

Trusted Partnerships

Unlocking The Value In Strategic Alliances



How investing in trust, accelerates value in complex ecosystems

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“WHILST PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPPs) ARE UNDOUBTEDLY CHALLENGING TO DELIVER AND NOT WITHOUT THEIR CONTROVERSY, ROBUST AND WELL-COORDINATED PARTNERSHIPS PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES TO BRING TOGETHER THE RESOURCES, EXPERTISE, AND POWERS AVAILABLE IN WAYS THAT CANNOT BE ACHIEVED BY EITHER PARTNER IN ISOLATION.”

LGA

”



Introduction

The delivery of today's most critical programmes, across infrastructure, defence, aerospace, technology and complex services, increasingly depends on strategic partnerships. No single organisation can manage the scale, pace or risk alone. In these sectors, safety, performance and availability rely on deeply integrated collaboration across multiple parties. Trust is not a "nice to have" in these environments; it is fundamental to delivery.

As humans we have evolved to trust as a survival strategy. In our ancestral environment, cooperation in groups was essential for survival and protection. Trust enabled us to share resources and defend against threats, giving cooperative groups a clear advantage. To evolve, humans have needed to rely on alliances. Trusting others' intentions meant lower risk and higher chances of group success. This "*shared intentionality*" (as described by psychologist Michael Tomasello) became a human trait, allowing complex societies to form.

Psychologically, trust reduces the constant need for vigilance. It lowers stress and triggers bonding, making cooperation feel safe. Over time, repeated positive interactions build neural pathways that make trust automatic and collaboration easier. Shared experiences overcome biases, turning strangers into allies. Trust is hardwired into us for survival. It lets us form bonds that multiply our strength and create the security we need for growth and mutual progress.

When partnerships are trusted and well-designed, they unlock speed, innovation and value that no organisation can achieve independently. Yet experience shows many strategic alliances fail to reach their potential. The symptoms are familiar: slower decisions, rising costs and outcomes that fall short of expectations. These failures are rarely caused by technical capability alone. More often, they stem from misalignment, fragmented incentives and a lack of confidence between the partners.

Trust reduces friction between the partners, facilitates earlier problem-solving and allows organisations to focus on outcomes rather than protection.

Where trust is intentionally built and actively maintained, partnerships move faster, share risk more effectively and deliver greater value.

Trusted Partnerships do not emerge by chance. They are created through deliberate choices: early alignment on shared outcomes, transparent behaviours, fairness, balanced power, shared accountability and sustained investment in relationships - at every level. These are not soft issues. They are core performance disciplines in high-value, high-risk environments.

 A SURVEY OF 48 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS SHOWED THAT 96% FEEL 'TRUST' IS A CRITICAL ELEMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS SUCCESS?

XTP Strategic Partnership Survey 2025

This white paper sets out practical insight drawn from real-world evidence. It helps leaders assess the health of their partnerships, understand the behaviours that build trust and apply a clear framework for action.

The message is simple yet urgent - **In complex ecosystems, trust is one of the most powerful performance multipliers available.** Organisations that design for trust, gain a lasting advantage. Those that do not, continue to pay the hidden cost of mistrust; in time, resources and missed opportunity.

Pieter Johnson – XTP

February 2026

Executive Summary

Strategic partnerships are essential to delivering programmes in complex organisational eco systems, enabling speed, innovation and value that no single organisation can achieve alone. Yet many remain shaped by low-cost, transactional models that become inflexible over time, driving misaligned behaviours, as buyers seek change and suppliers are locked into outdated commitments. In today's environment of rapid technological change and fiscal pressure, these legacy approaches are no longer fit for purpose. Evidence shows that the real constraint on partnership performance is not capability, but mistrust, misalignment and inconsistent behaviours, which slow decisions, increase costs and limit the value alliances can deliver.

Across 48 strategic partnerships surveyed, **96% identified trust as critical to success**, yet many described their alliances as **“transactional and creaking”**, with **44% reporting limited openness** and **38% citing a lack of honest feedback** as a primary barrier. AI-driven processes add further pressure, increasing scrutiny, lengthening buying cycles and making partners harder to distinguish. The result is a growing trust deficit at the very time when organisations most need confidence, agility and shared risk-taking to take on the challenges of the next decade.

Key Issues

Partnerships are often formed too late, with trust-building beginning only at contract start, long after behaviours have hardened. Research shows that real organisational trust takes **almost 3 years** to start to mature and gain any sort of traction.

- ⚠ Procurement and buying continues to reward **price over collaboration**
- ⚠ Risk is frequently **transferred rather than shared**
- ⚠ Supply-chain **innovation is locked** behind layers of bureaucracy, preventing access to the SME expertise where new ideas typically sit.
- ⚠ Leadership behaviours and **power imbalances**.

What Works?

Successful partnerships share **Six Trust Behaviours**:

1. Early joint planning and shared objectives
2. Transparent procurement and genuine risk-sharing
3. Joint metrics and a single definition of success
4. Integrated teams and deliberate governance
5. Leadership behaviours and open communication
6. Long-term value focus over short-term wins

The Outcomes Leaders Can Expect?

When trust is intentionally built and maintained, alliances deliver measurably better results. Case studies show:

- **10–15% under budget** and **zero disputes** under the Welsh MIM model
- **28 years of dispute-free collaboration** between London Transport and Adshel
- Major programmes delivering **faster, with fewer claims, higher innovation**, and supply chains that become partners rather than vendors.

Why This Matters?

- **76% of stakeholders expect at least 5% additional value from trust-based partnerships and 53% believe this is double digit!** What a staggering set of outcomes could be delivered! **The choice is now explicit: Continue managing mistrust, or hard-wire trust into how we buy, partner and deliver.**

3-Point Trust Manifesto

What Government, Public Authorities and Industry Must Do

1 Place greater weight on partnership capability in evaluations

Buyers must cap price weightings and allow higher qualitative scores for **proven** trust behaviours.

Leadership and collaboration capability is a **pass/fail** requirement, not a narrative add-on.

- If an organisation (buyer & seller) cannot evidence how it builds trust, shares risk and solves problems jointly, it should not be considered a partner for the long-term - regardless of commercials.

If partnerships are selected like commodities, they will behave like commodities.

2 Design Trust into contracts and not hope it emerges

All strategic contracts **must** mandate shared outcomes, joint governance and proportional risk-sharing from day one.

This means:

- A single definition of success
- Shared pain/gain mechanisms
- Integrated governance boards with equal voice
- Explicit behavioural expectations written into contracts and managed throughout delivery

Trust must be designed, governed and measured, not left to goodwill after contract award

3 Hold leaders accountable for Trust not just delivery

Public and Private Executive leadership boards must treat trust as a core performance metric, alongside cost, time and scope, including supply chain.

SRO and Executives should be formally accountable for:

- Openness of feedback
- Quality of partner relationships
- Early issue escalation
- Long-term value creation

If leaders are rewarded only for short-term delivery, mistrust will remain a rational behaviour.

Why Trust in some Partnerships Fail

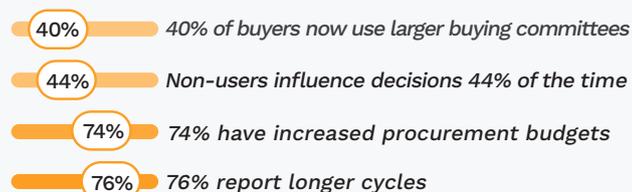
Organisations now face constant pressure: tighter budgets, ageing assets and rapid change driven by digital transformation and AI. Markets shift faster than systems and business processes can adapt, and much of the technology shaping decisions still relies on historic data rather than new behaviours. This creates a volatile environment where risk is high, stability is low, and trust becomes essential, yet increasingly fragile. Many partnerships have delivered stunning outcomes even in the world of PFI and ppp's. These are the exception and almost always have strong partnering behaviours between the parties which has grown their trust.

Strategic partnerships should help manage this complexity, but many are struggling. Procurement frameworks still prioritise price over long-term relational capability, leading to alliances that look viable on paper but are weak in practice. As one industry figure put it, **“There is no incentive to change.”** Our own findings echo this: **over half of respondents said their partnerships were transactional and working but creaking, and 8% said the partnership was broken and openly exhibiting a blame culture.**

Where trust is low, results suffer and in most cases the root cause is relational breakdown, not technical failure. Our survey found **38% felt a lack of openness and honesty** was the biggest barrier, and **44% said partner feedback was not open or honest.**

AI is adding new pressures. Automated proposals make suppliers sound alike, and buyers use AI tools to challenge claims more aggressively. As the LinkedIn Trust Advantage report warns, **“When everyone has access to the same tools and information, everything starts to sound the same. The result is more noise, more scepticism, and less trust.”**

Procurement cycles are expanding too:



At a time when AI should be speeding processes up, reducing cost and reducing complexity, the buying process is in fact moving the other way!

The costs of mistrust are significant. Failures, disputes and early terminations cause higher operating costs, built in risks and governance; and reduce the credibility of all involved, their brand and their future potential within that market.

“Blame, Shame, Fault and Guilt have no place in a trust-based partnership.” These behaviours create a prison from which the relationship cannot break out and will dictate the way forward, which will be claims, disputes and failure of the opportunity to thrive.

“CLAIMS AND COUNTER CLAIMS ARE LIKE A ROCK; YOU CAN MOVE THEM ONE AT A TIME WHEN THERE IS JUST ONE. BUT WHEN DISPUTES ARISE AND THE PILE GETS BIGGER, IT BECOMES AN UNSURMOUNTABLE TASK TO MOVE THE WHOLE PILE”
Speaker Bird & Bird Conference

67% OF RESPONDENTS SAID A LACK OF HONESTY AND NOT ENOUGH TIME INVESTED IN BUILDING TRUST WERE OBSTACLES TO A TRUSTED PARTNERSHIP

XTP Strategic Partnership Survey 2025

Supply chains highlight the same challenge. Clients consistently ask for better access to their provider's supply chain because they know innovation lives with SMEs and specialists, not in corporate layers. But large organisations bureaucracy and risk controls often block this. As Simon Sinek notes, **“A strong ‘Circle of Safety’ fosters trust and allows people to share ideas, work together, and face external challenges effectively.”** Our research reinforces this: **71% of respondents said people issues such as attitude, hidden agendas and cultural style,** were the biggest cause of trust breakdown.

Case Study

A rail sector example shows what trust in the supply chain can unlock. When contracting authorities look beyond their prime contractors into the SME supply chain they can unlock many innovative benefits. In one case study where an Alliance client (delivering a major project), contracted directly with a specialist SME supplier; they created innovative delivery solutions that represented multiple other benefits. **“This meant we could drop pallets at specific install locations along the route [rather than in centralised compounds]... the client itself estimated that on snagging time alone this saved about a year and a half on labour”.** Lucy Prior MBE

Only the complete end to end partnership working together, could deliver this solution!

At the Bird & Bird Conference “Contracting and Procurement for Complex Projects” the following messages reinforced the need to ensure that the buying process and contract form, support a collaborative opportunity to build trust for **BOTH** client and supplier:

- **“If the service specifications are wrong (or not ready) and you deliver a contractual tender form, it is destined to fail”** – A German Perspective
- **“Do not send the promise team to your buyer meetings, send the delivery team. They want to see those who will be doing the work”**
- Dispute Avoidance/Adjudication Boards (DAAB) provide advice and issue binding decisions, when necessary, in advance of a formal dispute

The Local Government Association similarly warns that **“the need for surety and ‘fixing’ key elements of the partnership... must be complemented by designing flexibility into its scope.”** Without flexibility and behavioural alignment, partnerships default to defensiveness, inefficiency and stalled innovation.

The pattern is clear: mistrust breeds caution, caution breeds inefficiency, and inefficiency breeds further mistrust. Unless trust is treated as a capability to design, resource and govern, these failures will continue and grow.

As Paul Jukes, former Chief Executive of North Lanarkshire Council, warns:

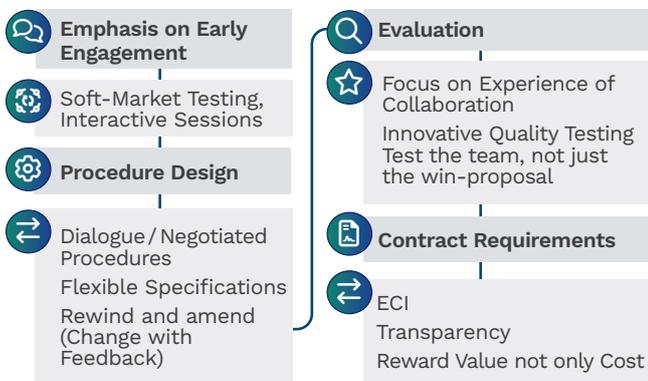
“If you lose a few pounds on a contract, you can always get it back.....But once trust is lost, you will forever be fighting to re-establish the relationship and regain a trusting partnership”.

Intentional Collaboration Unlocks Speed and Value

Trust is not a by-product of contract award; it is the direct consequence of deliberate behaviours that begin long before any formal procurement process commences. Research from the University of Strathclyde's meta-analysis of alliance formation (Hancock et al., 2023) is unequivocal: **“Measurable, resilient trust between organisations takes a minimum of 2.5 years to establish from first meaningful contact. The clear implication is that the earlier partnership-forming behaviours are initiated, the faster high-performance collaboration can be achieved. Waiting until financial close or contract signature leaves programmes starting from a deficit they rarely recover”.**

Leading organisations now treat **early buyer engagement** (often 12 to 36 months before tender) as the true starting line. Market-shaping workshops, joint horizon-scanning, collaborative pipeline reviews and informal “should-cost” modelling sessions create shared context and signal genuine intent.

Four Recommended Strategies for Collaborative Procurement:



Source: *Procurement Strategies for Complex Projects*

These pre-competitive interactions allow potential partners to assess cultural fit, test communication styles and begin the small, repeated acts of reliability that Simon Sinek describes as the only reliable route to trust.

A LinkedIn report underscores trust as a strategic differentiator through early engagement:

- Trust starts long before tender: **94 % of buyers** now use AI/data to research and quietly shortlist (or eliminate) partners months or years ahead
- **Price is losing** in environments where long term strategic positioning is critical: buyers increasingly demand proven compatibility and expertise
- Buyers are nervous: **only 34 % feel fully confident defending their choice** if it goes wrong, early honest and open engagement removes that fear
- Real trust comes from expertise, not charm: **86 % say demonstrable knowledge drives trust**, personal rapport is worth only half as much. Know your partners drivers, before using rapport to influence
- Trusted partners have a higher chance of getting the next job automatically: **peer recommendation is 3 to 4 times more powerful than price or features.**



“TRUST IS NOT BUILT IN GRAND GESTURES. IT IS BUILT IN THE SMALLEST MOMENTS, WHEN SOMEONE KEEPS A PROMISE, SHOWS UP ON TIME, TELLS THE TRUTH EVEN WHEN IT IS UNCOMFORTABLE, AND ASKS FOR HELP WHEN THEY NEED IT.”

Simon Sinek

In public procurement, early engagement with the market must be carefully structured so that it **does not preempt or influence a future procurement decision**. Any indication of predetermined preferences, whether real or perceived, risks undermining fairness and may expose the contracting authority to legal challenge.

Early **market research**, rather than single supplier engagement, should form a core part of procurement preparation. This may include desk analysis, soft market testing, or the use of independent, non-conflicted advisors. Such approaches enable Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) and project teams to develop an informed understanding of market capability while avoiding risks associated with preferential treatment or perceived bias.

Understanding the structure of the market, the range of potential providers and their partnering behaviours is a critical element of effective buying preparation. Transparent early communication of procurement objectives, delivery models and anticipated outcomes ensures that all prospective bidders are given a fair and equal platform to engage.

A critical consideration during this preparatory phase is the behaviours demonstrated by prospective suppliers. How organisations engage, collaborate and respond during early market activity can provide valuable insight into whether their trust behaviours align with those they will later evidence in formal proposals and delivery partnerships.

The Trust Clock^{XTP}

In complex strategic alliances, the trust clock starts ticking the day you first meet, not the day the formal buying process starts.

In the best partnerships, trust-building starts years before any tender. The most critical partnership alliances and complex strategic partnerships can no longer afford to treat trust as an afterthought. It must be engineered from the very first conversation, because the clock on the trust-building journey starts the moment organisations decide whether they are willing to invest in each other. Mobilising contracts, where transactional behaviours flourish are where trust can be won or lost and fair joint governance becomes critical.

Trust isn't a one-off event; it is something you start early and keep feeding. Do that, and the partnership flourishes and outlives the contract.



Building Trust: The Behaviours with ‘Balancing Fairness and Power’

The evidence from early-adopter programmes is conclusive. Those that begin trust-building behaviours at first contact, through open pre-market engagement, with equitable commercial models and procurement that selects for collaboration, and lifelong governance, **consistently deliver 15–30% greater outcomes**, materially lower conflict and alliances that endure beyond the initial term.

Equitable power and early ‘vulnerability’ are non-negotiable foundations. Creating healthy tensions with the right level of governance is crucial. Where one party can impose disproportionate contractual pain, defensiveness is inevitable from the other partner and trust has no foundations on which to build. Conversely, when power is balanced and leaders practise disciplined, pre-emptive openness, surfacing risks and constraints voluntarily (rather than under duress), reciprocal candour follows.

This behaviour must exist from prebuying, through the life of the partnership.



“VULNERABILITY IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF TRUST. WE HAVE TO CHOOSE COURAGE OVER COMFORT AND SHARE OUR STORIES OF STRUGGLE, NOT BECAUSE WE ARE INADEQUATE, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE RELATIONSHIP.”

Brené Brown



Our survey of 48 Strategic Partnerships highlighted the top 10 issues (if addressed) would improve trust in their partnerships:

Ranked	Top 10 issues (if addressed) would improve trust in partnerships
1	More transparency / open and honest communication
2	Consistent follow-through and delivery on promises
3	More regular, structured catch-ups and progress updates
4	Greater collaboration rather than control
5	Better understanding of each other's priorities & constraints
6	Joint problem-solving / working together on issues
7	Senior leadership visibly championing the partnership
8	More face-to-face / relationship-building time
9	Clearer roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes
10	Shared incentives / aligned goals

These initiatives succeed because procurement deliberately selected partners capable of trust-based working, then provided the governance, training and capacity building and cultural reinforcement required for that trust to mature.



Case Study

Welsh Mutual Investment – Trust Pays

What makes MIM different:

- Public sector retains 20–25% equity → everyone has “skin in the game.”
- Shortlisted bidders attend “chemistry workshops” before selection.

Local Partnerships’ role:

- Facilitate early market engagement and chemistry sessions.
- Run Local Strategic Partnership boards for the full 25-year project life, giving all parties equal voice.
- Train teams in collaborative behaviours and embed trust clauses.
- Coach alliance behaviours post-award to prevent adversarial drift.

Results: 10–15% under budget, zero disputes.

anglianwater **NHS**

Case Study

Evidence confirms the ‘trust return’ on this intentional investment.

- **Anglian Water @one Alliance** (Project 13 enterprise model) - 15 % productivity gain and 30 % fewer disputes through behavioural assessment at selection.
- **NHS Infrastructure & Projects Partnerships** Case evidence from hospital programmes demonstrates early supplier involvement can materially accelerate delivery timelines, often by double-digit percentages, compared with late-stage procurement models.



The Balance of Power

In strong, sustainable partnerships, trust depends on more than goodwill, it requires managed equity. When one partner dominates decision making or exerts disproportionate influence, the partnership loses its equity, undermines partner commitment, and risks falling back to transactional behaviours. As The Partnering Initiative warns, a power imbalance that **“allows one partner to dominate decision making...disadvantages other partners”** and **“destroys equity,”** leading to weakening any foundation of trust.

But we also must be mindful of constant change, people changing and moving on, political change, economic change. All of these put intense pressure on a strategic partnership relationship. This is when having Trusted Partnerships brings returns. They allow open and honest exchanges, so every party is clear about the position, health and contentment of the other. This is where the partner (client or supplier) is able to step in to help navigate the challenging times.

In complex alliances, the message is identical. Design The Six Trust Behaviours (following page) into every alliance from the very first conversation and you do not merely deliver a project; you create a partnership capable of delivering the next decade of strategic or national priorities, faster, more innovatively and at lower cost.

The Balance of Fairness

When you choose a partner, you truly trust, and give them fair terms and strong joint governance, something changes - risk drops, business cycles increase, innovation flows and the programme become far more resilient.

In simple terms: pick organisations you trust (by their demonstrable behaviours), treat them fairly, govern together, and the biggest projects and service delivery models will finally start delivering the excellence they were always meant to.

Individual Behaviours

How should you act as an individual in building trusted partnerships? David Maister (Author of The Trusted Advisor) created the following equation:

$$T = \frac{C + R + I}{S}$$

Where:

- T** Trustworthiness
- C** Credibility
- R** Reliability
- I** Intimacy (Having the courage to talk about difficult issues)
- S** Self Orientation (Self Orientation can be selfishness, self-focus, interruptions, knowing best.... The list is a long one!)

Case Study

London Transport & Adshel



In 1997, London Transport and Adshel launched a 20-year partnership to manage bus shelters in London. Still running (TfL and JCDecaux), it remains a model of trust-based collaboration. Its governance had joint Boards, with a revenue and cost sharing, shared risks and joint product investment.

The partnership delivered public savings of £400m (TfL audit, 2022), no formal disputes in 28 years and the contract was extended twice.

“We stopped thinking of Adshel as a supplier and started thinking of them as joint owners of the bus-shelter estate. Once that mindset changed, everything else: cost, quality, innovation, took care of itself.” Former TfL Commercial Director

This partnership proves that designing shared governance, risk/reward, and joint ownership from day one sustains trust and delivers value over and above the contractual outcomes.

Case Study

Building Trust Through Behavioural Assessment (DIO)



Defence Infrastructure Organisation

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) uses behavioural workshops during procurement to build trust in NEC Alliance Contract (ALC) delivery. Scenario-based exercises test openness, collaborative leadership, shared risk ownership and collective decision-making under pressure. By observing how teams behave before contracts are awarded, DIO identifies partners capable of forming trust-based alliances, reducing mobilisation risk and establishing the shared endeavour, confidence, transparency and joint accountability from the outset.



The Six Trust Behaviours, are proven mechanics that turn ordinary contracts into extraordinary partnerships.



1. Early Joint Planning and Shared Objectives

Organisational trust takes around 2.5 years to mature. Strong programmes begin 12–36 months pre-procurement, with clients and suppliers jointly shaping strategy, sharing risks and agreeing a co-owned definition of success.



2. Transparent Procurement and Genuine Risk-Sharing

Effective procurement prioritises collaborative behaviours, cultural fit and leadership, not just price. Shared risk ensures partners retain “skin in the game”, driving transparency, alignment and trust.



3. Joint Metrics and a Single Definition of Success

Trust breaks down with competing scorecards. High-performing alliances agree shared outcomes, tracked through simple dashboards. RAG status highlights trust gaps and progress, discouraging gaming and promoting joint problem-solving.



4. Integrated Teams and Deliberate Governance

Trust accelerates when “us and them” is removed. Co-location, joint inductions and shared rituals build connection, with integrated teams forming trust significantly faster than siloed ones. Ongoing relationship check-ins sustain trust beyond contract award.



5. Leadership Behaviours and Open Communication

Leaders define the trust climate. Visible engagement, vulnerability and early problem raising signal psychological safety, encouraging openness and collective ownership across teams.



6. Long-Term Value Focus Over Short-Term Wins

High-trust alliances plan for transition early. Clear hand-back standards, wind-down budgets, people plans and joint training are agreed upfront to protect long-term value.

ALMOST HALF OF RESPONDENTS HAVE HIGH CONFIDENCE THAT AFTER INVESTING TIME AND RESOURCES, ORGANISATIONAL TRUST WILL IMPROVE



XTP Strategic Partnership Survey 2025

We must act to support the behaviours needed to build trust in our alliances. Maister’s model shows we must put self-orientation aside, whilst we push for the collective good of the partnership.

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport - **“There are always ways to make things happen. Don’t use the barrier of procurement to stifle engagement. You find a way. Take responsibility for making things happen. People believe, when they see things happen”**

The organisation Constructing Excellence has an excellent ‘Behavioural Framework’ focused on Collaborative behaviours: Communication, Partnerships, Teamwork, Continuous Improvement, Trusted Partners, Accountability / Ownership.

Trust is one of the highest-return assets the strategic partnership can own. When deliberately designed, trust becomes the predictor of speed, cost, innovation and renewal.



“WHEN PEOPLE NEED IMPORTANT ADVICE, THEY STILL TURN TO PEOPLE THEY TRUST, OVER AI OR SEARCH ENGINES.”

Dan Shapero, COO of LinkedIn



The impact of these six behaviours

15-30% Lower Costs

Up to 80% fewer formal disputes

Projects routinely delivered early or on time

Relationships that self-renew as people actively choose to work together again

Services that give greater satisfaction

Working environments that feel secure and reduce staff turnover

Higher innovation and faster adoption of new technology

Improved safety performance and lower accident rates

Greater resilience during crisis or service disruption

Stronger talent attraction and retention

Enhanced public and stakeholder confidence

James Haluch MBE shared a story with us ...

A senior client leader attended all new-employee inductions to explain the partnerships shared goals, ending with: **“I trust every single one of you 100% to help me deliver these goals. You do not need to earn this, please don’t erode it.”**

The Next Move: From Insight to Action

Trust is a strategic capability.

When deliberately invested and managed, it can support the delivery of 10-30 % lower whole-life costs, up to 80% fewer disputes, higher innovation and partnerships that renew themselves without re-tendering.

The power of trust leads to partners being best practice case studies, references for new opportunities and most amazingly becoming an extension of the organisation, referring you into their networks and colleagues. There is **nothing more powerful in growth, than references and referrals** by your partners.

Organisations can start by delivering on these activities from the outset:

- Choose your **partners based upon their evidence of collaborative behaviours** and examples of trust building. Go beyond the promise teams (both client and supplier).
- Establish **clear joint** governance with “building trust” as an explicit strategic objective with an ‘independent’ critical ally available to provide non-judgemental support, avoiding disputes and claims!
- Hold routine **face-to-face and online** engagement sessions, no excuses.
- Be deliberately **vulnerable without weakness**, share reach-back issues early and openly.
- Agree a **Commitment List** that tackles the real pain points for each side.
- Create and publish a **live Trust Register** so both parties can see and discuss where trust stands.
- **Commit capacity/budget and people** to trust-building, knowledge sharing and targeting “above and beyond” outcomes.
- Adopt and visibly demonstrate signing the Trusted Partnership Charter^{XTP}

The evidence is overwhelming: Trusted Partnerships deliver faster decisions, better outcomes and significantly greater value than traditional, transactional models.

The behaviours, frameworks and proven delivery models already exist. The question is no longer whether trust works, it's whether your organisation is ready to invest and lead in your sector.

Leaders are clear about the potential upside.

WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE REWARD FOR BUILDING DEEP, MUTUAL ORGANISATIONAL TRUST:

- 76% EXPECT AT 5% (OR MORE) ADDITIONAL VALUE FROM THE PARTNERSHIP OUTCOMES (ABOVE THE CONTRACTUAL REQUIREMENT)
- 53% BELIEVE THE PRIZE IS GREATER THAN 10%
- ONLY 4% THINK THERE IS NOTHING TO GAIN

XTP Strategic Partnership Survey 2025

In other words, almost every stakeholder sees real, tangible value still on the table, value that can only be unlocked through deliberate, trust-based collaboration.

The choice ahead is simple: continue managing the cost of mistrust or step forward and build the Trusted Partnerships that will define the next generation of high-value projects and service delivery models. The organisations that choose trust today will be the ones shaping and winning tomorrow.

Stakeholders are crystal clear: when we invest in trust, partnerships don't just run better they deliver 5-10% or more for every organisation involved. That's a prize worth chasing together.

Now is the moment to act

Now is the moment to lead

The Trusted Partnership Charter^{XTP} Practices for Building Organisational Trust



Be Consistent

Follow through on every promise, however small. Consistency is the strongest single predictor of trust across both leaders and teams.



Communicate regularly

Never go quiet during problem times. Frequent, open communication is trust-building and the fastest way to close the gap in hybrid or remote teams.



Clarify goals and roles

Uncertainty is the biggest trust killer. A single, co-owned definition of success agreed by both parties is the highest environmental driver of trust.



Be transparent

Share decisions and reasoning early and honestly. Transparency is the number one behaviour that makes people trust you.



Build a culture of fair accountability

Maintain the Balance of Fairness and the Balance of Power. Treat schedule miss, as joint development opportunities, not for blame.



Prioritise relationships

Even in large complex ecosystems, trust remains personal. Deliberate relationship-building time, co-location and social rituals should not be optional extras; they are core investments.

Note:

We recognise that in certain public procurement contexts the term “Partnership” has specific legal connotations and is often avoided in favour of phrases such as “partnering arrangements”, “collaborative working”, “strategic alliances”, “framework agreements” or “long-term service arrangements”. In this paper, the terms “Partnerships” and “Trusted Partnerships^{XTP}” are used in their broader, non-legal sense to describe collaborative relationships between two or more organisations working together to deliver a service or product.

(UK Procurement Act 2023 (s.1–3) or Crown Commercial Service guidance on collaborative working for further reading on public procurement terminology).

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- Frontier Tech Confidence Tracker – Hotwire
- Creating Value Through Trust: Key Strategies for Successful Partnerships IMPartner
- Connected Places Catapult - Building trusted partnerships to accelerate complex infrastructure innovation.
- Constructing Excellence - Advocates collaborative models that replace adversarial behaviour with trust-based relationships.
- Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW) Promotes ISO 44001 and structured approaches that build trust between public, private and third-sector partners.
- Local Government Association (LGA) National local-government body producing guidance, toolkits to build trust and strong relationships across place-based partnerships.
- Local Partnerships Acts as a trusted, impartial interface between local and central government, helping public bodies and their private-sector partners build the confidence, collaboration and trust
- techUK The UK’s leading technology industry body - fosters trusted collaboration between the tech sector, public sector, infrastructure owners and regulators to modernise services and enable secure innovation

About the Author

Pieter Johnson brings over a decade of consulting experience, alongside senior frontline roles in operations, business development and marketing. This white paper reflects both his professional experience and a long-standing commitment to improving how strategic alliances are formed, governed and sustained.

Through XTP, Pieter works with organisations that recognise trust as a commercial advantage and are ready to turn it into a repeatable capability.

About XTP

XTP helps organisations build trusted partnerships that perform. We work with leadership and growth teams to navigate complex procurement environments, align commercial intent and establish partnerships that deliver long-term value rather than short-term transactions.

Operating across both public and private sectors, XTP specialises in bridging the gap between buyers and suppliers, bringing private-sector pace, clarity and commercial discipline to public-sector challenges, while helping private-sector organisations succeed within highly regulated procurement frameworks.

Our work focuses on trust by design: shaping behaviours, governance models and decision-making structures that enable partnerships to thrive in complex, high-value ecosystems.

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