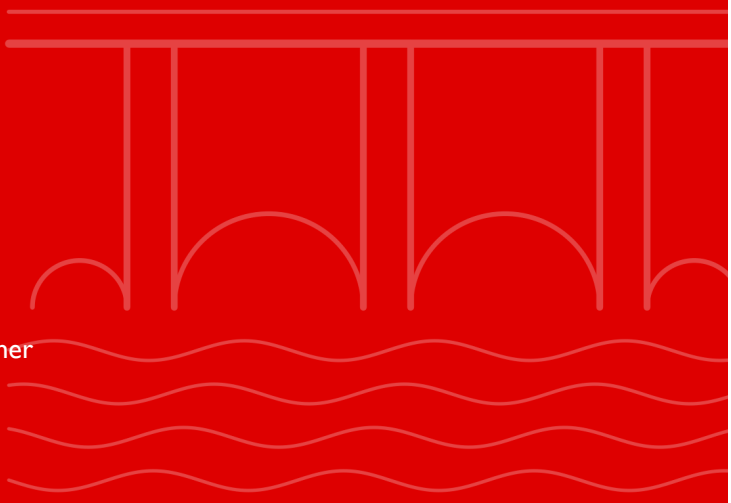
Avanti | Profiles

ABOUT THE INSTRUMENT

Avanti Top Team Partnership

Two banks, one span: the partnership at the top, built and kept in repair together.



Dr. Jonathan Huish and Dr Amanda Milliner
Avanti Change Ltd
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www.avantichange.com

INTRODUCTION

What this instrument is for

At the top of every public body there is a partnership. In a council it is the leader and cabinet working with the chief executive and corporate directors. In a health board, housing association or charity it is the chair and board working with the executive team. In government it is ministers working with senior civil servants. Each side has a different role and a different accountability, and neither can succeed without the other. When the partnership works, the organisation has direction, energy and confidence. When it strains, everyone below feels it.

Avanti Top Team Partnership is a structured development tool that helps both sides of that partnership look at how well it works, together. Everyone on both sides rates 48 short statements about eight partnership elements: One Agenda, Clear Roles, Mutual Trust, Candid Advice, Good Decisions, Under Pressure, One Face Outward and Learning Together. The results show the whole partnership's reading, each side's reading and the gap between them, so both banks can see the bridge as the other sees it and agree how to strengthen it.

The instrument draws on the doctoral research of Dr. Jonathan Huish (Cranfield University) on top team leadership in local government, on the work of Andrew Kakabadse on top teams and the political and professional interface, and on the Senior Team and Governance Partnership levels of the Avanti Development Framework. It is built around what matters most in public leadership: integrity, the public interest, outcomes for people and places, and communities as partners. It starts from what already holds, treats every reading and every gap as a contribution, and describes rather than judges. It is not a selection or performance tool, and it does not grade partnerships against one another.

A strengths-based partnership survey in which both the political or governance side and the executive side read how well their partnership works, so they can see the bridge between them clearly and strengthen it together.

Built around values and outcomes

Avanti Top Team Partnership is built on a simple belief: the strength of the partnership at the top shapes what the public receives. A partnership with one agenda, clear roles, mutual trust and candid advice is far better placed to serve communities well than one that pulls in two directions. Integrity sits within Clear Roles, Candid Advice and Good Decisions; the public interest within One Agenda and One Face Outward; and care for people within Under Pressure and Learning Together.

Community, lived experience and co-production run through the instrument rather than sitting in one corner. One Agenda asks whether success is judged by what changes for people and places. Good Decisions treats what communities and people with lived experience say as evidence. One Face Outward asks whether communities receive a clear and honest account of difficult choices. Throughout, the instrument respects both democratic or board accountability and the impartiality of public servants, because both are safeguards for the public.

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Values	Integrity, honesty and the public interest come first. Each instrument asks how people behave when values are tested, not only when they are easy to live.
Social outcomes	We look past activity and outputs to what actually changes for people and places, and ask leaders to hold themselves to that test.
Community	Communities are partners in public service, not audiences for it. Every instrument has a view beyond the organisation's own boundary.
Lived experience	People who use services, and those who have been failed by them, hold expertise that no professional can replace. We treat it as evidence.
Co-production	Designing and delivering with people, not for them. We use Arnstein's Ladder of Participation to be honest about where practice really sits.
People-centred change	Change is something people live through. How it is led shapes trust, wellbeing and whether the change lasts.

OUR APPROACH

How every Avanti instrument works

Top Team Partnership reads the bridge without judging either bank: every element starts from what already holds, a lower reading is a place to build together, and the gap between sides is treated as one of the most valuable contributions in the report. It keeps integrity, the public interest and the people and places the partnership serves at the centre.

Values-led	Integrity, the public interest and outcomes for people and places sit at the heart of every instrument. Community, lived experience and co-production are part of what we measure, not an afterthought.
Non-judgemental	We describe, we never diagnose. There are no good or bad profiles, only different starting points, and every result is offered as a perception to explore.
Difference as a positive	Different scores, views and styles are contributions. The richest conversations start where people see things differently.
Maximising potential	We look for what people and teams could become: the strengths to build on, the range not yet used and the contribution others are waiting for.
Individual to system	Each instrument connects the individual to the team, the organisation and the wider system of partners and communities.
Developmental	Every result is a starting point for growth and conversation, never a verdict. The instruments are not for selection, pay or performance management.

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From individual to team, organisation and system

Each person reads the bridge from their own bank, each side's combined reading shows how that bank experiences the partnership, and the whole partnership's reading shows the shared structure. The strength of the bridge at the top is felt throughout the organisation, by partners across the system and by communities in every decision that crosses it.

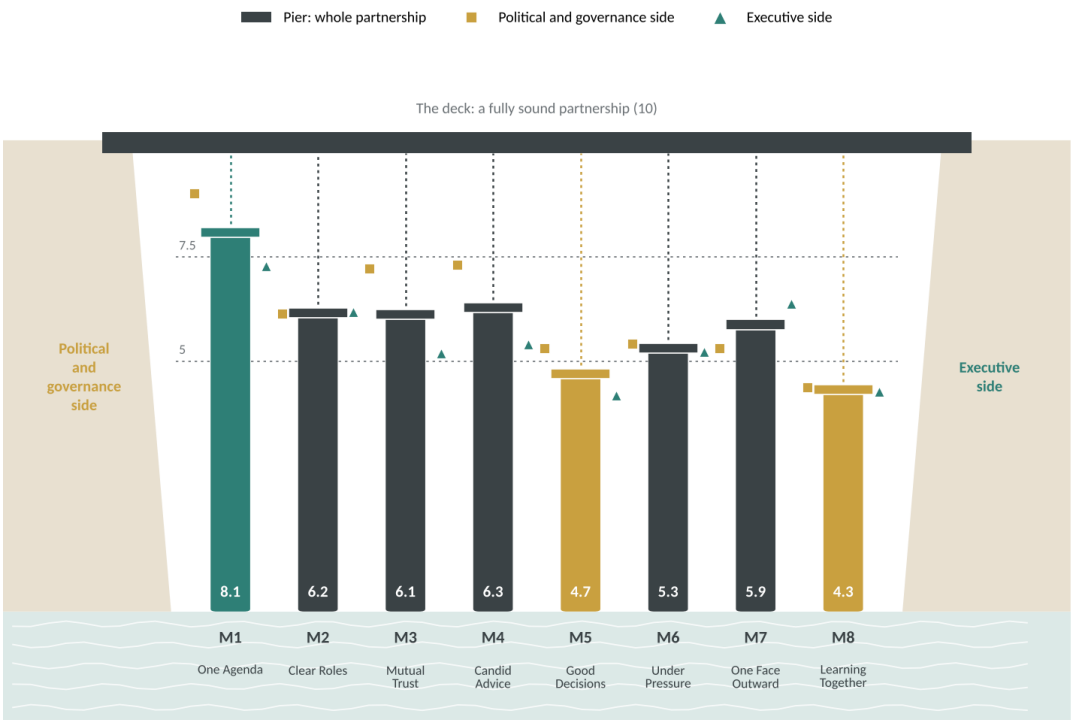
THE METAPHOR

The Bridge

Two banks, one span: each side stands on its own bank with its own role, and the partnership is the bridge they build and keep in good repair together.

Avanti Top Team Partnership imagines the relationship at the top of a public body as a bridge. The political or governance side stands on one bank and the executive side on the other. Each has its own role, its own accountability and its own view of the river. The partnership is the bridge between them, built together and strong enough to carry the organisation's weight. Eight partnership elements, from One Agenda and Clear Roles to Under Pressure and Learning Together, describe how well that bridge is built and maintained. Your report sets your own reading alongside the whole partnership's, and shows how each bank reads the bridge. A lower reading is not a warning about anyone; it is a place where both sides can build more strongly together, starting from what already holds.

Illustrative sample: the picture below is drawn from synthetic data.



M1 **8.1** **One Agenda** The span Signature strength	M2 **6.2** **Clear Roles** The abutments **Established**	M3 **6.1** **Mutual Trust** The foundations **Established**	M4 **6.3** **Candid Advice** The engineer's survey **Established**
M5 **4.7** **Good Decisions** The deck Growing edge	M6 **5.3** **Under Pressure** Holding in high wind **Established**	M7 **5.9** **One Face Outward** The view from the shore **Established**	M8 **4.3** **Learning Together** Upkeep and repair Growing edge

Wales is a country of rivers and of the bridges that cross them, from old stone arches in the valleys to the great spans over the Severn and the Menai. Every bridge depends on more than its deck. The span runs continuously from one bank to the other: that is One Agenda. Each end rests on its own abutment, built into its own bank: that is Clear Roles. Beneath the water, out of sight, the foundations carry everything: that is Mutual Trust. Engineers survey the structure honestly and report what it can bear: that is Candid Advice. The deck is where the traffic actually crosses, and its surface must be sound: that is Good Decisions. The bridge must hold in high wind as well as on calm days: that is Under Pressure. People on the shore judge whether it looks safe to cross: that is One Face Outward. And every bridge needs regular upkeep and repair to stay strong as traffic and weather change: that is Learning Together. No single part makes a bridge, and strain in one part puts extra load on all the others. The image also holds a truth about partnership at the top: the two banks are different, and they should be. A bridge does not move the banks closer together or make them the same. It joins them, so that people and purpose can cross.

FOUNDATIONS

Where the thinking comes from

Huish: top team leadership in local government	Dr. Jonathan Huish's doctoral research at Cranfield University studied top teams in local government: the conditions under which political and executive leaders become genuinely effective together, and the dynamics that quietly hold them back. Its attention to shared agendas, role clarity, trust and the realities of how decisions are made shapes the eight partnership elements throughout.
Kakabadse: top teams and the political and professional interface	Andrew Kakabadse's extensive research on top teams, boards and the relationship between elected or appointed leaders and senior officials shows how much the quality of dialogue at the top shapes organisational performance, and how often unspoken tensions go unaddressed. It informs Candid Advice, Mutual Trust and the instrument's emphasis on the conversations each side finds hardest to have.
Avanti Development Framework	The Senior Team and Governance Partnership levels of the Avanti Development Framework describe what effective leadership looks like at the top of public bodies and between their political or governance and executive sides. Each partnership element is linked to the framework, so results connect directly to wider development work.
Public service conventions and ethics	The instrument respects the long-standing principles that govern public leadership in the UK, including the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by Lord Nolan's Committee on Standards in Public Life, the impartiality of public servants, and the conventions that apply during election periods. These inform Clear Roles, Under Pressure and One Face Outward.
Edmondson: psychological safety	Amy Edmondson's research on psychological safety shows that groups make better decisions when people feel able to speak candidly. It informs Candid Advice and the idea that honest advice depends as much on how it is received as on how it is given.
Avanti practice: Rich Diversity and Positive Challenge	Rich Diversity is Avanti's term for the difference in thinking and experience that strong leadership needs; Positive Challenge is the practice of turning that difference into constructive conversation. They underpin the instrument's treatment of the two sides as different by design. The eight partnership elements and all questionnaire items are original Avanti work.

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Design principles

Both banks, one bridge	Everyone on both sides completes the same statements, written in the voice of the whole partnership, so each side's reading can be set alongside the other's.
Different by design	The political or governance side and the executive side have different roles, and should. The instrument values that difference rather than trying to erase it.
The gap is the gift	The gap between sides is reported openly and treated as the start of the richest conversation, never as evidence that one side is right.
Tested in high wind	Statements ask how the partnership works under pressure as well as in calm weather, because that is when the bridge matters most.
Start with what holds	Reports begin with the elements that are already strong and build from there, treating lower readings as growing edges rather than faults.

THE MODEL

The 8 partnership elements at a glance

	Partnership element	In a sentence
M1	One Agenda	We work to one shared agenda that both sides of the partnership own.
M2	Clear Roles	We each know our role, respect the other side's and stay in our own lane.
M3	Mutual Trust	We trust each other's intentions and abilities, and we keep our word.
M4	Candid Advice	Officers give honest advice, including unwelcome news, and it is welcomed and tested.
M5	Good Decisions	We make decisions properly, in good time, and once made they stick.
M6	Under Pressure	When pressure rises, we hold together and do not turn on each other.
M7	One Face Outward	We present a coherent leadership to the world while respecting legitimate difference.
M8	Learning Together	We take time to review how our partnership works, and we grow together.

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M1 ONE AGENDA

We work to one shared agenda that both sides of the partnership own.

A bridge has one span, not two half-bridges reaching towards each other, and a partnership with One Agenda carries both sides towards the same far bank.

One Agenda is the shared sense of direction that both sides of the partnership recognise as their own. The political or governance side brings a mandate, a set of commitments and a reading of what the public wants. The executive side brings knowledge of services, evidence, risk and what it takes to deliver. When the partnership has one agenda, these are woven into a single set of priorities rather than living as a manifesto in one drawer and a corporate plan in another.

In many public bodies the two documents grow apart without anyone intending it. Priorities are announced on one side and resourced on the other, and the gap between them is filled with frustration: members feel that nothing moves, officers feel that everything is a priority. A shared agenda closes that gap by being built together, early, in language both sides would use.

One Agenda does not mean the two sides agree on everything. It means they agree on what the organisation is trying to achieve this year and next, and they both feel they made that agenda rather than inherited it.

Why it matters

When both sides own the same agenda, effort and money go where they are meant to go, staff receive one clear message about what matters, and the public can see a line from what was promised to what is delivered. Without it, the organisation pulls in two directions and good people on both sides wear themselves out.

Through a values lens: A shared agenda is an act of integrity towards the public: it makes the link between democratic or governance mandate and delivery honest and visible. The strongest agendas are shaped with communities and tested against what people with lived experience say would make a difference to them.

When it tips too far: A very settled shared agenda can leave little room for new political direction or emerging evidence, and the partnership may hold to its plan a little longer than events suggest.

M2 CLEAR ROLES

We each know our role, respect the other side's and stay in our own lane.

Each end of a bridge rests on its own abutment, built into its own bank, and a partnership with Clear Roles lets each side bear its proper load without leaning on the other's footing.

Clear Roles is the shared understanding of what each side of the partnership is for. The political or governance side sets direction, makes the decisions reserved to it and answers to the public, a board or Parliament. The executive side gives impartial, professional advice, manages the organisation and delivers. Each role is legitimate and each needs the other. When roles are clear, people can do their own job with confidence and trust the other side to do theirs.

In practice the line between the roles is not always obvious. Members are rightly interested in how services feel on the ground, and officers rightly hold views about what would work. Under pressure, either side can drift into the other's space: a portfolio holder directing an operational team, or an executive quietly shaping a political judgement. Good partnerships notice these moments and talk about them.

Clear Roles is not about rigid walls. It is about knowing where the abutments sit, so that each side can reach confidently towards the middle of the bridge without losing its footing.

Why it matters

Clear roles protect both sides. They protect officers' impartiality, which the public relies on, and they protect members' accountability, which democracy and good governance rely on. They also make the organisation easier to run, because people know who decides, who advises and who delivers.

Through a values lens: Clear roles are an expression of integrity and the public interest. Impartial advice and democratic or board accountability are both safeguards for communities, and respecting them is a way of respecting the people the organisation serves.

When it tips too far: A strong focus on boundaries can make the partnership formal and distant, so each side guards its own bank and the middle of the bridge goes unvisited.

M3 MUTUAL TRUST

We trust each other's intentions and abilities, and we keep our word.

Out of sight beneath the water, the foundations carry every load the bridge will ever bear, and Mutual Trust is the foundation the partnership stands on.

Mutual Trust is the confidence each side has in the other: that they are acting in good faith, that they are competent in their role, that they will keep a confidence and that they will do what they say. Trust between the political or governance side and the executive side is not automatic. The two sides are accountable in different ways, they may have been through difficult times together, and each may carry stories about the other that predate anyone in the room.

Trust is built slowly, through many small moments: a confidence kept, a promise followed through, a misunderstanding checked before it was acted on. It can be lost quickly, through one leak, one public distancing or one surprise in a meeting. Partnerships that trust each other still disagree, often robustly, but they disagree as people who believe the other side wants the best for the organisation.

Like the foundations of a bridge, trust is mostly invisible when it is working. It shows itself in what the partnership can carry: hard conversations, bold decisions and difficult times.

Why it matters

Trust lets a partnership move faster, take on harder questions and recover from mistakes. Where trust is low, everything takes longer: advice is double-checked, motives are questioned, and energy that should go into public service goes into managing suspicion.

Through a values lens: Trust between the two sides is a public good. Communities are better served by leaders who can rely on one another, and integrity, in keeping confidences and keeping promises, is the material from which that trust is built.

When it tips too far: Deep trust can make the partnership slower to question one another, so advice and assurances are accepted more readily than the public interest might require.

M4 CANDID ADVICE

Officers give honest advice, including unwelcome news, and it is welcomed and tested.

A bridge stays safe because its engineers report honestly on what it can bear, and Candid Advice is that honest survey offered freely and received well.

Candid Advice is about the quality and honesty of what passes between the two sides. The executive side owes the political or governance side its best professional judgement: evidence-based, impartial, clear about options and risks, and honest about things that are not going well. The political or governance side, in turn, owes the executive side a fair hearing: questions that test the advice rather than punish it, and a willingness to hear what it did not hope to hear.

This is one of the hardest parts of any top team partnership. Advice that is unwelcome can feel like obstruction, and challenge to advice can feel like distrust. Over time, officers may learn to soften bad news or present only the answer they think will be accepted, and members may learn to stop asking. Both sides lose, and the public loses most of all.

Candid Advice is a shared practice, not only an officer duty. It thrives where both sides treat honest advice and honest testing as two halves of the same craft.

Why it matters

Decisions are only as good as the advice that informs them. When advice is candid and welcomed, risks are seen early, options are real and decisions hold up. When it is not, problems are discovered late and in public, and trust between the two sides erodes.

Through a values lens: Candid advice is a cornerstone of integrity in public life. It protects the public interest by making sure decisions are taken with eyes open, and it should include what communities and people with lived experience have said, even when that is uncomfortable to hear.

When it tips too far: A strong culture of candour can tip into relentless caution, so advice dwells on risk and the partnership finds it hard to take the bold step the public needs.

M5 GOOD DECISIONS

We make decisions properly, in good time, and once made they stick.

The deck is where the traffic actually crosses, and Good Decisions is the sound, well-laid surface that lets choices travel from proposal to action and bear weight once they arrive.

Good Decisions is about how decisions really get made in the partnership, as distinct from how the constitution or governance framework says they are made. It covers clarity about who decides, proper process and record, the use of evidence, timeliness and whether decisions hold once they are taken. Good decisions are not always popular, but they are well founded, properly made and clearly communicated.

In public bodies the formal route and the real route can drift apart. Decisions are sometimes effectively made in informal conversations and then processed through meetings, or taken formally and then quietly reopened. Delay can become a decision in itself, as options narrow while the partnership waits. Each of these is understandable, and each weakens the deck that everything else has to cross.

Good Decisions does not mean slow or bureaucratic decisions. It means decisions that the partnership, the public and any reviewer could look back on and recognise as fair, informed and owned.

Why it matters

Sound decisions protect the organisation, the people it serves and the people who make them. They stand up to scrutiny and challenge, they give staff a firm basis to act on, and they spare the partnership the cost of reopening the same choices again and again.

Through a values lens: Good decisions are where integrity and the public interest become concrete. Using evidence well includes treating what communities and people with lived experience have said as evidence, and making decisions in a way the public could see and understand.

When it tips too far: A strong attachment to proper process and settled decisions can make the partnership slow to respond, and reluctant to change course when circumstances genuinely call for it.

M6 UNDER PRESSURE

When pressure rises, we hold together and do not turn on each other.

A bridge is built for the storm as well as the calm day, and Under Pressure is how well the partnership holds together when the wind rises and the load is heaviest.

Under Pressure is about how the partnership behaves when things are hardest: a crisis, a critical inspection report, a story in the media, a challenging scrutiny session, a contested budget or an election period. These are the moments when partnerships are most tempted to fracture. Each side can feel exposed, and the easiest route can be to distance oneself from the other in public, to look for someone to blame or to step across roles in an effort to regain control.

Partnerships that hold under pressure do not pretend that everything is fine or that there were no mistakes. They face scrutiny honestly, they own shared decisions together and they deal with disagreements in private rather than in public. They also look after each other, recognising that both sides carry real weight and that people under sustained pressure need support.

Under Pressure is where the other partnership elements are tested in real conditions. Trust, clear roles and candid advice built in calm weather are what allow the bridge to hold in high wind.

Why it matters

How the partnership behaves under pressure is what staff, partners and the public remember. A partnership that holds together in a crisis gives people confidence and keeps the organisation focused on putting things right. One that fractures adds a second crisis to the first.

Through a values lens: Holding together under pressure serves the public interest, because communities need a leadership that focuses on them rather than on blame. It also requires integrity: owning shared decisions honestly, respecting the neutrality of officers and keeping election conventions.

When it tips too far: A strong instinct to hold together can make it hard to acknowledge mistakes publicly, so loyalty to the partnership is sometimes put ahead of openness with the public.

M7 ONE FACE OUTWARD

We present a coherent leadership to the world while respecting legitimate difference.

People on the shore judge a bridge by how it looks and whether it seems safe to cross, and One Face Outward is how the partnership appears to staff, partners and the public who depend on it.

One Face Outward is about how the partnership presents itself beyond the leadership table. Staff, partners and the public look to the top of the organisation for a clear sense of direction and a leadership they can rely on. When the political or governance side and the executive side speak about the organisation in consistent terms, and speak about each other with respect, people gain confidence. When they give mixed messages, or speak about each other dismissively, people lose it.

This is not about pretending there is no difference. In a democratic or governance setting there will be legitimate political debate, and officers must remain neutral. One Face Outward respects both: it allows for open political difference while making sure the organisation's agreed direction is presented consistently, and it never draws officers into political positions.

The view from the shore matters because most people never see inside the leadership. They see what the leadership says and does, and they draw their own conclusions about whether the bridge is safe to cross.

Why it matters

A coherent face outward builds confidence in staff, partners and communities. It helps people know where the organisation is heading, helps partners commit and helps communities trust what they are told. Mixed messages, by contrast, create confusion and invite people to play one side against the other.

Through a values lens: Presenting a coherent, honest face to the public is a matter of integrity and of respect for communities. They deserve a clear account of what has been decided and why, including the difficult choices, and a leadership that respects both democratic debate and the neutrality of public servants.

When it tips too far: A strong wish to present a united front can smooth over legitimate difference, so political debate feels discouraged or the public receives a picture that is tidier than the reality.

M8 LEARNING TOGETHER

We take time to review how our partnership works, and we grow together.

Every bridge needs regular inspection and repair to stay strong as traffic and weather change, and Learning Together is how the partnership looks after itself over time.

Learning Together is about how the partnership attends to itself. Top teams spend most of their time on the business in front of them and very little on how they work together. Yet the relationship between the political or governance side and the executive side is itself something that can be reviewed, developed and improved. Partnerships that learn together make time to reflect, invite honest feedback, develop alongside each other and adapt as people and circumstances change.

Change is constant at the top of public bodies. Elections, reshuffles, new board members, new chief officers and new policy priorities all reshape the partnership, sometimes overnight. Without deliberate attention, the habits and understandings that made the partnership work can be lost with the people who held them.

Learning Together is the upkeep that keeps the bridge sound. It is not a sign that something is wrong; it is what strong partnerships do to stay strong.

Why it matters

Partnerships that review and develop themselves become stronger over time, adapt to change more smoothly and recover more quickly from difficulty. Those that do not tend to repeat the same patterns, and their strength depends on the particular people involved rather than on shared practice.

Through a values lens: Learning together expresses humility and service: a recognition that leadership is a craft that can always grow. The richest learning often comes from outside the partnership, from staff, partners, communities and people with lived experience who see how the leadership works from where they stand.

When it tips too far: A strong appetite for reflection and development can absorb time the partnership needs for decisions and delivery, so learning about the bridge comes at the expense of using it.

TAKING PART

How it is completed

Everyone on both sides of the partnership completes the same 48-item questionnaire, rating how true each statement is of the partnership now on a scale of 1 to 10. Each person also indicates which side they sit on, so side readings can be calculated. Most people take around 15 minutes. It can be completed online or on paper, individually and in confidence, usually in the two weeks before a facilitated session.

The partnership usually includes all members of the political or governance leadership (for example a leader and cabinet, a chair and board, or a minister and ministerial team) and all members of the senior executive team. For the combined reading to be meaningful and to protect confidentiality, we recommend at least five respondents overall, and Avanti agrees in advance how side readings will be shown where one side is small.

How the results are reported

Top Team Partnership is completed by everyone on both sides of the partnership, and its report shows the bridge from three angles. First, the whole partnership's reading for each element, combining everyone's views. Second, a reading for each side: the political and governance side (for example a leader and cabinet, a chair and board members, or ministers) and the executive side (for example a chief executive and directors, senior civil servants or executive directors). Third, the gap between the two sides for each element, described on a simple scale: closely aligned (a gap of less than half a point), a modest gap (less than one point), a gap worth naming (less than one and a half points), a notable gap (less than two and a half points) and a striking gap (two and a half points or more). The gap between sides is often the most valuable conversation the instrument opens. It does not show that one side is right. It shows that the same bridge looks different from each bank, and that each side can see something the other cannot. Side readings are shown only where enough people have taken part on that side to protect confidentiality, and Avanti agrees with the partnership in advance how small sides will be reported.

The two sides	Who
Political and governance side	leader and cabinet, chair and board members, ministers
Executive side	chief executive and corporate directors, senior civil servants, executive directors

Who completes it: Every member of the political or governance leadership (cabinet, leader and portfolio holders; or chair and board; or minister and ministerial team) and every member of the senior officer or executive team.

SCORING

How it is scored

Each of the eight partnership elements has six statements. A person's reading for an element is the average of their ratings, and it counts if at least five of the six statements are answered. The whole partnership's reading for each element is the average of everyone's readings, and each side's reading is the average of readings from that side. Reports also show how widely readings are spread.

Readings fall into three score bands: Growing edge (below 5), Established (5 to below 7.5) and Signature strength (7.5 and above). The difference between the two sides' readings is described on a gap scale, from closely aligned to a striking gap. There is no 'good' or 'bad' partnership profile; a lower reading marks where the partnership has the most room to build, and a gap marks where the two banks see the bridge differently. Repeating the questionnaire after a year, or after a significant change of people, shows how the bridge has changed.

Band	Range	What it signals
Growing edge	1 to under 5	This element of the partnership is present at times, and it offers both sides a clear opportunity to build the bridge more strongly together.
Established	5 to under 7.5	This element is a recognisable part of how the partnership works, felt on both banks much of the time, with room to strengthen it further.
Signature strength	7.5 to 10	This element is a dependable part of the bridge that both sides can rely on, carry weight across and build from.



USING THE RESULTS

Using the results

Results are explored in facilitated work with both sides. Often each side first spends time with its own reading separately, noticing what it values and what surprises it, before the two come together to look at the whole partnership's reading and the gaps between them. The conversation starts with the elements that hold most strongly, then turns to the largest gaps between sides, then to the elements where the partnership would most like to build.

The work closes with a shared partnership commitment: two or three elements to strengthen, the practical changes both sides will make and when the partnership will look at the bridge again. Avanti can support this through joint development sessions, paired coaching for the leader and chief executive or chair and executive lead, or as part of a wider governance or leadership programme.

WHEN TO USE IT

When to use it

After an election or a change of leadership	When a new administration, leader, chair, minister or chief executive arrives, reading the partnership early helps both sides agree the bridge they want to build.
During governance redesign	When structures, constitutions or ways of working are being reviewed, the instrument shows how the partnership actually works in practice, not only on paper.
After a difficult period	Following a crisis, critical inspection or period of strain, it offers a constructive, non-blaming way for both sides to look at what held and what needs repair.
Alongside improvement or intervention work	Where an organisation is working to improve its governance, it gives both sides a shared picture and a practical focus for development.
Checking progress	Repeated after a year, or after a significant change of people, it shows how the bridge has changed and whether the partnership's commitments are taking hold.

ETHICS

Ethics and good practice

Participation is voluntary and based on informed consent. Individual responses are confidential: they are never shown to anyone on either side, and combined results are only reported when enough people have responded to protect anonymity, including at side level. Data is held securely, used only for the agreed purpose and handled in line with UK GDPR. Top Team Partnership is a development tool, not a selection or performance tool, and results must not be used for recruitment, appraisal, disciplinary or standards processes, or for political advantage by any group. Because the political and executive relationship can be sensitive, sessions are facilitated with particular care, and Avanti agrees in advance with the leader and chief executive, or their equivalents, how results will be shared and with whom before anyone completes the questionnaire.

Please note

This is a development instrument. It is not a clinical assessment and it is not designed or validated for selection, recruitment, promotion or performance management decisions. Scores describe perceptions at a point in time and are a starting point for conversation, not a verdict.

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THE SUITE

Part of the Avanti suite

Avanti Strategic Team Behaviours	The Weave looks at how a single leadership team behaves together. Top Team Partnership looks at the bridge between two teams at the top. Used together, they show how well the executive team works within itself and how well it works with the political or governance side.
Avanti Board Effectiveness Review	The Helm looks at how a board steers and governs. Where the board is one bank of the partnership, Top Team Partnership adds the view from the executive bank and the bridge between them.
Avanti Political Acumen 360	The Map shows how an individual leader reads and works with the political landscape. Top Team Partnership shows how the whole partnership works across that landscape, so personal development and partnership development can reinforce each other.
Ripples: the Avanti Development Framework instrument	Ripples looks at leadership across four levels, from the senior team to the whole system. Top Team Partnership focuses closely on the Senior Team and Governance Partnership levels, and the two connect directly.
Avanti Leadership Behaviours 360	The Compass shows how a leader's behaviours are experienced by others. Leaders on both sides shape the bridge, so the 360 offers a personal view of how one person contributes to the partnership Top Team Partnership reveals.

ABOUT US

About the authors

Dr. Jonathan Huish

Jonathan is a founding director of Avanti. His doctorate from Cranfield University studied top team leadership in local government: the conditions under which senior teams become genuinely effective and the things that quietly stop them. He is CIPFA qualified, has coached and mentored for more than twenty years, from first-line supervisors to chief executives, and brings a Tavistock grounding in group relations and reflective practice to how Avanti designs and facilitates its work.

Dr Amanda Milliner

Amanda is a founding director of Avanti. Her PhD from the University of South Wales studied community engagement in public services: what it takes for engagement to move beyond consultation into genuine co-production and partnership with communities. Her practice spans engagement strategy, leadership development and organisational design, with a particular focus on the relationship between organisational culture and the communities it serves.

About Avanti

Avanti Change Ltd works with leaders, boards and teams across public services: councils, health and care, housing and homelessness, mental health, harm reduction, emergency services and the voluntary and community sector. Our work is rooted in Welsh values of humility, service and dignity, and in the belief that how change is led matters as much as what changes.