

Final Paper

Partnership Brokers Association

Brokering of Transforming Partnerships

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Brokering of Transforming Partnerships

1. Introduction

This Final Paper is part of the process towards my accreditation as international partnership broker. The final paper is expected to be a step towards creating theory and generalisations based on practice. In my professional practice I work as a broker of transforming, multi-actor partnerships. There is not yet much evidence-based research or theory in relation to brokering this form of partnerships. In this Final Paper I'll take a first step in analysing what is needed from a broker when working with transforming partnerships. Furthermore, I will describe how I came to be a broker of transforming partnerships.

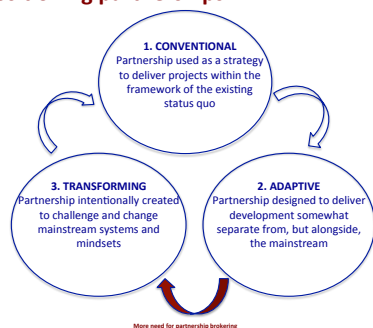
I will examine four questions:

- ✓ What is the essence of transforming partnerships?
- ✓ Which elements are important in a transforming partnership?
- ✓ What specific attitudes are required of the broker?
- ✓ How did I become a broker of transforming partnerships?

2. What is the essence of transforming partnerships?

The world is changing. We are dealing with complex issues for which no easy solution is available. Whether it is climate change, terrorism, scarcity of resources, deficits in the health systems, education for the poor, these all are wicked problems¹. Wicked problems, in the sense that they require system change, innovation and integral and out-of-the-box thinking. And in the sense that there is interdependency between the different elements of the problem. Multiple actors are involved and need to work together to find solutions. One solution for all doesn't work anymore, it is all contextual and requires partnerships, to make sure that all necessary partners are on board and work together.

Positioning partnerships



These wicked problems require multistakeholder partnerships, all about innovation and new systems, in which government, NGO's, knowledge institutes and business are involved. These partnerships require intensive brokering. The Partnership Brokers Association recently developed the definition of a Transforming Partnership: a partnership that is intentionally created to challenge and change mainstream systems

¹ Wicked Problems were first described by Rittel and Churchman (Wicked Problems. Management Science, 14(4), B-141 and B-142, 1967).

and mindsets. This is the kind of partnership that is needed to deal with innovation, wicked problems and societal change.

Both in the world of business, the social domain and development cooperation, the term transforming or transformational partnerships is used. For example, the United Nations² says: 'Transformational partnerships are a new form of collaboration between groups of companies and the UN, which catalyse wide-scale positive changes in behaviour creating impact at a systemic level across sectors and geographies.'

I have read articles on transition, transformation, partnerships, change management and in general on psychology of change. However, at this moment, no academic definition seems to have been formulated for transforming partnerships or transformational partnerships. The theory and practice around transforming partnerships has to be further developed. This paper is a small contribution to do so.

3. Which elements are important in a transforming partnership?

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

	EITHER / OR	BOTH / AND
VALUE SYSTEM	Competitive	Collaborative
TYPE OF OUTCOME EXPECTED	Win / Lose	Win / Win
ATTITUDE TOWARD "WINNING"	To the victor goes the spoils.	Your success is my success.
ATTITUDE TOWARD "LOSING"	Someone has to lose.	If someone loses everyone loses.
ATTITUDE TOWARD MINORITY OPINIONS	Get with the program.	Everyone has a piece of the truth.
WHY EXPLORE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMPETING POSITIONS?	To search for bargaining chips, in preparation for horse trading and compromise.	To build a shared framework of understanding, in preparation for mutual creative thinking.
ESSENTIAL MENTAL ACTIVITY	Analyze: break wholes into parts	Synthesize: integrate parts into wholes
HOW LONG IT TAKES	It's usually faster in the short run.	It's usually faster in the long run.
WHEN TO USE IT	When expedience is more important than durability, <i>Either/Or thinking</i> will usually produce satisfactory results.	When all parties have the power to block any decision, and the issue is for high stakes, <i>Both/And thinking</i> is usually the only hope for resolution.
UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY	Survival of the fittest	Interdependence of all things

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When we analyse the essential elements of a transforming partnership, we build on the work of many researchers before us. For example, one could describe a transforming partnership as a huge problem solving commitment between different actors with interests in the same domain. Already in 1996, the Both/And Mindset for solving problems indicated some important aspects that are also essential to transforming partnerships³: collaboration, win/win, everyone has a piece of the truth, shared framework of understanding necessary for mutual creative thinking and interdependence of things.

Horst Rittel, one of the first to formalize a theory of wicked problems⁴, defined ten

characteristics of wicked problems. Since transforming partnerships very often deal with wicked problems, these characteristics are also important for a transforming partnership. And also the main principles of partnerships, as defined by the Partnership Brokers Association, apply to transforming partnerships: Equity (respect), Transparency (trust) and Mutual Benefit.

² United Nations System Private Sector Focal Points Meeting in 2011, exploring what the UN and businesses needed to do differently in order to achieve "transformational partnerships" which will result in scaled and sustainable impact.

³ Facilitators Guide for Participatory Decision-Making, page 147, The Community at Work, 1996.

⁴ Wicked Problems: Problems Worth Solving, Jon Kolkko, in *Stanford Social Innovation review*, 2012.

Thus, combining a variety of theories and elements, I identified the following **10 essential elements** of transforming partnerships:

1. **Transforming Mindset:** partners have a mindset ready for changing the status quo and ready to embrace innovation.

2. **Positive societal impact**⁵: the partnership is based on a long term vision that has a positive, sustainable, powerful and lasting effect on people, planet and societal welfare as a whole.

3. **Responsibility:** the participating partners are willing to take responsibility and action within their own sector and organisation.

4. **Reflective learning:** partners have a reflective approach on their own behaviour and the partnership. Learning is incorporated within the partnership. Partners are willing to be open and vulnerable and grow and learn from each other.

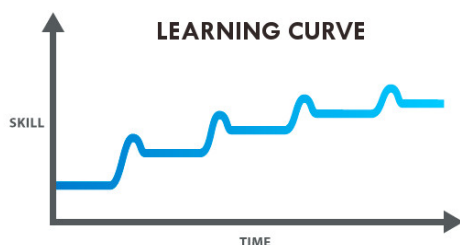
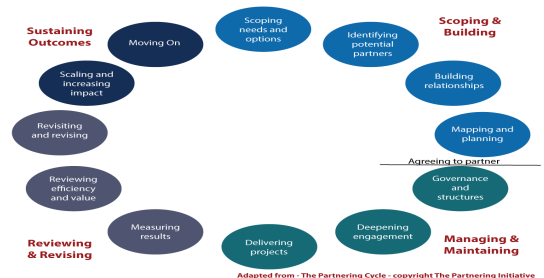
5. **Risk & Conflict:** the partnerships consist of a variety of partners that have different purposes and conflicting interests. This encompasses risks and may lead to conflict. No pain no gain.

6. **Diversity:** partners involved are not only those directly involved, but also those on who the partnership has (indirect) impact.

7. **Procesorientation:** the partnership focuses on process in equal amount as on results (the 'road' is important). Transparency and flexibility are more important than fixed results.

8. **Circular Chaotism:** instead of a schematic step-by-step approach moving into different phases of the partnering cycle, the partnerships moves in circles around the different phases.

The Partnering Cycle - a schematic framework



9. **Agility:** the partnership is able to quickly adapt to changing circumstances, through flexibility in structure and focus.

10. **Gradual learning curve:** the partnership works with a (non-intentional) learning curve of two steps forward - one step back.

⁵ Social impact is often defined as: 'the attribution of an organisation's activities to broader and longer-term outcomes'. In: Practical Guide to Measuring and Managing Impact, 2013.

4. What specific attitudes are required of the broker?

Seven principles of Partnership Brokering Good Practice:

1. Keep in touch with **new developments** in theory and practices of brokering partnerships
2. Apply the **most appropriate tools** at each stage of the partnering process and innovate where necessary
3. Take every opportunity to **build partnering capacity** in others
4. Refrain from promoting a partnering process when **aware of a realistic alternative** that would deliver better outcomes
5. Avoid taking actions as part of a brokering process that might involve **risk** without **prior endorsement** of these actions from all the parties likely to be impacted
6. Demonstrate a **responsible attitude** by raising concerns of an ethical or legal nature with partners when necessary
7. Know one's own **competence limitations** and the circumstances in which it is appropriate to request assistance from, or hand over brokering responsibility to, others.

Being a partnership broker is a profession. And every profession comes with a set of required competences. Since the level 1 course, the seven principles of good partnership brokering form a fundament of my partnership brokering.

However, working as a partnership broker for transforming partnerships requires not only a set of principles, but also requires a certain set of skills and attitudes. Some of these can - easily or less easily- be acquired through training and experience. But some may be more fundamental, a person may possess those qualities or not. It may be that a certain type of personality is more fit to broker a transforming partnership than another.

In this paragraph I describe the various attitudes of the broker who wants to broker a transforming partnership.

Be Innovative

- Feel comfortable to work outside your comfort zone
- Use innovative tools and methods and develop new processes and tools
- Be creative, find new and unorthodox ways to broker the process

Be Confident

- Hold space and be strong when needed
- Be transparent and concrete in your strategies and goals
- Hold people accountable

Be Strategic

- Know the vested interests and deal with it
- Contain risks
- Focus

Be Flexible

- Change roles when needed
- Accept that change is the only constant factor
- Re-evaluate the status quo all the time
- Adapt smoothly to new circumstances

Be Reflective

- Sit still and reflect on what is needed, on a regular basis
- Don't act on impulse, but use intuition
- Have distance towards the partnership brokering process
- Reflect on the bigger picture: how does this fit within a national or international movement
- Learn

Be Empowering

- Use energy and enthusiasm to move the process forward
- Help others to learn
- Engage the partners
- Honour the work of participants
- Be inclusive

Be Personal

- Adjust your language and 'intellectuality' to the level of the participants
- Talk about individual gains, needs and conflicts within the partnership
- Build an 'experience' – use storytelling
- Be open and vulnerable
- Be a psychologist: understand drivers and personalities
- Use empathy

4. How did I become a broker of transforming partnerships?

Which character traits and personal values, which steps in my professional career, have led me to becoming a broker of transforming partnerships? In this paragraph I will reflect on my background and the drivers that have influenced my brokering approach and how my recent learnings have contributed to my professional growth.

Character

I am ambitious. Since I am a quick thinker and decision maker, and a perfectionist, it is easy for me to take on the leading role. So I have to act with care and give space to other people and thoughts. On the other hand, I am an extravert and enthusiastic personality, and I get people motivated to take new steps. I have worked very hard to get a position that has some status and influence. These are still important aspects to me. I realize that I

get a lot of self appreciation through the results I achieve in my work. This has also been an element to reflect on during the 3 months coaching trajectory of Level 2.

I have done a lot of reflective processes in the past and have –in general- no problem talking about feelings and mistakes and vulnerabilities. I build very personal relationships with most people around me. In several episodes in my life I took risks, took unfamiliar paths and started afresh. Not being afraid to step out of a relationship, or leave a job without having another, to suddenly be faced with a pregnancy and warmly embrace it or to travel alone. This freedom of choice and the option to start new adventures is important to me.

Career

After law school I joined an American consultancy firm. This was not a compassionate environment. As a lawyer I also took the road of non-conformity. I started to set up a new law division, together with a colleague. The rest of the office was not happy with this. After two years, having completed my bar exam, I quit the job. It had made me very unhappy, although I had a very good relationship with several colleagues.

I had to develop a new career and I choose to work in the field of the items of the future: sustainability and international cooperation. This was a transformational moment. My network did not expect that I could completely start a new career as independent consultant in this field. But I did. I contacted one of the leading experts in the field of sustainability in the Netherlands and he let me work with him for a while. And I did a 1,5-year intensive postmaster course at the Erasmus University in Sustainability Management. I used my drive, enthusiasm and tenacity to get my first jobs as a consultant.

Since then, I have grown a good consultancy practice, being able to support myself and my son. I enjoy the freedom and autonomy. I developed a concept called the Future Proof Organisation, to share insight in elements that are important for organisations to sustain in the 21-th century. And I focus on innovation and sustainability, in transforming partnerships, as my way to contribute to new ways of cooperation and a sustainable and futureproof society.

Transforming partnerships

My first big partnership job in 2005 was as consultant for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assisting in the development of the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative, a multistakeholder partnership between government, business, NGO's and knowledge institutes in different sectors, to stimulate sustainable growth in development countries. I enjoyed the tension

*"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."*

- Robert Frost "The Road Not Taken"

between the different partners, the struggle to deal with the different interests, the need for flexibility. All these partners, each of them with their own jargon, not used to working together, different cultures⁶. I thrived under the challenge to use the max of my abilities to broker this partnership. As a broker, I needed to change my language and be flexible. I learned that I was a good mediator and broker between different partners.

Since then I have intuitively learned and grown as a partnership broker. In some cases, I was able to form and develop the partnership myself. In other cases, I entered the partnership when it already was formed, and I had to make sure partners aligned and moved forward. While in the first years I was still learning to behave as a broker, and to be comfortable within all the different partners, I became more experienced and after a while the role of broker became more natural.

Lessons of the Partnership Broker Training and Coaching

The final two years I have been abler to 'play' with brokering tools and different approaches. The training and coaching trajectory of the Partnership Brokers Association has enormously stimulated that more reflective approach. Although I probably was quite a good partnership broker working from intuition, I now have learned to make use of the tools and principles available that give a foundation to the intuitive way of working. Moreover, I am able to step back, reflect on the process and consciously make a decision about a role or method. I have grown the skills to operate as a broker, to reflect and make a decision. I am able to look at a situation and to asses: what is needed now? I am using the 7 principles of good practice of a partnership broker, and the three principles of building a partnership. And I know what the effect of it is.

I am more open about my personality and what the positive and negative effect of it is in a partnership. I will support other people, but I am also more open to support from other people. And I can make clear which kinds of partnerships fit me best.

One event during the Training Level 1 really had an impact on me. Doing the Belbin test, I had a very high score on the Shaper (25). It was implied that this would probably mean that I would likely be steering my partnerships to strongly. It felt as a judgment and made me question my capacity as a broker. However, during the coaching trajectory of level 2 I realised that as a broker I use a variety of skills and I am able to differentiate between the different roles needed in the process.

I am an authentic broker with a strong personality and a variety of skills. I frequently introduce new concepts and learn from other disciplines. I feel comfortable in the role of innovator and shaper. And my particular personality and skills set makes me a very competent broker for transforming partnerships, in which pioneering and shaping is functional.

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⁶ See also 'Exploring partnership culture – the partnership broker's role', by Surinder Hundal, Partnership Broker Association, 18 May 2015.