
Original Article

If organizations are from Venus and businesses are from Mars, can branding be the bridge? A seven-step guide to stellar partnerships

Received (in revised form): 19th April 2012

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ABSTRACT The central message of my article is contained in the title: 'If organizations are from Venus and businesses are from Mars, can branding be the bridge? A seven-step guide to stellar partnerships'. Fundamentally different in character, temperament and priorities, UN/NGOs and businesses have traditionally been cautious, even suspicious of one another. The article focuses on partnerships as an emerging discipline and aims to establish new rules of engagement between business and organizations. However counter-intuitive, our thesis is based on this insight: as brands are fundamentally about relationships, branding can be the bridge to trust and accountability, shockingly the chief components reported lacking in public-private partnerships today. The seven-step guide that follows is fully grounded in well-established brand-building principles.

Journal of Brand Management (2013) 20, 162–178. doi:10.1057/bm.2012.33;
published online 14 September 2012

Keywords: branding; UN/NGO partnerships; non-profit partnerships; commercial partnerships; ROI

INTRODUCTION

Given these punishing financial times, there can hardly be more urgency for organizations and businesses to work better together. Short of sounding alarmist, the fate of much of the world and the progress of future generations hang in the balance. Initiatives, notably the UN Global Compact, have

established clear principles for how organizations and businesses should work together and what universal goals they should strive for (United Nations, 2000). Truth is, even in the best of times, these partnerships have never been ideal, with failures arguably continuing to outnumber genuine successes. Why is this?

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If the view from our telescope is at all correct, it's because organizations are from Venus, and businesses are from Mars. This is true historically. It is true today. It is the problem we must solve if the situation is ever to evolve.

IN OUR EXPERIENCE

Organizations think that all business wants is new business, a higher profile for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), more shareholder value and good press. Businesses think that all organizations want is money, money, money. Organizations think that what businesses aim for is to improve their reputations on the back of – or even at the expense of – organizations' good reputations. Businesses are sure organizations are wishy-washy, can never post results, are slow to move and are happy to confuse talk for action.

- Business is in the business of creating more business for their business. (Senior UN representative)

- Who says GATT is disbanded. It still exists with the organizations and stands for General Agreement to Talk and Talk. (Banking executive)

Recent research from the 2011 C&E Corporate-NGO Partnerships Barometer confirms our experience. When asked, 'Why does your organization or business engage in corporate-NGO partnerships?' (see Figure 1), 92 per cent of businesses polled answered *achieving organizational reputation and credibility* (down from 94 per cent in 2010) while 95 per cent of organizations answered *access to funds* (same in 2010).

PROGRESS IS BEING MADE

A simple timeline (Table 1) suggests that radical is mainstreaming and corporations, politicians, governments, entertainment and the public at large are all embracing larger, social and environmental issues.

We also know from businesses, especially those with experience of partnerships, that

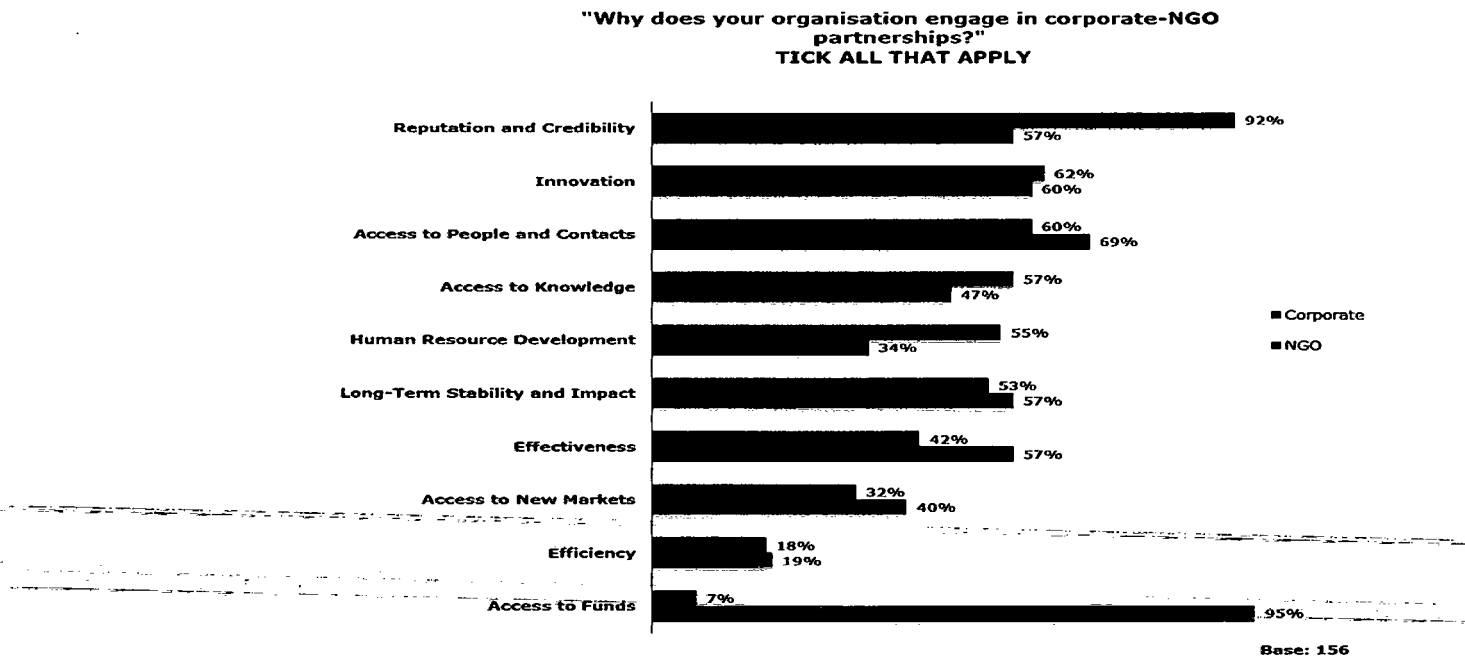


Figure 1: Reason for engaging in partnerships. Source: C&E (2011).

Table 1: The times they are a changin'

Year	Event
1971	Greenpeace founded
1987	European Management Forum becomes the World Economic Forum
1995	World Business Council for Sustainable Development founded
2001	British Petroleum becomes BP
2005	TIME Magazine names Good Samaritans Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono as Persons of the Year
2006	Al Gore launches <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> for which he shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007
21st Century	CSR policies become standard practice

partnerships are becoming more important (UN Global Compact and Dalberg Global Development Advisors, 2007).

- When companies with prior partnership experience were asked, 'How important do you think partnerships will be in the next 3 years?' 81 per cent responded 'extremely important' or 'very important' for their own organization, 64 per cent for the market in general.
- This corresponds with strong, but fewer, responses – 61 per cent for my organization, 55 per cent for the market – among companies with no prior partnership experience.

A LONG WAY TO GO TO PERFECT

Still, when it comes to partnerships among organizations and business, fears and risks abound. We are far from being a perfect world. An Ethical Corporation Report (Schiller, 2005) documents the divide (Table 2).

Most worryingly, the Report cites *Trust and Accountability* as the number one challenges from both sides to partnering in the future. Having campaigned against them for so long, organizations find it difficult to trust businesses' motives. From their side, businesses specify that they want to see

organizations improve their accountability. 'Organizational accountability is crucial. They have to be as transparent as businesses' (US oil industry executive).

CAN ANYTHING BE DONE?

However improbable a solution it may seem, we believe branding can be the bridge to bringing organizations and businesses together in true, expedient and mutually beneficial partnership. For one fundamental reason: brands are inherently about creating *Trust and Accountability* through long-term relationships.

We can provide no stronger endorsement than that of Sir Martin Sorrell, CEO of the WPP Group. We recently posed two questions to him:

- Based on your experience, how do you see the partnership between organizations and businesses?

My feeling is, while an adversarial role between businesses and organizations might have been true three to four years ago, more recently I think the two have come together much more effectively and we're starting to see some initiatives of significant proportions. We're seeing more partnerships between the UN and private corporations, the first one probably being the Ted Turner initiative, but there are many more. So I think the whole relationship has changed and is changing and is moving to bring businesses and organizations together, hopefully not to collide, but certainly to bring the poles apart closer together. That's a positive message of hope for the future.

- Do you see a role for branding in these partnerships?

The essence of the matter lies in branding. Both non-profit organizations and businesses benefit from strong brands. Brands are about vision and values and effectiveness

Table 2: Concerns about partnering: organizations and business

<i>Organizations' serious concerns about partnering with business:</i>	<i>Businesses' serious concerns about partnering with organizations:</i>
Compromise of their principles	Identifying the wrong partner
Loss of credibility from 'selling out'	Wasting time with no tangible results
Losing support from their proponents and activists	Exposure of commercial sensitivities through information leaks
Falling into the role of appeasers and doing community work for business	The potential for fall-out with the press
Internal culture change involving much lobbying	Negative impact on profits and revenues
Potential for more bureaucracy, extra work and more costs	Over-delivery when organizations do not carry their own weight
	Potential legal threats
	As there are many failures, why create another?

and trust; and clearly you can build trust between organizations and businesses if you have strong branding for both. What we do in advertising and marketing, and particularly in the branding and identity area, can have an enormously positive impact in building trust, transparency and confidence between businesses and non-profit organizations.

A SEVEN-STEP GUIDE TO STELLAR PARTNERSHIPS¹

What follows is a seven-step guide to ensuring stellar partnerships:

1. Walk a mile in their shoes: warm up
2. Brand yourself first
3. Choose partners according to your brand
4. Acknowledge that you need one another's brands, equally
5. Brand your partnership
6. Measure your joint impact
7. Communicate

Step 1 – Walk a mile in their shoes: Warm up

Organizations and businesses attract fundamentally very different kinds of people. Take the classic brand profile test shown in Figure 2 to see what we mean.

Different dreams, ambitions and values drive us all. These differences will not, nor should they, go away. One needs the other

for the different expertise, competencies and moral sensibilities each so famously brings. At the same time, a lack of understanding about these fundamental differences in human nature is, in our view, the single greatest stumbling block preventing trust and transparency.

Research from the 2010 C&E Corporate-NGO Partnerships Barometer confirms this divide. They posed this question to businesses and organizations: What score (1–5, 5 highest) would you give to the tensions you've experienced in developing partnerships and sustaining good relationships? Ironically, if businesses and organizations hold one thing in common, it's equally high and consistent levels of tension over how much their priorities and expectations differ (Figure 3).

Being wide-eyed about differences and acknowledging them right from the start will be critical to success. Better yet, walk that mile! Through role play, ideally with representatives from both organizations and business, learn to appreciate how the other side thinks: Is CSR a 'chance to change an industry' or 'selling out'? Try speaking her language: Does she talk about 'money' or 'funding'? About being 'wasteful' or being 'stingy'? About 'speed of approvals' or 'speed, what speed?'

Try living each others' concerns: Will we face exposures or legal threats? Are they

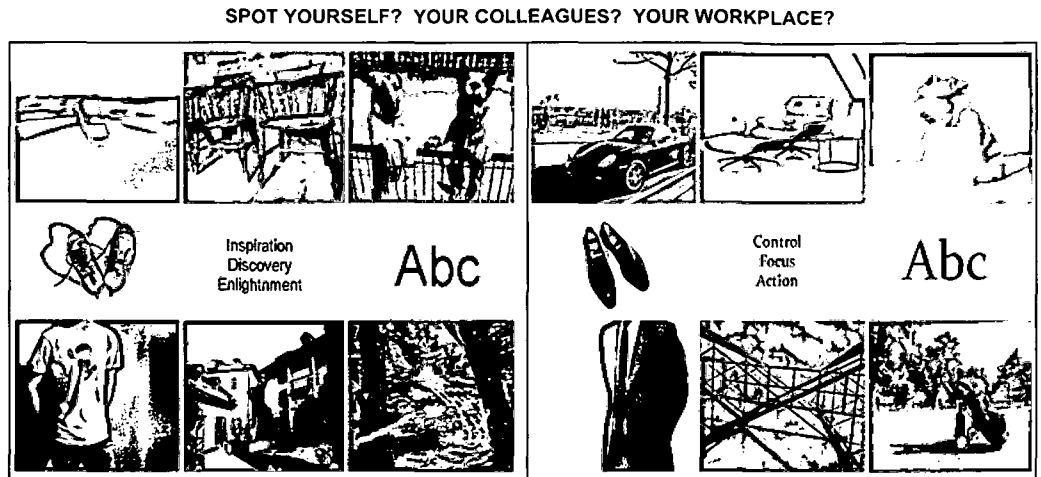


Figure 2: Brand profile test.
 Source: Landor BrandDriver™, photos courtesy of Alma Moya Losada.

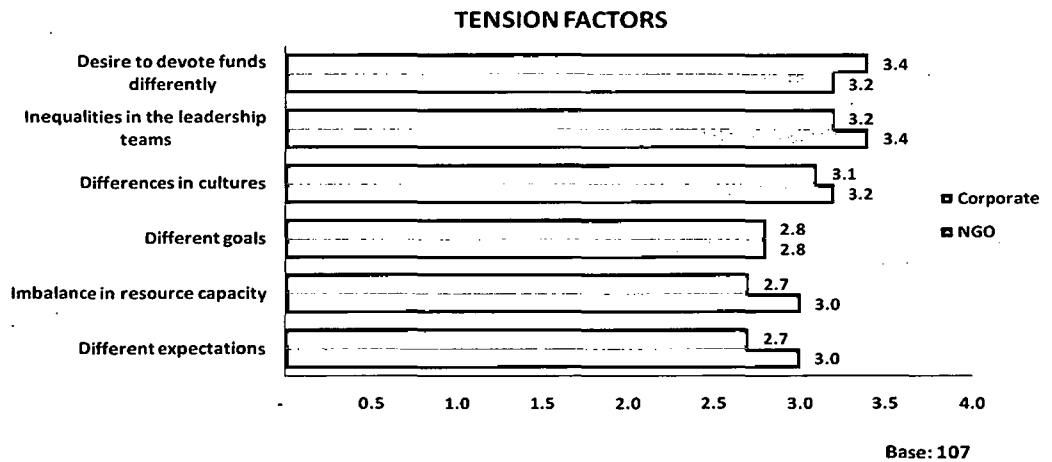


Figure 3: Sources of tension in forming and maintaining partnerships.
 Source: C&E (2010).

really the right partners for us? Will our culture change forever? This is no empty exercise. Research (Armstrong, 2001) suggests that role playing yields highly accurate forecasts about how others will think and act in conflict situations.

Step 2 – Brand yourself first

Branding is the single-most important step organizations and businesses should take *before* entering into partnerships. In our

experience, however, this is *rarely* the case. Among organizations, barriers include the far from universal view that they are brands at all; for some, the very notion of branding taints from commercialism. Businesses are traditionally better at choosing partners based on their brands because they want to enhance their brand profiles through CSR and CRM. But partner choice is far from universally brand-based.

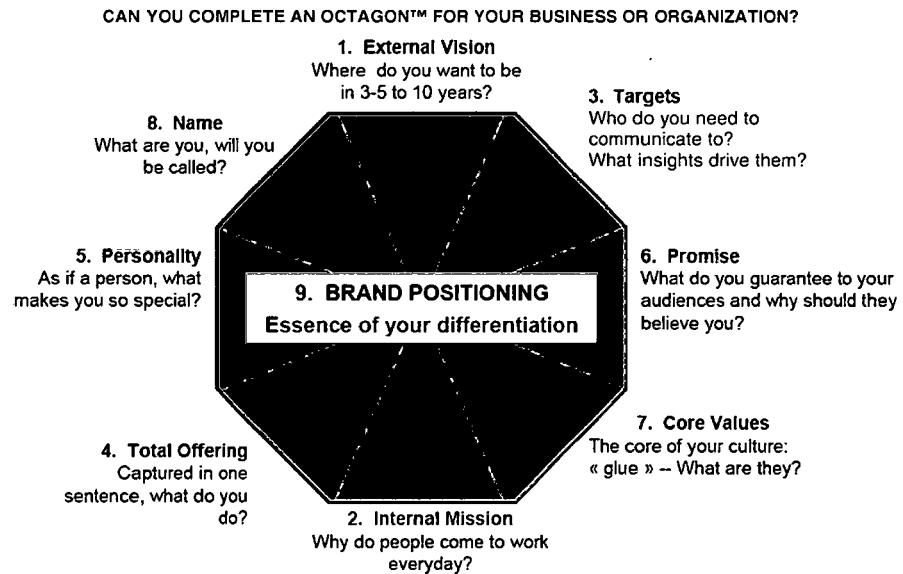


Figure 4: The Brand Octagon™.

By branding, we do not mean a logo or a graphic identity. We mean something very specific: the Brand Octagon™ (Figure 4). It is composed of not just two or three intangibles, but nine, which are continual sources of abundance and richness. Together, they represent the real depth and meaning of the business or organization: the focus of their futures and key drivers of their success. A Brand Octagon™ captures differentiation and relevance, simply but rigorously, in a snapshot:

- A Vision for the business or organization that will guide you for the next 3–5–10 years.
- The Mission and Core Values you will stand for to all audiences.
- The Total Offering (‘elevator speech’) and Promises that will keep your audiences loyal.
- Your Personality — every business and organization has one!
- A clear definition and prioritization of your Target Audiences and the insights that drive them.

- Not least, your Brand Positioning: your reason for being, what makes you special and different, based on the unshakeable beliefs and convictions you hold, holding all together at the center.

Branding NASA: A powerful example from the public domain

On 25 May 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced before a special joint session of Congress the dramatic and ambitious goal of sending an American safely to the moon before the end of the decade. Using some of the words and themes from that speech it is possible to create a Brand Octagon™ for NASA (Figure 5). Its focus and clarity are key reasons for the ultimate success of the moon landing. Its Vision is still the most audacious, and wonderful, of any we have ever come across. Its Positioning recalls that the real purpose of the space program was political: catching up to the Russians who had launched Sputnik 4 years before.

Whether apocryphal or not, the famed meeting of President Kennedy and a NASA janitor who was sweeping the floor makes

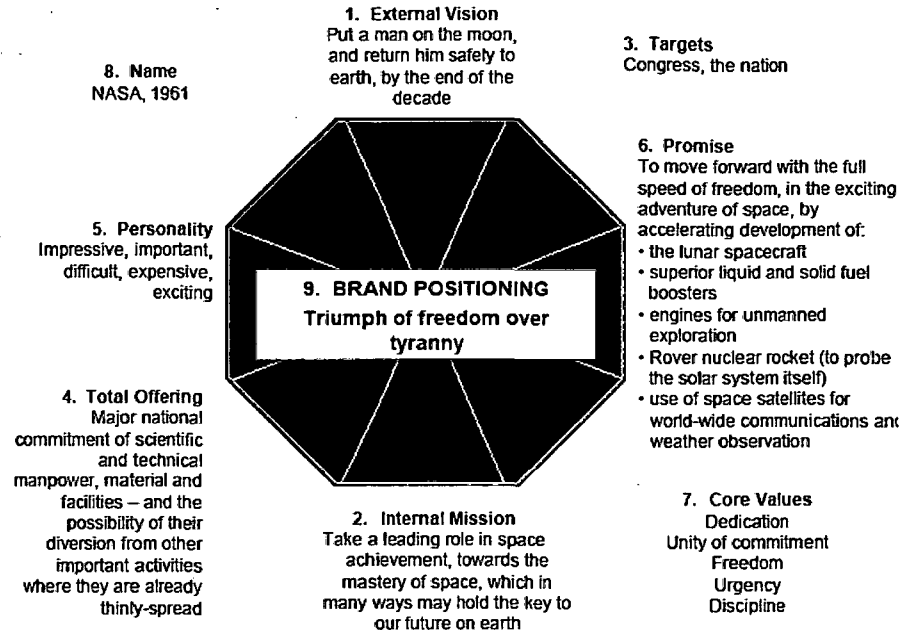


Figure 5: NASA's Brand Octagon™.

another important point. ‘What are you doing there, sir?’ asked President Kennedy. The janitor famously replied ‘I’m helping to put a man on the moon, Mr President’: perfect internal alignment. Not least, President Kennedy’s address was fundamentally a request for funding for the space program, 7–9 billion dollars over 5 years, which he succeeded in securing.

Power of a Brand Octagon™

NASA’s Octagon™ (Figure 5) captures the power of a brand to rouse, startle and shape new thinking and behaviors; to rally people internally with the power of their ethos, convictions and courage; and to attract partners and patrons to sharper, more eager engagement because of the brand’s convictions. Not least, NASA’s Octagon™ makes it abundantly clear why branding yourself is the single-most important step you can take before establishing partnerships. Branding ensures both internal alignment and external clarity about who you are, what you stand for and where you’re headed. The clearer

you are about your business or organization, the better partner you will make and the better partnerships you will seek and win.

Step 3 – Choose partners according to your brand

When it comes to choosing partners, businesses and organizations both need to know what they’re ready to give, what they need and what they will ask for. Each needs to complement their competencies and brand strengths with a suitable partner’s. While the reason for taking this step is self-evident, in our experience, it is far from routine. For example, we were recently told by a high-ranking organizational representative: ‘We honestly grab at whatever donor swims by’. (The raw, dangerous truth of this statement is what generated our initial thinking on this topic.)

There is, of course, a ready solution to identifying the right partners: applying the Brand Octagon™ in a disciplined, strategic fashion. It is this straightforward: match your aspirations (Vision and Mission), your capabilities (Positioning, Promises and

Offering) and your beliefs (Values and Personality) to the needs of your Target Audiences. Prepare to strategically choose your partner(s) based on your brand.

Stellar examples

Two examples, which pre-date the Octagon™, nonetheless demonstrate the principles we're talking about and validate the process.

TNT and WFP: Moving the world TNT, the commercial transport and logistics company, set out to help distribute health and wealth around the world (*Vision and Mission*). The origins are now famous: their CEO learned that a child dies of hunger every 5 seconds and that it's not an issue of supply, but of logistics and distribution. TNT acknowledged its share in the responsibility for a sustainable society (*Core Values*) and chose to do so through leveraging the core competencies of their business and employees: transport, logistics, associated knowledge and skills (*Promises, Total Offering*). In so doing, they would truly 'Deliver More' (*Positioning*). The first step was a rigorous search for a partner, based on selection criteria: a neutral body with an excellent reputation, global reach, a compatible culture and a need for TNT's logistical skills (*Personality, Core Values and Competencies*). After discussion with five potentials, the World Food Programme (WFP) emerged as the best partner and so was born the Moving the World program in December 2002. (TNT pledged 'never-ending commitment' in 2008.) TNT finds it a 'natural fit' as WFP is the largest humanitarian organization delivering millions of tons of food to feed about 90 million people in 70 countries each year. TNT serves more than 200 countries (*Complementary Target Audiences, Promises, Core Values*).

By genuinely exploiting our core competencies in a strategic partnership with a carefully selected cause, we are achieving

both social and business objectives. And by focusing on areas where we deliver unique assets and expertise, both TNT and WFP are benefitting. (Peter Bakker, former CEO, TNT)

The partnership between TNT and WFP is an excellent example of the way private corporations can cooperate with United Nations agencies to do vital life-saving work. (Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General)

WWF and IMD: One planet leadership WWF, one of the world's leading environmental organizations, has a single-minded goal: to make living fully sustainable on the one planet we have, not the three that Europe or the five that the United States requires (*Vision, Mission*). For WWF, sustainability is critical to survival and may even hold value creation and profit (*Core Values*). So, WWF created an educational program, called One Planet Leaders, targeted at businesses to help them integrate sustainability into their corporate strategies as a driver of innovation and growth (*Targets, Total Offering, Promises*). WWF's next step: to find a partner to help them make this actionable. After searching among many schools and institutions, WWF settled on IMD because of its focus on real-world action and learning (*Complementary Competencies, Personalities*). Together, WWF and IMD are committed to 'building the world's best change agents in sustainability' (*Positioning*). Over time, they want to inspire networks of people with the same goals and ambitions to influence the way we live, consume and do business.

We want sustainability people to learn to speak business and business people to learn to speak sustainability. (Carolina Moeller, Head of Business Education, WWF International; see Step 1)

Other stellar examples of partnerships that match brand values and leverage core

competencies for results include the following (Holliday and Pepper, 2001):

- Procter & Gamble, UNICEF and Cornell University developed a new product called NutriDelight to combat « hidden hunger » (vitamin deficiencies) in children in the Philippines and other developing nations. A public awareness campaign and local knowledge of spending power were pillars of the project.
- ABB and the Alliance for Global Sustainability created the China Energy Technology Program, an extensive partnership program involving scientists, academics and engineers on three continents, to identify the true costs of electrical power generation.
- Aventis Pasteur joined the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (or GAVI, itself comprising WHO, UNICEF, World Bank, governments) to provide immunizations for economic development and global security.
- Pampers and UNICEF, committed to improving the lives of babies around the world, created the One pack = One Vaccine program in 2006 to fight maternal and neonatal tetanus, entirely preventable diseases. The partnership has provided over 100 million vaccines.

Finalizing choice can be difficult

Even after due branding process, should experience or judgment remain insufficient to finalize the right choice of a partner, science can help. Global databases, such as Young & Rubicam’s BrandAsset™ Valuator and Millward-Brown’s BrandZ™, have long been used to quantify brand fits, based on brand personality and core values. TGI Life Values matches targets with the same values and affinity profiles. BrandDynamics™ from Millward Brown allows targets to help guide decisions by providing insight, for example, into which of several partners

will reduce overall risk or increase purchase intent. One method is not preferable to the other. Rather, they are all designed to complement one another to ensure both brand fit AND target audience relevance.

Step 4 – Acknowledge you need one another’s brands – equally

‘Traditionally, companies have viewed the social sector as a dumping ground for their spare cash, obsolete equipment and tired executives’ (Kanter, 1999). The reality: power still tips in favor of businesses while organizations struggle, marching several steps behind. The divide continues (Table 3).

The new reality: this divide must stop. Businesses and organizations are equals who need one another’s brands equally. The secret weapon: consumers.

Evidence

Of all benefits businesses find in partnerships, chief among them concern their *brands*: the equity they have in their values, principles and reputation. So it is no surprise that the top two reasons businesses report for engaging in partnerships are (World Economic Forum, 2005):

- Commitment to their company’s own values, principles, policies and traditions (84 per cent)
- Protecting their corporate reputation and brand (48 per cent).

At the same time, consumers around the world report a growing skepticism toward businesses and their brands. Their respect for corporations, in fact, is sliding:

- According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2009), consumers in 20 countries posted substantial declines in trust for businesses versus 2008, with a global average decline of 62 per cent (Figure 6).

Table 3: The divide continues

Businesses are highly valued in partnerships for solution-finding strengths and expert capacities

Why power tips in their favor ...

Global initiatives, like the World Economic Forum, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the Clinton Global Initiative, are business based
Abundant literature, annual congresses and frequent surveys support and explore business opportunities
CSR departments are charged with value-creation in partnerships, for example, revenue generation, new customers, customer loyalty, new market share, new products and services, better workplaces to improve morale and attract the best staff
Businesses continue philanthropy in the recession because it's seen to be good for business, although giving has shifted to 'strategic' offerings for greater returns, to product and service offerings and employee volunteer efforts: these are businesses' prerogatives (Farrell, 2010)

Organizations are highly valued in partnerships for moral authority, convening power, networks and local connections

Why they trail behind ...

Few specific initiatives target what organizations should do or expect in partnerships
The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation rightfully defines what they expect of organizations as 'grant seekers'. Yet no documentation in all our searches says what organizations should expect in return for their contribution to partnerships
When it comes to partnerships, compromise of principles and the potential alienation of staff still rankle
Lack of comfort with commercial approaches, lack of confidence about what organizations should ask for and limited experience with branding versus businesses continue to limit potential
With funding still the key connection, organizations often appear resigned, 'cap in hand'

Thinking about everything you have read, seen, or heard about business in the last year, in general, do you trust corporations a lot less, a little less, the same, a little more, or a lot more than you did at the same time last year?

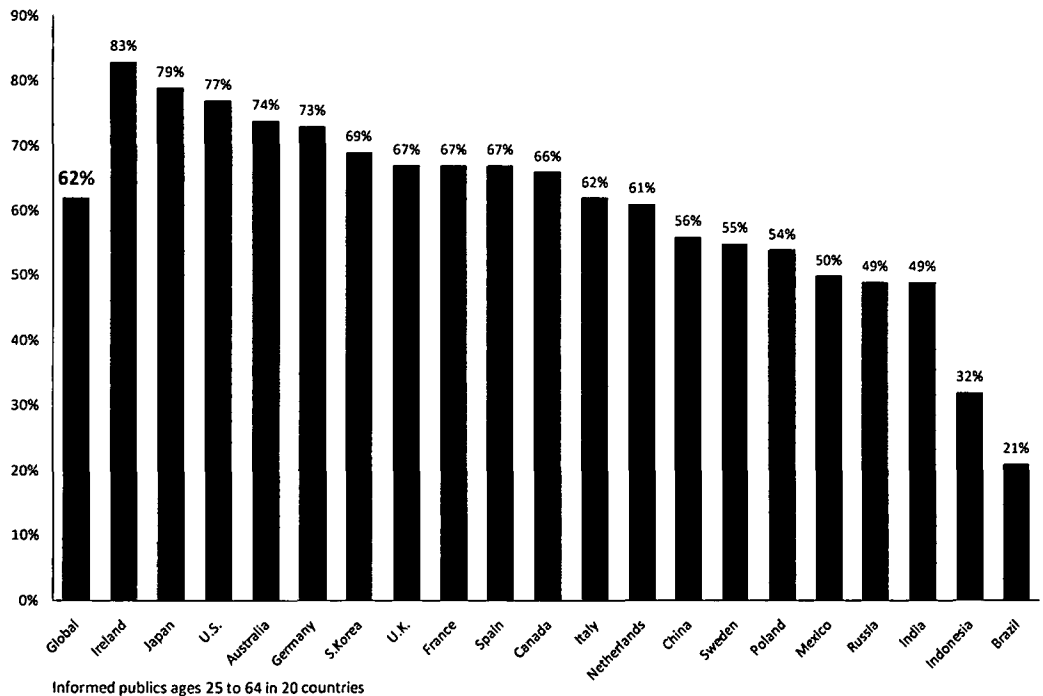


Figure 6: Consumer skepticism of business is growing.
Source: Edelman (2009).

According to the same report, consumers' trust of businesses in the United States is at its lowest level post Enron, the dot-com bust and September 11, and is now on a

par with the United Kingdom, France and Germany, whose consumers have posted low levels of trust in business for the last decade (Figure 7).

Lack of trust in business comes with serious consequences, however.

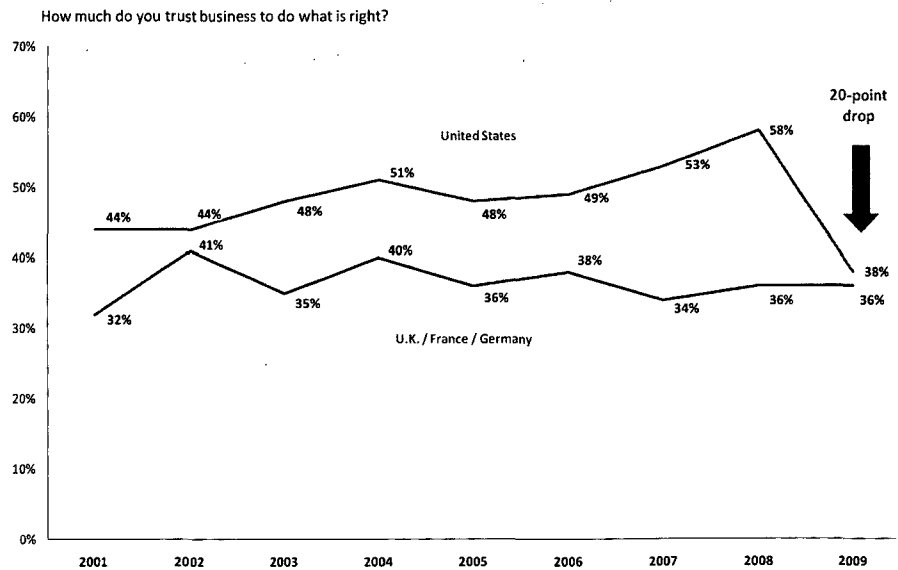
- The Edelman Trust Barometer posed this question to consumers in the 20 countries in their 2009 study: ‘Thinking back over the past 12 months, have you taken any of the following actions in relation to companies that you trust or that you do not trust?’ Results dramatically confirm the tangible benefits trust delivers (Figure 8).

What are businesses to do? Perhaps place more of *their* trust in partnerships with organizations.

- Of the four institutions tracked by the Edelman Trust Barometer, NGOs command the most trust among consumers versus businesses, media and government. Around the world, NGOs are the only

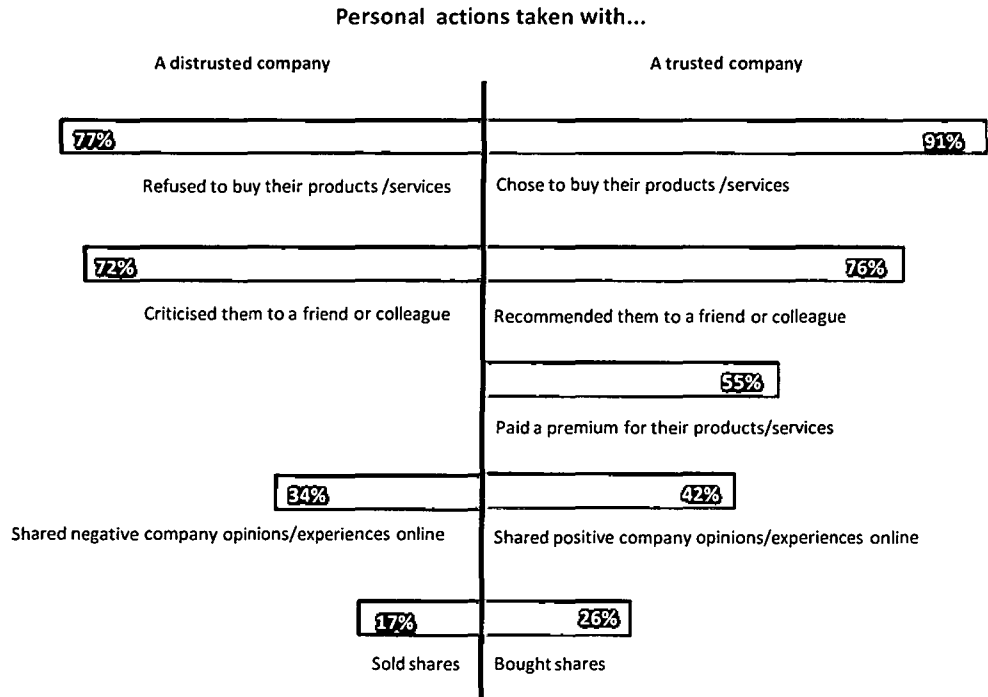
institution trusted by more than 50 per cent of informed publics. This is consistent with evidence from a Millward Brown ReputationZ study in 2007 (among consumers in the United States and United Kingdom) that showed that when it comes to information, consumers trust non-profits, charities and NGOs just after friends and family and doctors. Businesses do not make any of the top listings.

- As for NGOs’ fourth place showing in Asia Pacific, it’s important to note that growth in the non-governmental sector has been strong and steady over the past few years. For example, trust in NGOs was 31 per cent in 2004, 36 per cent in 2005 and jumped to 60 per cent in 2006, flattening to 53 per cent in 2009. Data from the 2011 Edelman Trust Barometer show that China’s trust in NGOs has risen to 63 per cent from 48 per cent in 2008 (Figure 9).



Informed publics ages 35 to 64 in the U.S. and U.K. / France / Germany
Responses 6-9 only on a 1-9 scale; 9 = highest

Figure 7: Consumer trust in business falls in the United States and Europe.
Source: Edelman (2009).



Informed publics ages 25 to 64 in 20 countries

Figure 8: Consequences of consumer trust and distrust.
Source: Edelman (2009).

The point

Going forward, organizations must see themselves as brands as much as businesses do. The brands of both are created and sustained by everyone's ultimate audience, consumers, who vote with their perceptions and wallets. On the basis of their brands, organizations should be prepared to enter and maintain relationships at 50–50: no apology. Especially now, in this current economic climate, we can only expect that the falling stars of businesses will need the shining stars of organizations more than ever.

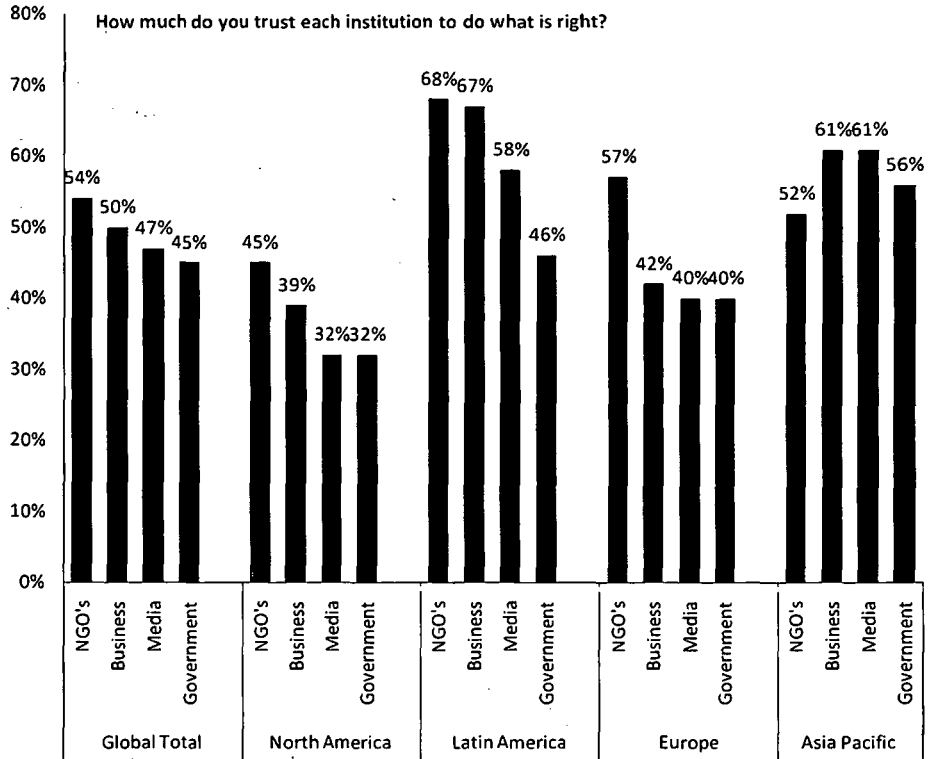
comparable) step is rarely, if ever, taken, could there be any better proof that branding is the bridge to trust, accountability and transparency in partnerships? When partners set a common Vision and Mission; when they jointly commit to Promises, a Total Offering and Positioning; when they adopt common Values – and give their partnership a formal Name (recall One Planet Leaders, Moving the World and One Pack = One Vaccine), can openness, trust and mutual understanding ever be far behind?

Step 5 – Brand your partnership

By now, this step should be obvious: businesses and organizations should answer the nine questions together and create one common roadmap: their Brand Partnership Octagon™ (Figure 10). While this (or a

Proof positive: Trust = success

The 2010 C&E Corporate-NGO Partnerships Barometer asked participants, 'What would you say are the enablers of successful partnerships in your experience? Tick all that apply' (Figure 11). The process of



Informed publics ages 35 to 64 in 20 countries.
 Responses 6-9 only on 1-9 scale; 9 = highest

Figure 9: NGOs top the trust lists.
 Source: Edelman (2011).

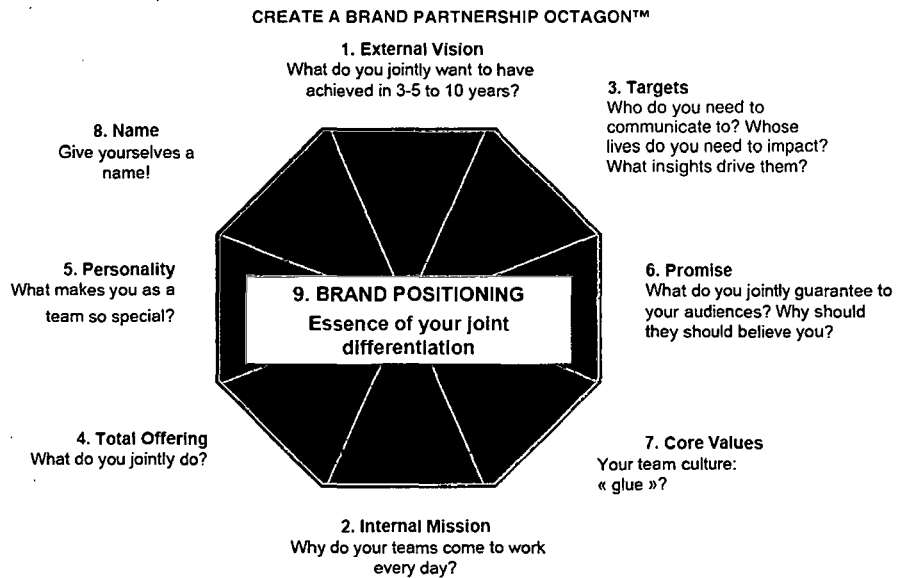


Figure 10: The Brand Partnership Octagon™.

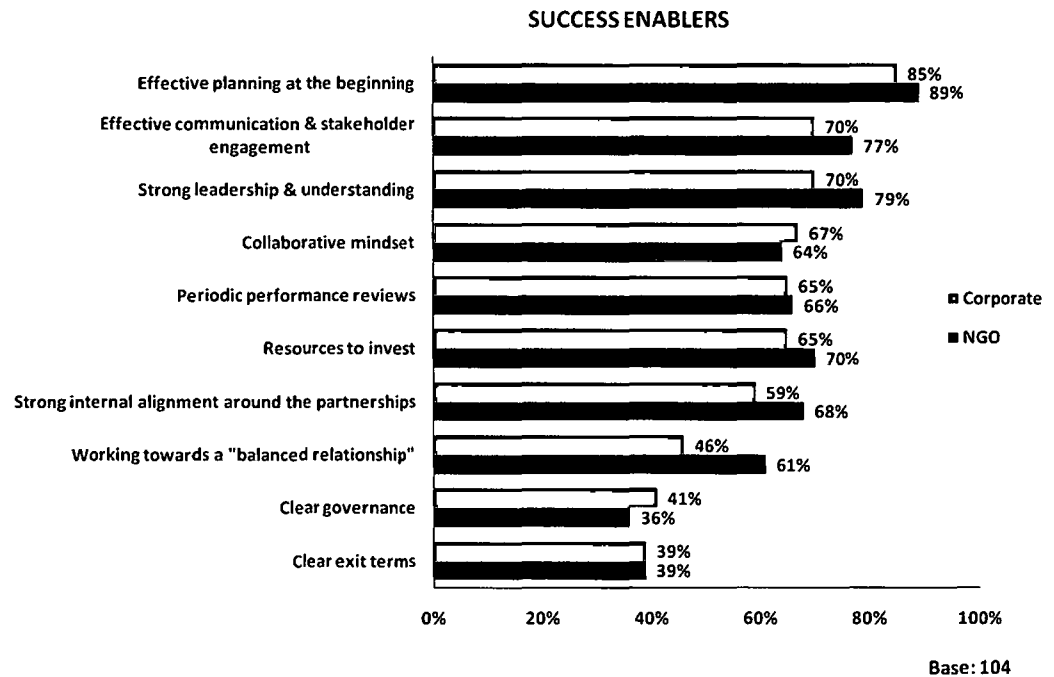


Figure 11: Enablers of successful partnerships.
Source: C&E (2010).

creating a joint Brand Octagon™ ticks off at least five of these success enablers: effective planning at the beginning, effective communication and stakeholder engagement, collaborative mindset, working toward a ‘balanced’ relationship, and clear governance.

Real benefit: Greater impact

Far more than an end in itself, creating a joint Brand Octagon™ provides a perfect platform for the partners to stake real, ‘game-changing’ claims for the people and causes they serve. Why? Because a joint Brand Octagon™ is nothing if it doesn’t challenge the partners to set big, hairy and audacious goals.

Through Vision and Mission, a joint Brand Octagon™ should point the way forward to the changes the partners will make for people they serve and the lives they will touch. Through Promises and Positioning, the joint Octagon™ should stir external

communities – patrons, donors, the public – to sharper and more eager engagement for what the brand stands for and why they want a part of it. Common Core Values should ignite the partners’ own cultures – colleagues and management – with the power of their convictions and courage, while the joint Octagon™ as a whole should help shape the communities and the cultures the partners operate in and make a statement about humanity and the human potential they will impact. If not this, nothing.

Step 6 – Measure your joint impact

- What is the ROI (Return on Investment) of your partnership?
- How are you delivering on KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)?

Knowing your impact is critical to every sinew of this endeavor, and like most of the steps preceding, is rarely taken. This, in spite of the fact that lack of clear processes for

"What would you say are the key challenges or barriers for you in undertaking corporate NGO partnerships?"
TICK ALL THAT APPLY

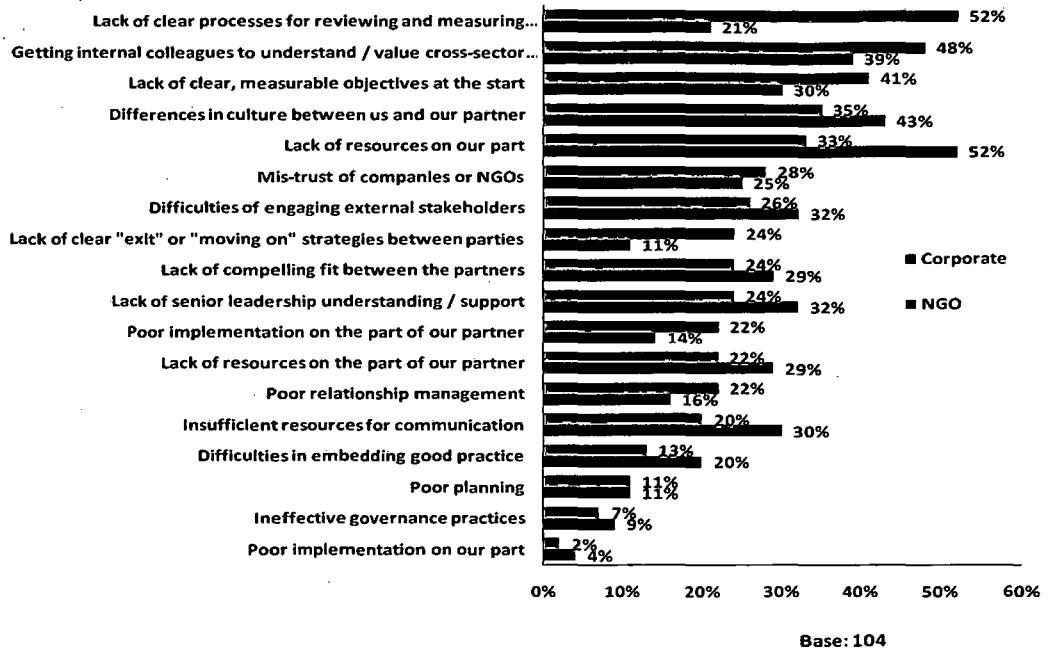


Figure 12: Barriers to partnerships among businesses and organizations.
 Source: C&E (2010).

reviewing and measuring performance is cited in the 2010 C&E Corporate-NGO Partnerships Barometer by *businesses* as the number one barrier to successful partnership (52 per cent, multiple ticks possible). Lack of clear, measurable objectives at the start is the number three barrier (cited by 41 per cent of *businesses*). Interestingly, organizations rate these two factors as less important barriers (at 21 and 30 per cent, respectively), and we presume this is because organizations historically are less accustomed to providing and proving results (ROI? See Step 1) (Figure 12).

Where to begin setting KPIs, tracking results and measuring impact? Of course, the joint Brand Octagon™. What Vision and Mission have you set for the partnership? What is the reason for being (Positioning) for the partnership and what

will you show for your efforts? What Promises do you jointly guarantee to the communities who need to believe you, and believe *in* you: your teams, your colleagues and management, the public, partners and donors, and not least, those whose lives you will touch and change?

You don't need 100 KPIs; you need 10 solid, good ones. Don't be afraid to be aggressive. For example, how have the communities you supplied with micronutrients become more economically sustainable? How many more children were able to attend school because of the breakfasts you served or the shoes you supplied? How many more women survived child-birth due to the midwives you trained? How many more bottles of water or candy bars or diapers did you sell as a result of combining your logos on the packs?

(Businesses will make money in partnerships; business objectives are a fair measure too.) Capturing these results is not just good business; it's self-preservation.

Step 7 – Communicate

Communication is trust and transparency made real: the proof of common commitments to fulfilling common goals. Behind effective planning, effective communication is the second highest reason cited by businesses (70 per cent) and organizations (77 per cent) for successful partnerships (see the 2010 C&E Corporate-NGO Partnerships Barometer (Figure 11)).

Moreover, effective communication can be a major factor in overcoming some of the chief barriers to successful partnering cited by businesses and organizations in this same study: getting internal colleagues to understand and value cross-sector partnering, differences in culture between us and our partner, mistrust of companies or NGOs, difficulties in engaging external stakeholders, and lack of senior leadership understanding and support (Figure 12).

It is not only one another we must communicate with. Communicate with the people whose lives you've impacted. Find out what differences you have made. Never forget the real reason you've partnered in the first place.

CONCLUSIONS

Branding commercial and non-profit partnerships holds great potential for all parties, not least the recipients of their joint efforts. When businesses and organizations apply the principles of branding, equally, this can enhance partner choices, make processes more efficient, and help set and measure bigger, more aggressive goals. This doesn't mean spending more; in these still punishing economic times, when all funding is precious, it means greater impact, more fully relevant agendas and more efficient results for the same, or in many cases lower,

budgets. Applying branding to commercial and non-profit partnerships can create a new idea of (the branded) community, where all stakeholders, including the people served, engage and benefit. Ultimately, branding commercial and non-profit partnerships can and should be seen as a discipline in its own right, trained up and grounded in principles, best practices and ROI accountable to jointly set KPIs.

Post-script

What doesn't kill you will make you strong. With the likelihood of painful financial times ahead, and funding remaining a scarce commodity, traditional corporate philanthropy will surely decline. This may not be all bad. Going forward, partnerships may well need to place more emphasis on program content, cross-sectoral synergies, and shared roles and responsibilities. The more robust relationships that result will need to ensure trust and transparency right from the start. And this in turn will place greater emphasis on each of the seven steps to ensure that branding, as we have defined it, is the bridge to stellar successes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge substantial contributions from Sana Carlton, Millward Brown Switzerland, and Martine Rebours, Kantar Media.

NOTE

¹ This article assumes funding is secured. Many partnerships involve multiple partners; this article focuses on one relationship and assumes that the same principles apply to multiple partners.

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