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“Tick in the box” partnering

How often do we hear clients announce: “We have adopted partnering”? They all know the latest recommendations, and are aware that they need to show auditors and shareholders that best practice has been adopted.

Alas, what is happening all too often in practice is that partnering is viewed simply as a “tick in the box” rather than a fundamental shift in culture and practice. “Partnering contracts” (such as PPC2000) are adopted, but the real cultural change is not embraced, and, in our experience, it is usually the client that establishes the partnering environment. If the framework client does not share information on long-term programmes, budgets and initiatives, how can true collaboration take place? All too often the client is sticking to traditional fare of roast pork and jam roly-poly while expecting their partners to eat sushi: a recipe for partnering indigestion.

Paying lip service to partnering actively damages the change that our industry is trying to achieve. The language of partnering invokes “trust” and “shared objectives” but what happens when client actions appear inconsistent with this? Sending out this kind of mixed message breeds suspicion of the whole “partnering” process and undermines any potential benefits. As one constructor has commented “we can work with traditional or with partnering, but not with a hybrid: we don’t know where we stand”.

The fact remains: if I join Weightwatchers, announce I am on a diet and buy all the latest diet books, it will not make one iota of difference if I’m still tucking into crackling, spuds and jam roly-poly! Unless clients commit to a fundamental change in attitude we will not see the real slim-line benefits of partnering. “Tick in the box” partnering is a major obstacle to change that the industry needs to overcome.

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