

MAKING THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE WORK: JOINT POLITICAL AND MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP

Few leaders choose their chief executive. Even fewer portfolio holders choose their directors and executives or cabinets their corporate management teams. For most the working relationship between politician and manager (CMT) is an 'arranged marriage'. Yet it is this relationship which has proved a crucial indicator of good or bad performance in the local authority. As Relate (Marriage Guidance to the more aged) would argue all relationships need work – it's not just the offspring (in this case the 'policy children') and their performance that count. The parent's relationship affects the children.

Since the introduction of the new political management arrangements we have found politicians and managers willing to work at clarifying and developing their relationship. This has ranged across all types of authority and from CPA excellent through to poor. Each has recognised that as well as the performance driven agenda (the kids must get good A levels), the nature of the leadership rests on an effective political/managerial relationship, both one to one and team to team.

Four specifics have been important in building the relationship:

1. **Agreeing responsibilities for political, managerial and joint (or shared) leadership.** The Leadership Development Commission build on this work, suggesting that the three way divide needs understanding and agreeing across all aspects of leadership typically community, strategy, performance, change. This clarification of responsibilities has been particularly helpful for authorities with lower CPA ratings where the joint leadership has been ill defined.

Are your top team (Executive/Cabinet to CMT) and one to one (portfolio holder to director) relationships mutually agreed and understood?

2. **Ensuring there is regular 'quality' time built into the timetable** of the Executive/Cabinet and CMT. The top team needs to work jointly on the Council's strategy, priorities and performance and managing the organisation. Joint Awaydays need to be timed to feed into strategic and budget processes as well as, say, in one London top team having joint quarterly performance management meetings where portfolio holder and director are held to account.

Has your top team built into its timetable regular 'quality' time for strategy, priorities, performance and change management?

3. **Building a shared understanding of one another's language, views and culture.** Political necessities, priorities and stories need to work alongside

managerial imperatives from Government, analysis and professional judgements. Developing a shared ambition for the authority will draw upon both and it requires mutual understanding of both. Some top teams regularly spend time at the start of Awaydays checking how its members are feeling about their mutual positions.

Has your top team spend any time openly discussing those bits that require you to swallow hard?

4. **Ensuring there is time both separately and jointly for making sense of the Council's agenda.** Too often the Council's strategic documents have been nodded through by politicians. This will not wash with the current political arrangements and, not least, CPA requirements of joint leadership. We have repeatedly found that before the Executive/Cabinet and CMT come together both groups need to get their separate thinking sorted out (particularly the Executive/Cabinet) before a joint meeting, otherwise it can be a very unequal meeting. Once working in joint session we have found the joint use of analytic tools and techniques for working on direction, priorities and performance has greatly assisted understanding and ownership. Too often the analysis is complete by the time politicians are involved and this creates two unequal parties in the discussion. The same practices apply in the portfolio holder /director relationship.

How good are your processes for developing separate and joint thinking about the Council's agenda? Are the top team and one-to-one relationships developing joint thinking through shared techniques?

Top teams and portfolio holder/director relationships are crucial for helping or hindering the delivery of the Council's agenda. This might not be a marriage of love, nor does it need be, but parents working at improving their relationship will affect the offspring.

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