



The **TRANSFORMATION** Project

A Case Study of
Project Partner Collaboration
with
Playgroup



The TRANSFORMATION Project

A Case Study of Project Partner Collaboration – Playgroup

1 – Summary Overview

1.1 – The Organisations Involved

1.1.1 – The TRANSFORMATION Project Partners

The TRANSFORMATION Project was developed by working in a collaborative partnership with colleagues from the Public, Third and Private Sectors. The collaboration consisted of:

Research Project Partners – Aston Business School and Chapel Consulting, the Economic & Social Research Council and the Association for Project Management.

Organisation Project Partners – Warwickshire Police (Public Sector), Echo Managed Services (Private Sector), Playgroup (Private Sector), Birmingham LEP (Public Private Partnership) and Telford & Wrekin Council for Voluntary Services (Voluntary Sector).

Organisation Mentors – DHL Supply Chain and Associated British Foods.

1.1.2 – The Case Study Organisations

This Case Study relates to the collaboration between Aston Business School, Chapel Consulting and Playgroup, one of the primary Organisation Project Partners in the development and use of **The TRANSFORMATION Project** toolsets.

Playgroup is an influential Digital Brand Engagement Agency based in Clerkenwell, London. Playgroup was established in 2002, expanding with the acquisition of NowWashYourHands in 2007. At the start of **The Transformation Project** Playgroup consisted of 16 employees with a turnover of approximately £2.75m. Its client base included such prestigious organisations as Mercedes-Benz, Unilever, British Telecom, Adnams, The BBC, Sony, and WWF.

1.2 – The Reasons for Collaboration

1.2.1 – From The TRANSFORMATION Project’s Perspective

The **TRANSFORMATION Project’s** purpose was to create a suite of Management Tools which were an innovative blend of current Project Management Methodology and cutting edge Academic Research, designed to integrate and supplement existing project and change management practices in any type of organisation. This was not only to ultimately benefit the Organisation Project Partners, but also the whole community of practice regardless of sector. This was achieved by creating a collaborative team consisting of cross-sectorial organisations who were experiencing difficulties in project and change management and academic researchers with a proven track record in those particular fields of expertise.

1.2.2 – From the Playgroup perspective

Playgroup decided to collaborate in order to get external input which would assist in how they operated both within their organisation and with their clients. The main interest was in the development of new tools that would assist them with the management of relationships with their external stakeholders.

2 – The Story

2.1 – The Context for the Collaboration – Industry Meltdown

Playgroup were experiencing severe external environmental conditions, a major factor of **The Receptivity for Change Toolset**. The UK economy was in meltdown, this was hard hitting for the Private Sector which was the majority of their client base. This was resulting in rapidly changing consumer behaviours and their industry was poised for massive change. However Playgroup recognised they were not responding fast enough.

2.1.1 – History behind the Collaboration

Playgroup’s project management methodology consisted of eight distinct phases, these being:

- Business Requirements
- Understanding the Audience
- Understanding the Brand
- Strategy Development
- Designing an Experience
- Production
- Activation
- Evaluation & Reporting

Each of these eight phases contained set process steps and specific outputs for example:

Business Requirements

- Client Services
- Initial Scoping
- Project & Resource Planning
- Commercial & Legal Agreements

An interesting observation of the Playgroup methodology was that Stakeholder Identification and Management did not feature until the 'Audience' and 'Brand' phases. This is contrary to the project management 4 phase life cycle where this activity is initiated at the beginning of Phase 1, 'Concept'.

Playgroup apply both 'agile' and 'waterfall' methods to the development of their projects, or a combination of both. Due to the creative nature of their business they prefer the agile approach as it allows the evolution of concepts as the resource is built. This is in opposition to the waterfall method which locks everything down into a predetermined plan (traditional project management).

The implications of 'agile' project management means the client would ideally become a more integral part of the development team than they might normally be. Another implication is there is less emphasis on documentation and more of a focus on iterative delivery of working product, the scope of work is not fully defined at the outset which can lead to contractual issues

Playgroup identified a need to develop their methodology by integrating some of **The TRANSFORMATION Toolsets**, specifically to address some of the stakeholder engagement issues that they were experiencing, apparently quite a common issue over the majority of recent projects.

2.1.2 - The Makeup of the Partnership

Playgroup were represented by Tim Moore, Managing Director, and Catherine Thompson, Project Coordinator. Along with Mike Reid, Senior Partner at Chapel Consulting and The TRANSFORMATION Project Knowledge Transfer Executive and Dr. Michael Butler, Aston Business School and The TRANSFORMATION Project Principle Investigator & Project Lead, this was the formation of the partnership.

2.1.3 – Why Collaborate?

Following the TRANSFORMATION Project launch on the 1st October 2009, the committed Organisation Project Partners later that month attended a two day workshop. The purpose of the intense two day event was to generate an understanding of the three evidence-based management frameworks that were to be used to transform project management practice, to identify the needs of the Organisation Project Partners and to jointly develop a project brief for the management tools.

The frameworks included Receptivity for Change (What are the mechanisms for delivering high performance?), Social Networks (Have you considered how stakeholders talk to each other?) and Actor Network Theory (Have you thought about your infrastructure so that it supports your team?). Once the Project Partners had participated in interactive presentations of the frameworks, they then went into a syndicate session, in which they related the frameworks to their organisations. Later in a plenary session, each project partner then shared their issues and ideas.



Playgroup discussing organisational issues and toolset potential.

Dr. Michael Butler, Principal Investigator said, *"It was amazing to see our project partners taking challenging ideas and using them immediately to evaluate their current project management activities."*

The workshop showed that the frameworks were really helpful in diagnosing current organisational issues and stimulating debate about how to practically solve them. Warwickshire Police firstly identified their perceived issues in relation to the three frameworks, shown on the following slides. This workshop provided Warwickshire Police with the understanding of their shortfalls and issues, cementing the need for help and collaboration.

Social Network Theory: Identifying the issues within Playgroup.

Social Networks - Playgroup

Method of capturing relationships needed for success

- ▶ Required at project inception
- ▶ Continually mapping relationships throughout project lifecycle
- ▶ Evaluated at the end of every stage, and corrective action taken
- ▶ Using it to manage stakeholders
 - ▶ or giving them the tools & insight to manage themselves?
- ▶ Replicating successful relationships/networks
- ▶ After "gap" analysis – techniques for corrective action

•Non human actors / situational factors

•Identify blockers & finding ways to change their attitude / work around them

- Risk management?

•Briefing to questionnaire to ensure most honest responses?

•Role of the facilitator 3rd party?

•New / different communication methods

- Don't allow "hiding behind email"

Receptivity for Change: Identifying the institutionalised inhibitors to organisational receptivity within Playgroup.

Receptivity - Playgroup

- ▶ Issue : Agreement on vision and values
- ▶ Different views on what is & what is not an opportunity

Environmental change

↓

= no ideological vision

↓

=so cannot lead change or implement

=so institutional politics cause chaos

=no possibility space

- Societal
- Technology
- People characteristics
- Attitude to learning/investment
- Risk taking
- Motivational drivers
 - Money vs good for world
- Environmental

- ▶ Blinkers
- ▶ Focus on efficiency – same thing better/faster cheaper
- ▶ Innovation – change too much?
- ▶ Don't give change a chance. Organisation can't keep up
- ▶ Play? Forcing a way of working
- ▶ Commitments e.g. Traffic – needs change, so need to adapt/evolve
- ▶ People – not managing change
- ▶ Too internally focused at times
- ▶ Playgroup brand – do people care about play?
- ▶ Transparency

Actor Network Theory: Reinforcing the need for more robust stakeholder analysis and engagement within Playgroup.

Actor Network Theory - Playgroup

- ▶ **EMPATHY** – remote vs face-to-face
 - ▶ Interestment
- ▶ User profiles of our clients? (actor)
 - ▶ Choice
 - ▶ How do we respond to this?
- ▶ User journey - Understanding how they will evolve through the project cycle
 - ▶ Critical points on this journey
 - ▶ Implications of these
 - ▶ "confidence injections"
 - ▶ Continuous change
- ▶ Additional emerging Stakeholders - Who are they?
 - ▶ Sit down & talk about who they are
 - ▶ Involve them earlier?
 - ▶ Tracking stakeholders
 - ▶ Matrix models
 - ▶ Enrollement (continual process)
 - ▶ Project management software – remove actors?
 - ▶ Clients
 - ▶ Team members
 - ▶ End users?
 - ▶ Organisational change

Human factors **Economic viability of processes** **Dynamic (non-linear)**

- ▶ Mobilization
 - ▶ Basecamp
 - ▶ Open & accountability

2.2 – Setting up the Collaboration

Once each Organisation Project Partner’s needs had been identified it was necessary for the Knowledge Transfer Executive to get under the Organisation’s ‘skin’, meeting people responsible for project delivery, understanding project processes & protocols and further understanding organisational & institutional binds. Not forgetting that the project identified as the ‘prototype’ toolset testing ground had also to be fully understood regarding scope, context etc...

Transformation Toolset Summary

Practitioner Partners Project Brief

<p>Group 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have high accessibility (friendly) language ✓ A tool for project managers ✓ Needs to be visual – easy to understand ✓ Integrate with existing project processes & reporting ✓ Help us to be better understand, monitor and intervene with our stakeholders ✓ Simple top-level, but enable a "deep-dive" ✓ Help to formulate ideal project teams • Have ROI built in – prove its own value ✓ Adaptive to individual previous experiences & learnings • Have an "early output" to develop confidence in the process to continue stakeholder's involvement & enthusiasm ✓ Allow early identification of emerging risks – enable proactive management • More than just diagnostic – offer solutions? 	<p>Group 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Broadly applicable ✓ Simple ✓ Flexible / tailorable • Social network line as is ✓ Possible advice as learn more <u>how</u> to use it ✓ Help with stakeholder analysis
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The final Project Partner Toolset Specification

“The workshop was enormously helpful as a lens with which to view some things that have happened within our organisation. It definitely helped with the underlying issues which perhaps we weren’t focused on at the time.”

Tim Moore, Managing Director – Playgroup

2.2.1 – Co-Ordination Mechanisms and External Support

It was necessary to conduct a set of structured Project Partner Site Visits, fully documented to later assist in effective toolset development. These structured site visits were also the mechanism for understanding the individual project scopes and constraints which were paramount to a successful development of **The TRANSFORMATION Project Toolsets**. These site visits were synchronised with a detailed Project Delivery Plan.

Organisation Project Partner Site Visits were just one of the mechanisms used throughout **The TRANSFORMATION Project**. In addition the following external support and co-ordination mechanisms were used:

Project Partner Workshops – A scheduled series of events which ensured effective toolset development, allowed cross-partner learning & development and maintained momentum and collaboration.

The TRANSFORMATION Project Seminars – These were designed to share transformational experiences from outside of the core group and to promote awareness of **The TRANSFORMATION Project** progress.

The TRANSFORMATION Project e-Zine – A regularly published electronic update to all interested parties.

The TRANSFORMATION Project Web Site – Regularly updated with the latest downloadable publications, podcasts and video footage from the workshops and seminars.

2.2.2 – Challenges and Problems

Exposure of the pure academic frameworks, in particular **Receptivity for Change**, acted as a catalyst to a major restructuring and downsizing of Playgroup. This was even before the development of **The TRANSFORMATION Project Toolsets** had been completed.

2.3 – How the Partnership worked

2.3.1 – The Structure of Collaboration

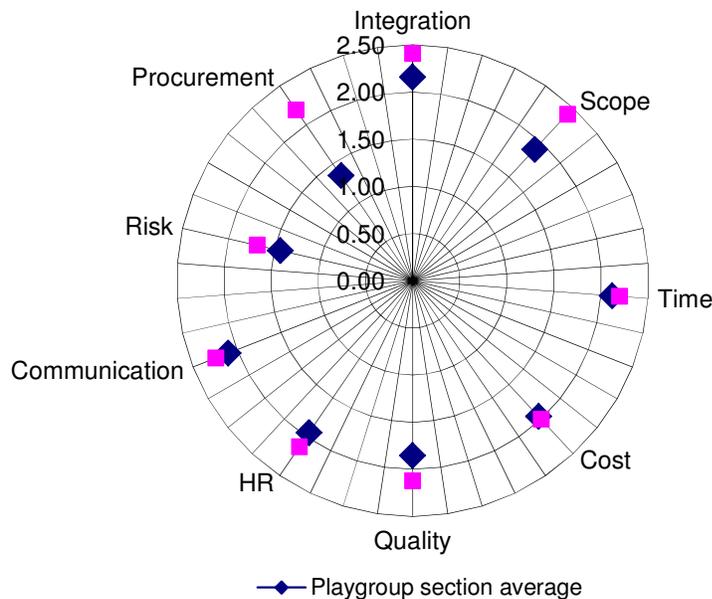
As previously described the collaboration consisted of Playgroup who was represented by Tim Moore, Managing Director and Catherine Thompson, Project Coordinator. **The TRANSFORMATION Project** was represented by Mike Reid, Senior Partner at Chapel Consulting and **The TRANSFORMATION Project** Knowledge Transfer Executive and Dr. Michael Butler, Aston Business School and **The TRANSFORMATION Project** Principle Investigator & Project Lead.

2.3.2 – Collaboration in Practice – The Good and Bad

Despite the almost immediate radical restructure of Playgroup, collaboration continued providing a valuable insight into Receptivity for Change happening in a real situation.

2.3.3 – Outcome and Impact

The initial Project Partner Site Visit instigated a self-analysis of Playgroup’s Project Management Maturity. The summary results are depicted below:

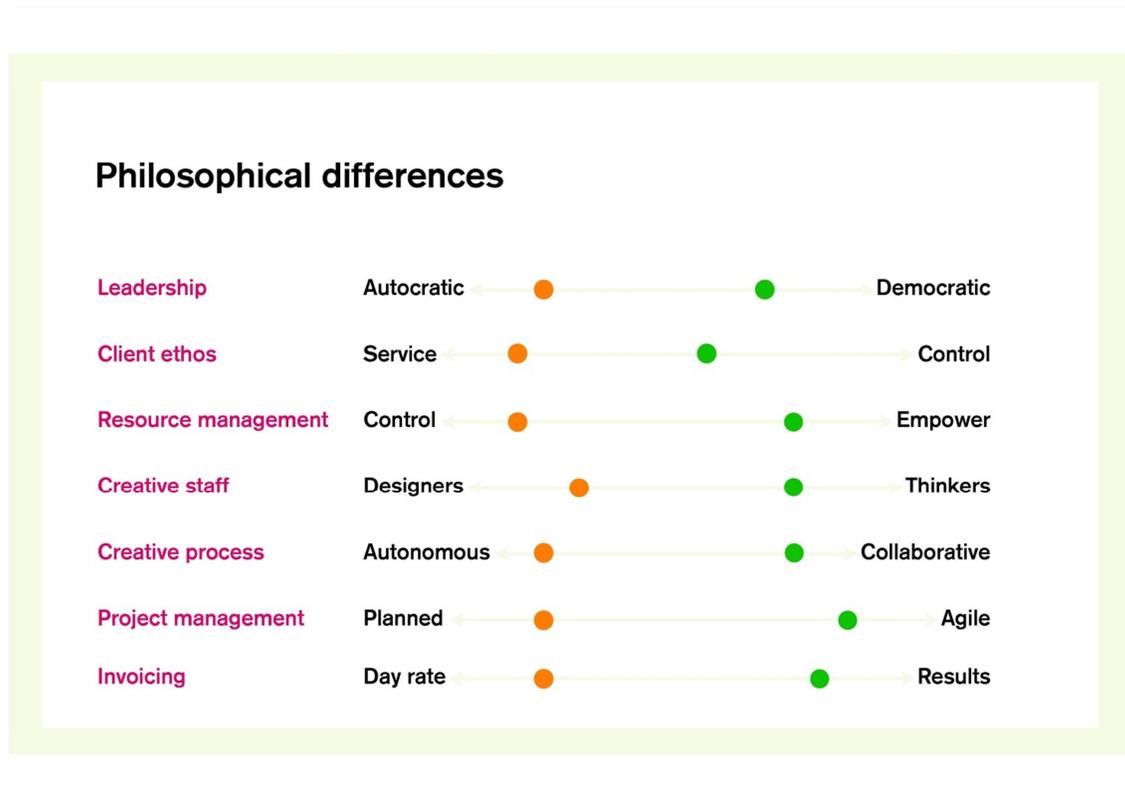


Overall, the impact of The TRANSFORMATION Project on Playgroup was immense. It sparked an in-depth analysis of the organisation based on the key factors of Receptivity for Change.

From the Institutional level perspective, Playgroup determined it had become a ‘non-receptive context for change’ organisation which resulted in the “If we stay here, we die” speech by Tim Moore.

With regard to Ideological Vision it was rapidly determined that a shared vision between the two co-founders did not exist. From an external viewpoint, this created what seemed to be a schizophrenic business with totally opposite stand points depending on who was being dealt with.

The diagram below illustrates the self-analysis on philosophical differences:



The conclusion was drawn that Playgroup no longer had the capacity to change. It was at this point Tim Moore departed Playgroup to form an organisation later known as Young Innovators. Tim did however maintain links with Playgroup on a consultancy basis which also allowed the continued collaboration with Playgroup.

Although not used in its pure form, the principles of **The Actor Analysis Toolset** were used during a cursory analysis of the recent Adnams contract. Actor mapping revealed the main point of contact as being a ‘hub’, an actor who is critical to the on-going success of the project and who is the focal point of all inter-organisational contact. This situation can be extremely detrimental to project progress. In the case of the Adnams contract this particular ‘hub’ left the organisation for a period of maternity leave and the project subsequently ground to a halt.

Another significant outcome of the collaboration was the opportunity for Mike Reid’s daughter to spend a period of ‘work experience’ within the re-structured Playgroup under the guidance and mentoring of both Catherine Thompson and Tim Moore. This proved to be a huge success for all concerned and would not have been possible without this Project Partner collaboration.

3 – Overall Lessons

3.1 – What do you think worked well / poorly?

The design of the supporting structure around **The TRANSFORMATION Project** was extremely effective, ensuring continued engagement of the Organisation Project Partners. This is a difficult thing to maintain as their involvement is predominantly on a 'good will' basis.

The engagement of a 'Knowledge Transfer Executive' was critical to the success of the collaboration; A person who understands the practitioner requirements and can translate academic frameworks into usable management tools.

Organisation Partners operate in a dynamic environment; it is not always possible to flex the rigid project plan to suit their rapidly changing needs as was clearly experienced with Playgroup.

3.2 – With the benefit of hind-sight what would you have done differently?

The collaboration has been a great success, achieving the original Project Partner Toolset Specifications with a huge demonstrable business impact. With a collaboration of this complexity across such a protracted timespan it is crucial that future collaborations take note of Section 3.3 – 'Advice on Future Collaboration'.

3.3 – Advice on Future Collaboration

- Understand your Partner Organisation, the challenges and opportunities they face on a daily basis and the environment they operate in.
- Ensure you meet the Organisation Partner expectations.
- Deliver the desired outcomes.
- Take extra-ordinary actions when necessary to suit the real life situations Partner Organisation face.
- Ensure regular informative engagement and communication of progress.
- Have a 'back-up' plan when things change outside of your control!

3.4 – Any other information?

For further information on **The TRANSFORMATION Project**, please contact:

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Or visit our web site www.thetransformationproject.co.uk