



WEAVING THREADS

An exploration of key principles and themes that underpin all PBA training¹

Our working assumption is that effective partnering is invariably transformational because it entails moving away from doing business as usual. Achieving genuine transformation requires a willingness to critique, reflect and envision new possibilities. The training that the Partnership Brokers Association (PBA) provides – whether to individuals or entities operating in the partnership brokering role – aims to embed a number of core values and principles alongside imparting key partnership brokering concepts, tools, skills and methods.

As a professional association, PBA recognizes that people are informed and influenced by their own experience, background and knowledge and will reflect and change at their own pace when the circumstances are right. Our approach, therefore, is not to push those we train into forcing change, which tends to lead to little more than compliance and / or be short-lived, but to enable them to support those they work with to prepare for change as and when the time is right. We encourage those we train to better understand their own professional strengths and weaknesses and also to decide for themselves what, how and when they are ready to change in the way they undertake their partnership brokering work.

Some underlying themes are emerging in the design and delivery of our courses that reflect the approach, skill sets, fundamental principles and values that PBA seeks to nurture in all partnership brokers.

This short paper² seeks to capture the ‘threads’ that we have agreed to abide by and to attempt to weave throughout our training work for PBA³.

¹ This paper originated at the first PBA Training Community of Practice (CoP) in September 2013. It was written by one person and reviewed / revised collaboratively. The intention behind it was that it should provide a foundation for all PBA’s training courses. It will be subject to annual review and revision so that our work remains fresh and up-to-date

² A kind of ‘PBA Authorised Trainers Manifesto’

³ The illustration is a weaving by Eta Ingham-Lawrie whose work was hanging in the room where we held our first Training CoP meeting and that inspired the title of this paper (www.trigonos.org)



POSITIONING OURSELVES AS TRAINERS

Learning as a collaboration between trainers and participants

Adhering as best we can to the core partnering principles⁴, our approach as trainers is to share knowledge and expertise among the group by enabling genuine dialogue ('conversations') about, reflection on and challenges to that knowledge and expertise. As trainers, we are open about our own frames of reference and transparent about the conceptual frameworks that we use in the training – being genuinely willing to change our views and concepts and warmly welcoming critical comment. Differences of viewpoint are seen as central to the process and not a diversion.

Our training materials and concepts⁵ are all, rightly, introduced by us as trainers with energy and confidence, but not because 'we know best' but rather as a jumping off point for creating new knowledge.

Balancing process and content

All PBA training courses are designed and delivered with as strong an emphasis on process as on content. This is an exact mirror of a key theme in our Partnership Brokers Training (the notion that partnership brokers need to spend as much time on the partnering process as on achieving project goals if they are to build robust and effective collaboration). As trainers we aspire to being equally comfortable with both elements as well as choosing to co-train with someone who complements our preference for one or the other.

Being 'reflective' trainers

As trainers we need to practice what we preach by a deep commitment to reflection, self-observation and critique. We continuously ask ourselves when we are in the training role 'what is needed now?'⁶. We know that PBA training, when undertaken successfully, can be exhausting as it requires a continuous striving to meet the needs of the trainees and to be open to challenge and the need to re-consider / change direction.

We also believe that it is important to give and receive feedback during the training (between ourselves as co-trainers and with the group) as well as taking the time to reflect and de-brief after each training course is completed. We should habitually ask ourselves as trainers a number of questions, for example: Is my training still 'alive'? Which sessions could have achieved more? What did I not take account of? What can I learn from my co-trainer? What should I prepare for better / improve / change next time?

Commitment to co-training and continuous learning

In line with our belief in collaboration, our commitment to 'co-training' is critical – both because it allows for a diverse / complementary approach but also because it actually models co-facilitation in practice. As trainers, we commit to building our capacity as co-trainers and as a Community of

⁴ Equity, transparency and mutual benefit – as articulated in *The Partnering Toolbook*

⁵ These are subject to challenge and change year on year by the PBA Training Community of Practice

⁶ Again, this is parallel to our suggestion during training that this is a key question for partnership brokers to ask themselves

Practice by exchanging learning and experience with our fellow trainers, building our capacity to co-train and seeking opportunities for peer review / feedback.



CREATING A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Physical setting

We consider carefully, wherever possible, the choice of training venue. Is it peaceful? Removed from the hustle and bustle of the trainee's day-to-day lives? Is there good natural light? Is it in or near a natural environment that will encourage reflection? Is there sufficient room for participants to move about, work in smaller groups and mingle informally during breaks? If the venue falls short of these things (this may be outside our control as trainers) what can we do to compensate for things that are missing and to make it work optimally?

Creating an environment where those we train can challenge themselves

PBA trainers seek to create a 'safe space' in which participants can learn effectively – which, we believe, involves then in taking some level of risk. Encouraging participants to be brave enough to step out of their comfort zone, establishing ground rules and being willing to take risks oneself as a trainer are all important. This may involve exploring with trainees why they feel they need a comfort zone – some may need it for contextual reasons, some for genuine personal protection reasons (ie they are especially vulnerable at this point in their lives).

Valuing diversity

As PBA trainers we are committed to recognizing and respecting individual difference and to building on the diverse, and sometimes divergent, values of those we are training. Such diversity can be in terms of gender, culture, sector, experiences, worldviews and knowledge and should be explored throughout the training. This can sometimes be challenging for trainers (as it can be for partnership brokers with a very diverse group of partners), but at its best it can provide the foundation for transformational learning opportunities and innovation. This is fundamental to effective / innovative partnering and partnership brokering, so critically important the our training offers opportunities for this experience.



BUILDING & MODELING CORE PARTNERSHIP BROKERING SKILLS

Reflective Practice

By 'reflective practice', we mean taking the time to take a step back, think, analyse, question, critique and inform future work through a deeper understanding of experience. All our courses are designed to encourage both structured and unstructured reflective practice. Trainers should familiarise themselves with *The Imagined Conversation* (Ros Tennyson) and the *Reflective Practice Guidelines* in the PBT workbook. Sharing our own reflections with the participants (perhaps at the

start of each day on a training course) demonstrates our commitment to this approach and illustrates how our training approach is also influenced by those we train.

Observation

We provide several opportunities in the training for participants to practice and further develop their observational skills. We encourage people to use all of their senses to understand situations: what they see, what they hear, what they sense (as well as what they *don't* see and *don't* hear) as these are critical to understanding the nuances of a situation. 'Taking the temperature of a room' and developing empathy (the ability to experience things from another's perspective) are built on good observational skills, which should be evidence-based and backed up by specifics, and not based on potentially incorrect assumptions and interpretations.

Active listening

Linked to observational skills is the ability to really – actively – listen, and to genuinely *hear* what another is saying; to hear both the spoken and the unspoken and to accurately understand (and if in doubt, to check out) what is being said. This may involve rephrasing or reflecting back what has been said to clarify the speaker's meaning and intent. It also involves concentrating on the speaker and their points, and not becoming distracted by thinking about our own responses and reactions to what they are saying.

Giving and receiving effective feedback

There is a session in our training courses on giving & receiving feedback, and there are also ample opportunities for participants to put this into practice during the sessions. It is critical to model giving/accepting feedback effectively (where feedback is focused on a specific situation and / or behavior in order for it to be useful), both giving and receiving it well and thoughtfully, rather than defensively is critical. Trainers need to help participants understand that effective feedback given with good intent is a genuine gift. If aware of anyone not receiving, giving or reacting to feedback well we seek to work further with them – more informally, perhaps.

Challenging and changing

While PBA trainers need to be willing to accept challenges from trainees, they also have a responsibility to challenge the assumptions, mindsets and patterns/ frameworks / habits of participants and to help them to look beneath the surface. The purpose of this is to help trainees to open themselves to new knowledge and new ways of thinking / behaving. As trainers, we are prepared to challenge participants' assumptions and frameworks, and to delve beyond the surface of what participants present. This may mean that some sessions are 'uncomfortable' but our assumption is that if all sessions are 'safe' the training is probably having very little impact!

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