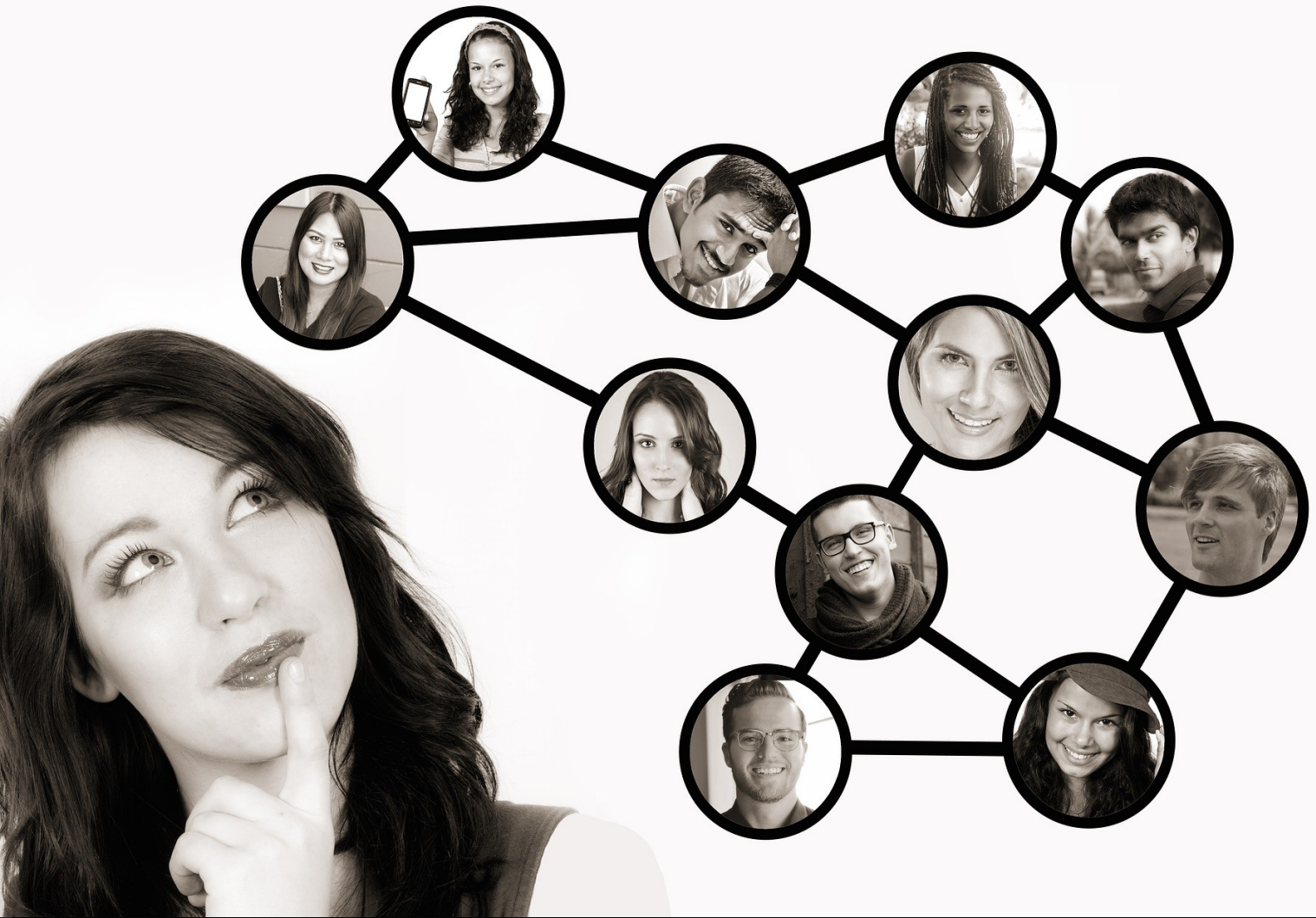


# ADAPTIVE PARTNERSHIP



BUSINESS PARTNER SKILLS

NICK WRIGHT

## PARTNERSHIP

Are you a business partner? Business partnership is common in many organisations today, particularly in functions such as L&D, HR, Finance and IT where it's important to build high quality relationships between different teams or departments to deliver high quality results. At the heart of business partnership is a question of how to work well together: e.g. by understanding who needs what from whom, and then managing the relationship so that it works well for both parties.

Business partners (BPs) use different approaches in different situations, depending on what is needed at the time. For instance, a BP may sometimes operate as 'coach' or adviser', helping someone to find a solution to a problem for themselves rather than doing it for them. In a different situation, the BP may operate as 'service provider', doing something for another person or department that lacks the time or expertise to do it for themselves.

In some situations, the BP may work as 'co-leader' with another person, e.g. where they agree to lead an important project together rather than one person or department trying to do it on their own. Finally, the BP may also sometimes act in a 'governance' role where the BP needs to ensure that people adhere to legal requirements or policy standards, e.g. when dealing with child protection or health and safety issues in the workplace. I'll say more about this below.

## MODES







I find it helpful to think of the BP as acting in different 'modes,' depending on who holds responsibility for what and what is needed in a particular situation. Here is a way of thinking about these different modes. Coach mode: 'I will help you do this for yourself.' Service provider mode: 'I will do this for you.' Co-leader mode: 'We will do this together.' Governance mode: 'You need to do this.' This means the BP needs to determine which mode fits best, and how to do it well.

Moving between modes like this may feel strange for people working in functions that have been traditionally viewed as 'service providers'. If a BP suddenly starts operating in a different mode, it can feel uncomfortable or unfamiliar for the BP and confusing for other people too. In light of this, start by introducing the BP idea to other departments along with the reasons for moving to this approach, and provide practical examples of what each mode could look like in practice.







## CONVERSATIONS

The most important aspect of business partnering is learning how to navigate the types of conversations with other people and departments that build trust and enable mutual success. I find it useful to review the BP arrangement over time with the people and departments I'm partnering with, so we can build on what works well and change that which doesn't. This may all sound a bit complicated so here are some examples of the kind of things a BP may say or do in each mode:







### COACH MODE

-  Let's remind ourselves of the goal we are working towards. What would a great result look like?
-  On a scale of 1-10, where does this sit on your list of priorities at the moment?
-  What is holding you back from moving this forward? What have you tried and what happened?
-  I can help you to think through this for yourself so that, next time, you will feel more able to do it on your own. How does that sound to you?
-  I have some ideas. How about I share them and then we can discuss?
-  What practical steps could you take now?







## SERVICE PROVIDER MODE

-  I can do this for you. What would you find most helpful?
-  What would a great result look like for you?
-  How urgent is this? When does it need to be done by?
-  I'm working on an urgent task this morning. Could I come back to you at coffee break this afternoon?  
Would that work for you?
-  Let's look at options and implications before we make a decision on next steps.
-  I will need X from you so that I can do it. How does that sound?






## CO-LEADER MODE

-  We can lead this together. How comfortable do you feel with that approach?
-  This is how I see your/my role. Is that how you see it? Let's agree who will do what and when.
-  Let's identify the opportunities and obstacles and how we could work together to address them.
-  How often shall we meet to update each other and check everything is on track?
-  Let's agree what we will do if either of us get stuck on route.
-  How would you like me to communicate with you, e.g. phone, emails, Zoom or face-to-face?

## GOVERNANCE MODE

-  There are important legal (or policy) issues you/we need to follow in this situation.
-  These are the consequences I see if you/we do/don't do this.
-  Let me outline what your/my key responsibilities are. What will you need to make this work?
-  Do you envisage this creating any problems for you? If so, let's look at how I can help you address them.
-  I can share examples of how others have dealt with similar situations. Would that help?
-  Is there anyone else you need to consult with to ensure you have the authority, resources and backing to do this well?

## REFLECTIONS

-  Which mode(s) do you tend to default to most in your business partnering relationships?
-  Which mode(s) do your partners tend to want, hope for or expect from you?
-  Which mode(s) would be the greatest stretch for you, skills and confidence-wise?
-  What could you do practically to develop your range of business partnering modes and skills?
-  What help may you need to navigate different business partner relationships successfully?

# NICK WRIGHT

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Nick has a Postgraduate Diploma in Coaching Psychology, a Masters' Degree in Human Resource Development, a Degree in Theology, a Diploma in Pastoral Studies and a Certificate in Supervision and Consultation.

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