

Contracting: Where to Draw the Line

Themes from World Café Workshop: Victorian Facilitators' Network 28th Feb 2007

Overview

About 28 people participated in the World Café workshop hosted by Jenni Dann and Erin Jancaukas of Now for the Future. The process was certainly lively, and the pearls that were pooled were so good that they have been collated here. So what follows is a compilation of the workshop 'Convergence' or summary, plus notes gathered from 3 of the tables.

The pearls have been collated under headings that roughly follow those used in the Convergence process.

Rapport with client

- 'Gut feel' informed by values
- Does it feel right, does it feel comfortable?
- Why are you interested in me/us?
- Digging deeper = Full conversation before putting hat in ring
- Need to be able to have a robust rambling discussion with client
- How much are the proposers willing to discuss with you?

Reality Check - Tendering

- Who else / how many people are tendering?
- Am I making up the numbers – but they really have their favorite?
- Motives - Is it a token/PR exercise?
- Are 'they' just trying to pick my brains?
- Only tender if have an existing relationship
- Cost your tendering time

Reality check – Accepting work

- Being clear on what you've got to offer
- Be clear about what you want to do
- Time vs effort
- Is there sufficient resources to do the work?
- Is there enough time allocated to do the work properly?
- Does the process fit the aims?
- Is the remuneration adequate?

Values

- What is the purpose of the work and what does it mean to you?
- Working with people you are like/aligned with – at what point might you be colluding with a hidden pre-determined outcome?
- Compromising is okay, so long as we are not being compromised!
- Company's ethics and facilitator' ethics – are they sufficiently compatible?
- Who is paying?
- What is the work about – maybe this is ethical work, even if the company isn't?
- We need to demonstrate in Tendering – ethics, honesty, transparency

Be clear about our roles and clear expectations -

- must have
- would like to have
- definite no

Being clear what the real job is

When asking contracting questions - it is really important to listen to the answers

- You don't always know what you are actually contracting to do
- 'What is it you can't, or won't (or feel unable or unwilling) to do that you're wanting me to do'? – ie Why is this not being done in-house? - question to clients
- Empowered agreement, what is the impact on all parties involved in the work?
- What provoked 'this need for facilitation'?
- Reconciling different views about what is in the contract
- Bringing to the surface - getting clear anything that is covert
- We need to dig for covert conflict, motives, intentions – is the client being transparent?
- Does the client have a set agenda vs planning the work together with you. Is the process, ways of participating and outcomes open to development and negotiation?
- Listening well – check out any subtexts
- Is the work about pooling collective wisdom that will lead to adding value? How will this be achieved?
- What is the client's role/s in the proposed work

Outcomes

- What is client going to do with the results of the facilitated meeting/workshop?
- What commitment does client have to implementing the outcomes?
- How will the information be used?
- Commitment and capacity of client to implement outcomes – is the resources/\$\$ available for implementation?

About our role

- Should you do your contracting yourself? Or have someone do it on your behalf?
- Critical reflection on the brief – talk to peers etc if not sure
- Need to consider our own motivations/intentions in taking on a job
- Am I rushing in for me or for the client? Self-motivated?
- What role am I contracting to do - the expert/someone to walk the journey with/helper?
- Am I comfortable with my role in this work?
- Personal integrity – is it do-able?
- Am I comfortable with the client's values, ethics, motives?

Tricky issues

- To take or not to take a job OR how to say no and not lose the client and not have it affect your reputation
- There is a continuum in Contracting, there are complex issues to weigh up and there is often much grey between YES and NO!
- Harder to negotiate contracting within an organisation and say no to senior management
- Hard to say no when just starting out – also may not want to say no – to get wide range of experience

Cases when we have said no:

- Not such a good job – doesn't fit the work we do, the values we hold
- When client wants a particular process and we consider that is not an appropriate process for the issue/problem at hand
- When someone else can do a better job – understand one's own strengths. Risk of losing one's reputation if you take on the wrong jobs. Build reputation by standing by our own skills
- Gut instincts
- Unreasonable \$\$
- Impossible – team, time, unrealistic, skills