each other. Often the battles are out in the open, the departments or organizations express their disagreements openly and vocally. They criticize each other openly, perhaps even publish memos and emails about each other. When this kind of warfare occurs in alliances, it usually takes place at grass-roots levels between people who were not involved in formulating the partnering arrangement but are responsible for carrying it out. When this kind of conflict occurs in organizations, it often involves departments that attempt to monitor or control other departments such as quality, accounting, auditing and other regulatory departments.
- *Not My Job.* In this form of the Babel Problem, people who work at grass-roots levels in organizations that are supposed to be partnering with each other acknowledge the partnering arrangement. However, they don’t think that it applies to them. For example, people working in the Accounting Department of a software company know and even applaud their company’s efforts to build strong relationships with its customers. At the same time, though, the Department maintains a set of rigid accounting practices that make it difficult for customers to do business with the company. The accounting practices undo much of the partnering work that the company’s marketing and technology departments achieve.

- *If We're The Experts, Why Aren't You Listening To Us?* In this version of the Babel Problem, organizations or departments that are supposed to possess “expert” knowledge, approach others in a one-way, top-down manner. This can occur in outsourcing when a company partners with a service provider that possesses strong technical or professional skills. This version of the Babel Problem also occurs inside organizations when a strong technical department like Research, Strategy or Statistics tries to partner with internal user or customer groups.
- *Stand-off.* In this form of the Babel Problem, departments or organizations don't battle openly so much as they ignore each other. Here the issue with conflict is that there is not enough of it. Standoff often occurs when one department's role involves planning for another, as when a corporate office develops strategies and policies for field offices. In alliances, Stand-off occurs when one organization ignores the relationships it is supposed to be building with the other. Stand-off occurs in mergers and acquisitions when organizations fail to make use of the resources their new partner organizations potentially bring to them.

All of these forms of the Babel Problem take place not only in large corporations, government bureaucracies, universities and hospitals. Small companies, professional firms, civic groups and informal partnerships all can host the Babel Problem.

In fact, the Babel Problem can impact an “organization” or “alliance” of just two people. For example, two painters (maybe they are professionals, or maybe they are a husband-wife “alliance”) tackle the job of repainting a kitchen or wallpapering a living room. They divide the work to take advantage of the talents and interests each brings to the job. With brush, one tackles the trim and fine detail while the other, with roller, covers the large spaces.

If they don't partner effectively, all four forms of the Babel Problem described above can occur. They may argue about who will work in what area and what to do when the large spaces meet the trim: “*That's not my job!*” They may feel the need to offer or reject advice and feedback from each other: “*I'm supposed to be the expert!*” If their arguments about who should paint what when escalate, they can “*go to war.*” But when matters finally deteriorate, they will likely end in “*standoff.*”

### **Symptoms Of The Babel Problem**

The Bible's portrayal of the Tower of Babel story provides useful insight into the symptoms of the Babel Problem. The Bible has it that the people stopped working on the tower when the Almighty caused them to be “confused” and to “speak in different languages.” These conditions describe four symptoms of any fragmented organization or alliance:

1. The work of the organization overall stops and the people become confused.
2. In their confusion, the people focus more on the goals of their own immediate group than on the goals of the organization overall.
3. To make matters worse, people in the different groups speak a kind of a different language. They use different words, phrases and meanings.

4. When people speak different languages, they don't listen to each other. They assert their own point of view and talk past each other.

Beyond these, we observe that a fifth symptom of the Babel Problem is either too much or too little conflict. Healthy, successful organizations and alliances have a reasonable amount of conflict, an outcome of normal discourse. An absence of discord often signals the denial rather than the absence of problems. It's not that healthy organizations and alliances don't argue, but that they argue well.

**Figure 1.1 Forms And Symptoms Of The Babel Problem**

<b>Forms And Symptoms Of The Babel Problem</b>	
<b>Forms</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departments At War</li> <li>• Not My Job</li> <li>• Stand-Off</li> <li>• If I'm the Expert, Why Aren't You Listening To Me?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work stops or slows</li> <li>• People focus on immediate group</li> <li>• People speak different languages</li> <li>• People don't communicate effectively</li> <li>• Too much or too little conflict</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.2 Forms And Symptoms Of The Babel Problem: Biblical View**



## Causes Of The Babel Problem

The only things that evolve by themselves in an organization are disorder, friction and malperformance.  
*Peter Drucker*

Why does the Babel Problem occur? Why do so many organizations and alliances fragment into warring factions? What are the roots and causes of the Babel Problem?

Nine different factors cause the Babel Problem. Each is powerful. Combined, as they often are in real-world organizations and alliances, the factors form a powerful force.

1. *Division of labor.* Robert Michels, one of the first organizational sociologists, theorized that fragmentation in organizations is *inevitable*. His groundbreaking 1920's text *Political Parties* observes that organizations must divide labor in order to accomplish anything significant. However, he contends that dividing labor creates different roles, responsibilities and thus leads inevitably to an organization's members pursuing different self-interests.

2. *People bond emotionally with smaller groups.* Some psychologists believe that people identify more closely with smaller groups rather than with an overall organization because it is easier to form a human connection with the smaller group. The larger organization is more removed, more abstract. Even in organizations which, themselves are mid-size or small, people gravitate to groups and sub-groups that are smaller and easier to bond with than the organization overall.

3. *People chemistry.* Often the most visible and visceral cause of Babel problems is that, at a personal level, the people involved in an organization or alliance simply do not and apparently cannot get along with each other. People themselves who are entangled in troubled organizations or alliances don't talk about the division of labor or bonds with the smaller group. They focus more on their gut-level dislike and distrust of "the other guys." This kind of conflict arises often in mergers and acquisitions and in outsourcing situations that bring different organizational cultures together. It also arises in organizations when departments talk, look and work in ways that differ significantly from each other.

4. *Unclear or conflicting goals.* Even when organizations have articulate goals, even when and alliances have detailed contracts, the goals that percolate down to specific departments and groups can be unclear. Frequently, when departments clash over tactics and details, the conflict traces back to unclear organizational goals. Both departments may have quite a different understanding of the organization's goals, and that difference in understanding fuels conflict in their everyday work.

5. *Insufficient procedures.* Sometimes the chief roadblock is not strategy or people chemistry but nuts-and-bolts processes and procedures. In recent decades our organizations have become flatter, less hierarchical, more informal. This trend enhances innovation and speeds decision making, but it can also create chaos. Many organizations

have less than optimal processes for handing off work between departments, managing employee performance and resolving differences of opinion across groups.

7. *Misunderstanding the meaning of “customer service.”* Service provider firms and internal service departments in organizations have done much useful partnering work under the banner of “customer service.” In some cases, this effort has helped insensitive departments and organizations to pay more attention to what their customers really need and to provide a more useful service. In growing numbers of cases, though, both customers and service providers have taken the intention of customer service too far, translating it into simply customers whatever they ask for. Though it is important to listen to the customer, the customer is not always right. Productive partnering is more two-way, more collaborative and may involve challenging the customer as much as simply doing what one is told.

8. *Ineffective leadership.* Leading any organization, even a simple one, can be challenging. In partnering, developing effective leadership can be particularly difficult. How does one lead when there is no formal hierarchy, perhaps even no organization, new alignments and untested working arrangements? Every year, hundreds of books and articles are published on leadership, and many offer valuable insight and advice. However, little has been written and established about the nature of effective leadership in partnering situations.

9. *Overall, underestimating the difficulty of achieving alignment.* We observe this phenomenon in nearly every partnering situation. Even in complex situations alliances and organizations, and with experienced executives, people consistently and significantly underestimate how much effort it takes to achieve alignment and partnering among the different constituencies.

**Figure 1.3**

**Nine Causes Of The Babel Problem**

1. Division of labor
2. People identify with small groups
3. Decentralization
4. Outsourcing
5. Strategic alliances
6. Rising customer expectations
7. Misinterpreting the meaning of “service”
8. Ineffective leadership
9. Underestimating the difficulty of achieving alignment

## **Five Economic Forces That Fuel The Babel Problem**

My wife and I got along great for twenty years. Then we met.  
*Scott Adams, The Dilbert Future*

Five economic forces are causing more meetings between organizations, departments and people who “got along great” for many years working apart. These five forces in our economy provide further fuel for creating the Babel problem:

1. Decentralized organizations
2. Outsourcing
3. Strategic alliances
4. Mergers and acquisitions
5. Rising customer expectations

*1. Decentralized organizations.* Decentralized organizations dominate our economy to such an extent that it may be difficult to recall how different organizations were not too long ago. In the 1940’s and 50’s most organizations emphasized control, bureaucracy, alignment and authority. Most organization charts were tall pyramids with many layers of middle management.

Currently, decentralized organizations dominate in our economy because they are “leaner,” make decisions more quickly and implement change more rapidly. However, decentralized organizations also breed Babel Problems in that they often do little to integrate their various departments. Decentralized organizations in which departments don’t communicate with each other can easily become “departments at war.”

*2. Outsourcing.* Outsourcing is very popular in our economy at present because it enables organizations to get rid of functions that distract from their core mission and competencies and has the potential to save the organization money. However, outsourcing often creates Babel Problems in the communications and coordination between service provider firms and customer organizations. Customer organizations can demand too much or too little information from service provider firms, and service firms can focus too much on providing the technical aspects of the service while neglecting the communications that the customer organization needs.

*3. Strategic Alliances.* Organizations form strategic alliances with other organizations for a wide variety of reasons: to develop products and services together that neither one could do alone, to join forces against a common competitor or threat, to increase market share. Each time organizations form a strategic alliance they also create a breeding ground for the Babel Problem, as the new alliance depends on the organizations communicating and collaborating with each other.

*4. Mergers and acquisitions.* Merger activity has been high for several years running. However, mergers have been popular for many years. As long ago as the 1930’s, Will Rogers commented on organization’s love of growing by merging and acquiring.

Mergers and acquisitions have strong potential to build an organization's core competencies, increase revenues and profit and build economies of scale.

At the same time, mergers and acquisitions often breed Babel Problems because they can create "forced marriages" of organizations with very different cultures and values. Mergers that look good on paper can fail when people in both organizations are unable to solve the Babel Problems they face.

5. *Rising customer expectations.* Customers' rising expectations is a fifth source of the Babel Problem. When customers demand more of the organizations that supply them with goods and services, organizations often respond by trying to listen, respond and build more effective long-term working relationships. Unlike the other four trends fueling the Babel Problem, this one is rooted more in social forces than in organization structure or strategy. Over the past few decades, individual consumers and organizational customers alike have come to demand more from the organizations.

**Figure 1.4**

**Five Economic Forces That Fuel The Babel Problem**

1. Decentralization
2. Outsourcing
3. Strategic alliances
4. Mergers and acquisitions
5. Rising customer expectations

## **Solving The Babel Problem: The Unlikely Roots Of The Partnering Solution**

The construction industry provides the roots of a method that consistently solves the Babel Problem. Known more for conflict and litigation than cooperation and communication, the construction industry may seem to be an unlikely source for a partnering method. Yet the fragmented, complex nature of large projects also provides the conditions that any successful partnering method must address.

Construction partnering has achieved an impressive track record in the industry in the thirty years since its inception. It provides essential building blocks for a Partnering Solution for other forms of the Babel Problem: outsourcing, mergers, alliances, interdepartmental, government, education, sales, support.

This red wine partners well with cheese.  
*Ad in the Boston Globe food section*

What's significant about construction partnering is that, unlike the general intention to partner that the *Globe* ad illustrates, it provides a *method*. Many people and organizations use the word "partnering," so many that the word can be reduced to shallow levels of meaning. In construction, partnering is not only an intention, it is also a method. And the method is not only effective, it is also simple and efficient.

The pervasiveness, forms, symptoms, causes and economic sources of the Babel Problem are daunting enough to make it clear that a Partnering Solution will require some significant thought and effort. No easy fix, no magic bullet, is going to put back together the organizations and alliances that the Babel Problem so effectively fragments.

At the same time, a Partnering Solution cannot be so complex that it is unwieldy. In order to be useful a Partnering Solution must not only resolve the Babel Problem, it must do so in a way that mere mortals can attempt it. The construction industry rises to meet this challenge with a partnering method that is both comprehensive enough to achieve results and simple enough to achieve widespread understanding and use.

The construction industry roots of The Partnering Solution are unlikely yet understandable. It's not that people who work in construction enjoy conflict but that, until recently, there was no effective forum for discussion and problem solving on projects. Most projects involve numerous companies carrying out different tasks: architects, engineers, contractors, subcontractors. There is a contract and a project manager but the contract can't anticipate all the coordination problems. There is a project manager but he or she has no formal power or authority. With all the organizations involved, conflict and miscommunication are inevitable.

The culture and history of the construction industry posed further obstacles to partnering. Compared with other industries, design and construction lags consistently and conspicuously in training and development, and in investing in human capital. Getting any form of meeting to take hold outside those dealing with immediate project concerns broke significantly, almost shockingly, with standard practices.

Yet in spite (or perhaps because) of these problems, the industry has developed a highly effective partnering method. Construction partnering has demonstrated results consistently and positively enough to earn endorsement by the American Institute of Architects, Associated General Contractors and American Consulting Engineers Council. Increasing numbers of government agencies and corporations now require partnering workshops as a condition of project funding.

The Army Corps of Engineers developed the first construction partnering experiments about thirty years ago in its Pacific Northwest region. Frustrated with a growing list of projects over budget and beyond schedule, several Corps managers got the notion of piloting teambuilding on some of its projects. With their own professional roots in engineering, they developed an approach to teambuilding that differed in key ways from teambuilding rooted in the human resources and organization development field.

Since the Corps produced its initial material, various facilitators and managers have adapted and refined it. Still, many current construction partnering efforts share consistent agenda items, content and structure. Most construction partnering focuses on a partnering workshop or series of workshops. One or two days long depending on the complexity of the project, the workshop brings together key project players from each of the organizations working on the project. For a typical \$30 million building, the group can engage 20 - 30 people, a diverse and usually quite vocal group of architects, engineers, plumbers, electricians subcontractors, clients, building users, facility managers, government officers, etc.

The meeting usually follows a highly-structured agenda:

- *Taking stock.* In the first hour or two, participants list what they think will go well on the project and what they think may cause problems. This part of the workshop surfaces the key issues the project will have to address.
- *Building mutual understanding and trust.* Before working to address the project's key issues, the most effective partnering workshops work with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, DISC or other personality profile. Even just an hour or two of work in this accelerates participants' getting to know each other and build trust.
- *Writing a Goals statement/ Partnering Charter.* After clarifying the project's key issues, participants develop a project Goals statement that addresses the issues. Typically 10 - 15 sentences in length, the Goals Statement includes both quantitative performance goals and more qualitative goals for the ways people on the project should interact. To give the statement clout, participants sign it. Work on the Goals Statement takes an hour or two, depending on the number of people in the group and the extent of differences they attempt to resolve.
- *Refining Communications processes and procedures.* Participants develop detailed communications processes and procedures necessary to achieve the goals. These procedures usually include mechanisms for handling changes, clarifying issues likely to arise in the field, resolving disagreements and ensuring that everyone gets the information they need when they need it.

An external, objective facilitator usually runs the meeting to ensure that all the players participate, no one dominates and the group stays focused on the agenda. To conclude the workshop, participants plan when a follow-up meeting should occur and what issues it should address. In follow-ups, people monitor the plans and commitments they made in the original workshop, address new problems and explore new opportunities.

### **Figure 1.5: At A Construction Partnering Workshop**

Arriving first, the three men from the construction firm fill their coffee cups and move quickly to the table in the middle of the room. The engineers and some subcontractors come in next, take their coffee and also take a table. The owner, facility manager, a few future tenants arrive followed quickly by four people from the architecture firm.

The facilitator leads the group through the agenda items quickly but in such a way that everyone participates, involvement is balanced, no one dominates. The group raises issues, writes and signs goals, and develops detailed procedures to use on the project. All the work is done in small groups at the half-dozen tables in the room. Membership in the small groups varies according to the issue the groups are working on.

In the opening hour, participants work with people from their own firms. Each table lists on flip charts items its members anticipate will go well and others they think will be more difficult. As the groups put their flip charts up on the walls, it becomes clear that the different groups anticipate similar problems.

Now the group works with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Participants all put their scores on a flip chart page. The facilitator describes what the grid means, then groups together people who have similar personality types. Working with the Myers-Briggs helps people to criticize themselves. With a great deal of animation and story telling, participants discuss how their types influence their communications on projects.

Just before noon, the facilitator reorganizes the small groups to work on the Goals Statement, placing people with their counterparts from the other organizations. Each group writes two or three quantitative performance measure goals and two or three communications process goals important to the project. The groups refine their statements while eating. Over dessert, the groups present their drafts to the whole group. The whole group reaches agreement on fourteen statements. Participants sign the final draft on the flip chart.

In the afternoon, people work in yet another different group, developing policies and procedures necessary to implement the goals. The senior managers draw up an Issue Escalation Process. Field staff work on procedures for managing Requests For Information, the paperwork people on the site file with the architect when they have questions. The owner and several of the subcontractors work on procedures for handling change orders. The future tenants, facility manager and architect discuss how to address their interests.

All the groups end with detailed, specific plans. The whole group discusses when to meet again. They schedule the follow-up workshop.

## The Partnering Solution Method

It is important to note that construction partnering is not just a meeting, not just “venting,” “networking,” “planning,” or “getting to know each other.” An intelligent infrastructure and thoughtful agenda provide the foundations for construction partnering to achieve lasting results.

We have led over 100 successful construction partnering programs and another 100 successful partnering programs outside construction, using the partnering method for outsourcing, mergers, strategic alliances, sales, support and interdepartmental coordination in large organizations. Based on these cases, we define the method inherent in the Partnering Solution as having four steps:

1. *Arrange a meeting of the key people involved in the situation.* In some cases this may be difficult in itself. It certainly was in many construction partnering situations when people were not used to meetings outside the tradition of short-term project focus. Even if meeting initially seems easy, it can be difficult to determine who should attend partnering meetings. Consider who is involved, who holds influence, who can disrupt things later on. Construction partnering provides a useful working example, involving a vertical cross-section of people on the project --- senior executives, project managers, and a number of people at grass-roots levels.
2. *In the meeting, follow the five-part partnering agenda.* It’s important to discuss *all four* of the items --- Taking Stock, Building Trust, Clarifying Goals, Implementing Procedures and Raising The Bar. It’s also important for each discussion to result in specific action plans.
3. *Schedule a follow-up meeting at the end of the first meeting.* Don’t wait until trouble arises. At the follow-up, track the group’s progress on its own goals and processes, address new issues and explore opportunities
4. *Schedule additional follow-ups at proactive intervals.* Meetings should occur soon enough to anticipate and avert new issues. Use the principal of “preventive maintenance” that automobile manufacturers use.

Beyond the core method of the Partnering Solution, we have also identified a number of factors that enhance partnering effectiveness:

- Improving Meetings Skills. Running partnering meetings for optimal participation, performance, innovation and creativity
- Increasing One-On-One Collaboration Skills. Building grass-roots one-on-one skills to advance partnering goals.
- Strengthening Partnering Leadership. Developing models and practices for leadership that fit with and reinforce partnering.
- Putting Your Own House In Order. Getting organizations to be “Partnering-Ready.”
- Re-Thinking Partner Selection. Choosing better partners from the outset.

### Figure 1.6 The Partnering Solution Method

1. *Arrange a meeting of the people involved in the situation.* This may initially seem easy, but it can be difficult to determine who should attend partnering meetings. Consider who is involved, who holds influence, who can disrupt things later on?
2. *In the meeting, follow the five-part partnering agenda.* It's important to discuss *all five* of the items and to result in specific action plans for each ---
  - a. Taking Stock
  - b. Building Trust
  - c. Clarifying Goals
  - d. Implementing Procedures
  - e. Raising The Bar
3. *Schedule a follow-up meeting at the end of the first meeting.* Don't wait until trouble arises. At the follow-up, track the group's progress on its own goals and processes, address new issues and explore opportunities.
4. *Schedule additional follow-ups at proactive intervals.* Meetings should occur soon enough to anticipate and avert new issues. Use the principal of "preventive maintenance" that automobile manufacturers use.

### Beyond The Basics

Beyond the core method of the Partnering Solution, several other factors enhance partnering effectiveness:

- *Improving Meetings Skills.* Running partnering meetings for optimal participation, performance, innovation and creativity
- *Increasing One-On-One Collaboration Skills.* Building grass-roots one-on-one skills to advance partnering goals.
- *Strengthening Partnering Leadership.* Developing models and practices for leadership that fit with and reinforce partnering.
- *Putting Your Own House In Order.* Getting organizations to be "Partnering-Ready."
- *Re-Thinking Partner Selection.* Choosing better partners from the outset.

## Why The Partnering Solution Works

In your typical teambuilding exercise the employees are subjected to a variety of unpleasant situations until they become either a cohesive team or a ring of car-jackers.

*Scott Adams, The Dilbert Principle*

What makes The Partnering Solution successful? Some teambuilding exercises indeed are as unproductive as the ones that Scott Adams describes above. Even teambuilding that is thoughtful and intelligent often fails or falls far short of its original goals. The Partnering Solution succeeds because it differs from most other teambuilding activities in five important ways:

1. *Most teambuilding aims to increase participants' awareness.* The Partnering Solution aims to produce lasting results. Increasing individual awareness is a noble and often valuable goal. But The Partnering Solution also aims to produce lasting, tangible results. The Partnering Solution deals with real issues and develops actual processes and procedures.
2. *Most teambuilding activities begin with a solution e.g. "Let's go whitewater rafting."* The Partnering Solution begins with participants defining the issues. Even when participants think they are familiar with the issues, effective partnering workshops all begin with an open discussion of what's working, what isn't, what is likely to work, what will likely cause problems. Beginning with discussing the issues builds buy-in to partnering activities and agreements.
3. *Most teambuilding activities involve an intact team.* The Partnering Solution involves a cross- organization, multi-layered group. Effective partnering involves a vertical cross-section from key organizations, e.g. the owner of the architecture firm, the architect who did the design and the person back in the office who will correct the drawings. The multi-layer approach builds in internal checks so that internal issues in the partnering organizations are surfaced and addressed as needed.
4. *Most teambuilding focuses on one type of issue e.g. "trust" or "self-esteem."* Construction partnering addresses different scopes of concerns from goals to people issues to procedures. Sensitivity training, assertiveness skills, Myers-Briggs workshops all impart useful information. However, none of these combines work with both "micro" people-issues and more "macro" concerns of strategy and structure as partnering does. Combining focus not only addresses more, but also links micro and macro issues.
5. *Most teambuilding activities are one-time events.* The Partnering Solution involves multiple workshops and builds in ongoing work and follow through between workshops. Most teambuilding activities attempt to achieve results by the sheer power of the insights they deliver in a one-time activity. Construction partnering attempts to achieve results by tracking action items over the course of

the project. When done effectively, partnering de-emphasizes the partnering workshop and stresses instead the ongoing work of monitoring partnering results over the whole project. Making partnering ongoing is essential to ensure lasting results.

<b>Figure 1.7 How The Partnering Solution Differs From Other Teambuilding</b>	
<b>Other Teambuilding</b>	<b>The Partnering Solution</b>
Aims to increase participants' awareness	Aims to create lasting, tangible processes and results
Begins with a solution	Begins with participants defining issues
Involves one intact team	Involves multiple layers from several organizations
Focuses on one activity	Works at both micro and macro, uses the four-part partnering agenda of Taking Stock, Building Trust, Clarifying Goals, and Implementing Procedures
One-time effort	Ongoing

## **Using This Book**

This is a “tools” book. Most of the book describes specific strategies, skills and tools readers can put to use in a wide range of applications. This first chapter provides the context for using the tools in an optimal way, outlining the scope and seriousness of the Babel Problem and providing basic information on the method that comprises the Partnering Solution.

To provide a deeper understanding of the situations where the Partnering Solution is useful and the outcomes it can achieve, Chapters 2 and 3 describe partnering case studies. Chapter 2 provides a “partnering album,” a series of brief descriptions of 12 different partnering applications. Chapter 3 describes 4 typical partnering cases in more detail.

Chapters 4 – 8 describe each of the five parts of the partnering agenda in detail:

4. Taking Stock. Developing measures of partnering effectiveness.
5. Building Trust, Valuing Diversity. Improving the “people chemistry” in partnering situations.
6. Clarifying Goals. Why and how to develop performance and communications goals for partnering.
7. Implementing Processes. Defining and implementing essential procedures to achieve partnering goals.
8. Raising The Bar. Using the Partnering Solution not only to solve problems but also to explore and develop opportunities.

Chapters 9 – 13 describe Improving Meetings Skills. Running partnering meetings for optimal participation, performance, innovation and creativity

9. Partner, Heal Thyself. Doing the internal work necessary to make your organization an effective partner externally. Getting your own house in order.
10. Better Meetings. Improving group communications skills to make partnering meetings more effective.
11. Improving One-On-One Collaboration Skills. Strengthening the one-on-one skills that contribute to partnering results.
12. Strengthening Partnering Leadership. Developing models and practices for leadership that fit with and reinforce partnering.

Chapter 13 (an appropriate number?) is the murder mystery, “Death By Outsourcing.” We thought that it would be both useful and entertaining to wrap many of the book’s core concepts into an unconventional approach to a business case.

Chapter 14 helps readers translate the strategies and skills in the book directly into “Preparing Your Own Partnering Plan.”

## Our Core Case Organizations

We follow a handful of what we call “Core Case Organizations” throughout the book for two reasons. First, we thought that following a core set of organizations would make it easier for readers to follow the partnering process throughout the series of different issues and tasks we address. We draw on many case examples for brief illustrations, but having a core group to also follow through the partnering strategies makes it easier to see how the partnering pieces fit together.

Second, we sought out the core case organizations because we want to make the point that for an organization to develop competence, it is essential for partnering to infuse the organization at many levels. Our core case organizations have high levels of partnering competence and extensive experience with partnering. They illustrate not only how specific partnering approaches work, but also, how those approaches fit into a cohesive business strategy.

Our Core Case Organizations include:

- SEi Companies, a one hundred-forty person mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineering firm with offices in Boston and Houston
- Lee Kennedy Co., Inc., a hundred-person construction company based in Boston
- ADS Financial Solutions, a 150 person firm that provides systems integration and software consulting services for banks and the financial services industry.
- Keyes North Atlantic, a sixty-person electromechanical contracting company based in Newton, Massachusetts
- Foliage Software, a 100-person software development company based in Burlington, Massachusetts
- PCA Architects, a 40-person architecture firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts

Each book partner is profiled in the last section of this chapter. The section introduces the book partner organizations as Core Case Organizations. I am trying both to provide a brief profile of the organization and to sketch its history and culture of partnering.

### **Lee Kennedy Co., Inc. - Construction**

Lee Kennedy describes his construction company’s roots with partnering, “When I started this, I said there’s got to be a way to be a contractor without being a Mongol raider. Without realizing it, I got us started presenting a more cooperative face to clients and architects.” Tucked in a South Boston location, the Lee Kennedy Corporation is entering its 25<sup>th</sup> year of business with a hundred fifty employees and an enviable reputation among clients, architects and sub-contractors as well.

The company’s “Door Award” typifies its in-depth involvement with client partnering. The company annually gives the award to field staff whose actions exemplify its commitment to customer service. (The company also gives a parallel award annually to internal office staff.) The title of the Door Award stems from the work of one of the company’s carpenters. Without asking for permission from the company, the carpenter

took considerable time to re-fit a door belonging to a tenant of one of Lee Kennedy's clients, Boston Properties. The carpenter had no obligation to fix the door, he just wanted to provide good service to Boston Properties. The job took so much effort that Boston Properties staff asked him why he was working so hard. The carpenter replied, "Right now, this door is the most important job our company is working on."

### **SEi Companies - Engineering**

"What business are we in?" CEO Bob Gracilieri likes to ask new project managers when they begin working for SEi Companies, a 120-person engineering firm with offices in Boston and Houston.

"Engineering?" the new recruits respond, a little tentatively.

"No!" Gracilieri replies, bringing his fist down on the table. "We are in the people business, and don't ever forget that!"

Gracilieri explains, "We have to make it very clear to people what we're all about. So many firms in this business try to make it on technical smarts alone, and that's not enough. Of course you have to be very strong technically, but that's not good enough. What we try to do, beyond all our technical expertise, is get our project managers to really listen to the clients, really try to understand them. It's hard because that's not the way engineers are trained, but it's something we have to do."

### **Foliage Software**

Co-CEO Tim Bowe explains, "Our interest in partnering is what drove our extensive reorganization, these past few years. We realized, focusing on technology solutions, we could do everything we said we were going to do on a project, and still have an unhappy customer." Foliage Software is a 100-person software development, systems integration and strategy consulting firm based in Burlington, Massachusetts. "So we've moved from seeing the problems we're hired to tackle as technology problems to recognizing them as business problems."

Semiconductor Division Manager Norm Delisle explains how that emphasis impacts his work, "I had years of experience managing projects before I came to work here. What's different here is that senior management is always asking me, 'Did you call the client today? Did you call the client today?' Just the idea of constant communications permeates everything here."

### **Keyes North Atlantic – Electromechanical Contractors**

"We have lots of strong customer relationships," Susan Keyes points out "but not all strong customer relationships are partnering relationships." She is president of Keyes North Atlantic, a 60-person electromechanical contractor in Watertown, Massachusetts with a strong history of partnering with clients as well as with other members of project teams --- contractors, architects, engineers.

“Partnering relationships,” Keyes continues, “are especially interesting to us those are the ones that push us to do our best work. Those are the ones that treat us as if we were staff for them. It’s not just satisfying customers when we partner with them, it’s working with them side-by-side to meet challenges and solve problems. We give them advice, and they give us advice as well. Often, we’re able to develop new systems and processes, and everybody benefits”

### **PCA Architects - Architects**

“One of the things about partnering is that it’s been humbling,” David Chilinski confesses. CEO of PCA Architects, a 20 year-old, 30-person design firm in Cambridge Massachusetts.

Chilinski explains, “We often get work through referrals and that is very satisfying. What is surprising is to hear that the client who referred us said, ‘...the reason to hire PCA is that you will have a *great time* working with them.’ What’s humbling is that it’s not our design excellence that brought them, or our on time, on budget - project management, it’s the simple fact that they have a good time!”

David Galler, a principal in the firm elaborates, “Partnering for us also means that we pay attention to the client’s business objectives. I think the college dining renovations that we have done are a good example. The new facility is such an attractive place to congregate. We hear that there’s increased volume, 30 – 50% more dining hall volume than before our renovation. That’s a big jump, and it has big impacts for our university clients.”

### **ADS Financial Solutions – Software Consulting**

“The real partnering challenge in our business is to be simple and focused on what the client wants, not on how smart we are,” ADS Financial Solutions CEO Bill Gallagher reflects. ADSFS is a 25 year-old, 150 person firm that provides systems integration and software consulting services for banks and the financial services industry.

“Our senior consultants have the technology expertise, but they are primarily bankers, all of them have 15 or 20 years’ experience working in banks before they join ADS. That helps them stay focused on what the client really needs. Being an effective partner means we have to show our value, not just our expertise. In order for us to be successful in the way that’s most important to our clients, we need to be sure that our customers get the solution that’s best for *them*.”

