

Evaluation of the Core Skills Development Partnership

Part 3 – Planning for outcomes

a 'How to' guide, and toolkit

October 2004

Prepared by Andrew Harrison
GFA Consulting
Midlands office
121 Trafalgar Rd
Birmingham
B13 8BT

0121 449 4815

07885 616 914

andrew.harrison@gfa.co.uk

Executive summary and checklist

This Executive Summary is written from a particular view point. It is designed to help you put into practice programmes of activity which will make a lasting difference to baselines - in this case in core & basic skills, but the principles could apply in a wide range of settings.

The findings, therefore, lead to evidence-based suggestions about the critical things that need to be done in order to

- improve the likelihood of achieving outcomes
- reduce the risks of a partnership's programme of activity having little impact on the mainstream practices of its member organisations; and
- secure high levels of vfm¹

Checklist – headline findings and lessons

So what does the experience of the CSDP suggest you need to do to plan more effectively, for outcomes?

- In the first instance, you need to get the thinking straight (*strategy*)
- Secondly, you need to be sure of your ground, and have practical tactics for implementation of the strategy (*activity*)
- Thirdly, you need to be able to follow through convincingly, keeping momentum going, bearing in mind that the strategy is to deliver change through a partnership (*co-ordination*)

All of these dimensions need to be consistent with one another and mutually reinforcing and self re-inforcing.

¹ The CSDP vfm policy is reproduced in the appendices to Part 2 of this evaluation.

You need to get your thinking straight

Headline finding & lesson:	You need to have thought through (and shared) <u>theories of change</u> underpinning the strategic decisions made by the partnership.
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSDP used several different theories of change to help model their core purpose - <u>Several</u> theories of change helped, because of the range of interests that needed to be engaged, and the changes in the context for the partnership over 7+ years - Having several theories (not at the outset) but over the 7+ years, helped to keep the strategic focus relevant and credible to all the partners

Headline finding & lesson:	Baseline 2 things – under lying conditions and the state of health in partners’ planning & delivery systems.
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Baselineing the under lying conditions for core and basic skills was vitally important. - Equally significant was the explicit assessment (by the Board and Senior Managers group) of the changes needed in partners’ service delivery systems in order to shift the under lying conditions. - The CSDP experience suggests that you need to match these up with one another so that change in systems drives changes in baseline conditions (outcomes)

Headline finding & lesson:	Develop the partnership with delivering change and making a difference to outcomes in mind
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CSDP was not afraid to challenge itself and its members. ‘Storming’ – albeit agreeable debate - was a feature of the annual cycle of needs’ assessment and planning. - The Executive Team saw that part of its role was to ‘raise the game’ of the whole delivery system. - Membership of the mechanisms which the CSDP set up was by invitation, based on contribution to the overall strategy. - The Executive personnel involved in the partnership were all in developmental roles, and regarded by informed observers as ‘more than project managers’; combining high quality project management skills and credible grasp of the relevant policy agenda.

You need to get your tactics consistent with your thinking

Headline finding & lesson:	You increase the likelihood of adding value if you concentrate your activities on <u>changing professional practice for the better</u>.
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivery chain analysis and improvement was one of the core business processes that the partnership used in its operations. - You need to absolutely recognise the fact that ‘buy in’ from the leading professionals working within the delivery systems you aim to change is a precondition for success.

Headline finding & lesson:	You need to recognise that there is a continuous process of interpretation and translation...
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change was ‘part of the message’; <u>change and improvement</u> was the message - There was extensive use made of evidence and policy digests - Value of very large scale investment in professional development and updating - You need to take account of the need to change thinking & behaviour, and recognise that this is a continuous process: there is never an end to the need to interpret and communicate change and service improvement.

Headline finding & lesson:	Create your infrastructure <u>within</u> the planning and delivery systems of your partners, whose practice you intend to change
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic investment in supply side (e.g. voluntary sector, business advice organisations, Connexions’ Service) - Use of virtual teams within partner organisations, who collaborated both on delivery activities, and development of plans - Investment by the partnership in staff who worked on the CSDP agenda in partner organisations as ‘development attachments’ - Your plan is to re-shape their (your partners’) plans, rather than have them join in with yours - Join ‘their’ networks (i.e. the networks of those people you want to influence) - Use your know how and influence to help them achieve their objectives

Headline finding & lesson:	Innovate and be flexible; maintain a space within in which experimentation can be done
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The approach to project development was based on the view that there were no 'magic bullet' solutions to core and basic skills improvement. - Principles of rapid prototyping were used with many many interventions taking place within any one year, within the framework of an annual business plan, to which partners were committed in the expectation of delivering measurable change - Very high quality back office systems meant that there was confidence in the integrity of the partnership's project management and control systems. This created the space within which experimentation was feasible. - Very high level champions and advocates of the partnership helped to maintain the focus on development of services. - There was scrupulous use of evidence as the basis for either testing hypotheses, or rolling out practice (on a larger scale) which had been demonstrated as effective (on a smaller scale)

You need to follow through and keep the momentum going

Headline finding & lesson:	Make change the message, or at least a significant part of the message
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help people by interpreting national (sometimes international) trends and developments in the light of local needs and priorities - Plan with outcomes in mind - Have a message about change in order to be 'on message' getting your language right, hearts and minds - Be sure that you can describe the change you have in mind in a form which is easily understood by, and engaging to partners - Sometimes it helps to be different (if plausible) in your actions, if not radical: If the evidence fits this stance, don't hesitate to stress the fact that you are working at the 'leading edge'

Headline finding & lesson:	<u>Actively</u> support implementation of activity to deliver outcomes
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Treat appraisal of activity as part of the process of project development - Regular re-profiling of resources against projects in the light of an overview of how they are delivering against other projects - Have a networking strategy in order to develop and maintain key relationships within which you influence the practice of partners - The scale of resources that could be invested were proportionate to the changes in the baseline

Headline finding & lesson:	Keep on stretching
Evidence summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Report on performance: part of the habitual communication was around 'how are we doing?'- Up the ante, raise the game: focus investment on developing the standards to which systems are delivering. The partnership mixed a 'hard nosed' interest in what was being achieved with an aspiration to see standards of delivery raised.- Telling the story about progress against strategy, linking what is happening now to the long term goals you have in mind.