External Brokers and Coaching Tools:

understanding and equalising power in partnership relationships

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1. Introduction

Case studies, training courses and articles exist outlining the essential ingredients, structures and systems for brokering successful partnerships; PBAS has also placed considerable importance on the skills of the broker and their ability to navigate complex partnering waters. The World Bank's Partners for Development Programme *The Partnering Toolbox*[1] includes a training module on Consultation and Communication that provides information on how to structure communication; and the International Business Leaders Forum's *The Partnering Toolbook*[2] has an array of useful tools from assessing partner coherence through to guidelines for partnering conversations. Yet, despite the availability of much information on communication, I found that many of my most challenging experiences in a partnership's development related to *people and how they relate to one another* and the solutions I needed impacted on *power*.

Over the years, as I practised the art of brokering partnerships, I had noticed certain patterns of behaviour repeating themselves. Behaviour similar to the initial stages of the partnership in *The New Broker*,[3] when Maria, the local NGO representative says 'The communities in the district expect to get five permanent health centres.' There seemed to be an imbalance between personal responsibility by partners to deliver to their side of the 'deal' and the expectations of those partners to be 'provided to'. Looking more closely, in each situation it was either a local NGO or residents' organisation that was providing the partnership with some of its greatest challenges.

After exploring what I thought might be root causes to this behaviour, I consulted with colleagues with expertise in facilitation, action research and coaching, to find tools and techniques we could use to help move the partners into more effective modes of communication. We knew they would not hold all the answers we were looking for, since they were designed predominantly for different contexts, however they have helped to shed some light on the partnering challenges we were facing.

Drawing on these experiences, in this paper I will:

1. Explore some of the issues an external broker needs to be aware of in relation to power, and how this might make partners unhealthily dependent on them
2. Suggest a few techniques to help a broker notice that others in a partnership are becoming unhealthily dependent on the broker
3. Outline some practical steps to help an external broker to re-define their relationships with partners in a healthier way.

2. Power and the External Partnership Broker

Why is it that brokers can find themselves on the receiving end of challenging behaviour; and what do they do that might even be inviting such behaviour?

The Broker's Power

Leading psychologist James Hillman lists many forms of power relating to both the role of a person (such as their position, access to information, perceived 'expertise', control of resources) as well as the personal characteristics of a person (charisma, persuasion, authority).[4] *The Guiding Hand*[5] confirms that brokers have power arising from such sources, for example pioneers can have 'too much opportunity for unilateral decision making'; and animators may have authority vested in them by the initiating organisation. Also, where an initiating organisation is also a funding agency, a broker gains an additional source of power: he/she may be viewed as a conduit for the funder. The broker therefore needs to be aware of the many sources of power that are vested in them in order to be able to use this power wisely.

Partners' (Lack of) Power

Meanwhile, groups that are to be on the receiving end of the social development outcomes of partnerships are often systemically and historically lacking in power. So it is not surprising that often their behaviour is not one of an equal partner at the negotiating table of a partnership; or that they might use behaviour that partnerships find challenging.

For example in my work over the last 6 years, I have repeatedly experienced two manifestations of groups behaving in a way that is particularly challenging to a broker. Firstly where the partner needed constant motivating and support from the broker, thus making it difficult for the broker to move towards an exit strategy in line with PBAS principle 8.[6] I have called this a *dependency culture* for the purposes of this paper. Secondly when the partner constantly, and incorrectly, accused the broker or other partners of letting them down, often stopping the partnership from ever getting started at all. I have called this a *blame culture* for the purposes of this paper.

A broker can draw upon a wide range of theoretical frameworks to understand, interpret and develop strategies to deal with such challenging behaviour. For example Paolo Freire's 'Four Levels of Consciousness' (magic awareness, naïve awareness, critical awareness and fanatic awareness) suggest the different stages of awareness groups might have to their own situations; and predicts the likely behaviour of the group and what might be appropriate ways for working with such groups.[7] Meanwhile Robert Chambers' work on power states that the development professional's reality often overrides the people they are developing, and asks the question 'whose reality counts?' as the first step in guiding the development professional's responses to a situation.[8]

The choice of which framework to use is often up to the broker and dependent on their culture, context and to some extent personal preference; although other partners may set this framework. At the New Economics Foundation (NEF), with our context of disadvantaged communities in the UK, one approach we have found useful is to use tools drawn from psychology and therapy to assist us in interpreting and responding to the challenging behaviour of some of our partners. This then allows us to move into an enabling and coaching mode in our relationships with them.

In this paper I have limited the focus to two ideas drawn from the area of Transactional Analysis to illustrate the useful insight therapy and psychology could provide to a broker in their day-to-day brokering practice.

3. Transactional Analysis

Identifying Ineffective Relationships

Transactional Analysis (TA) is a social psychology tool and a method to improve communication, developed by Dr Eric Berne in the 1950s. Within TA is 'The OK Corral', created by Franklyn Ernst (1971) to show different life positions people can take.[9] Although initially created to understand the behaviour of individuals, I have found the OK Corral useful in shedding some light on positions held by partners in a partnership.

Diagram 1. The OK Corral

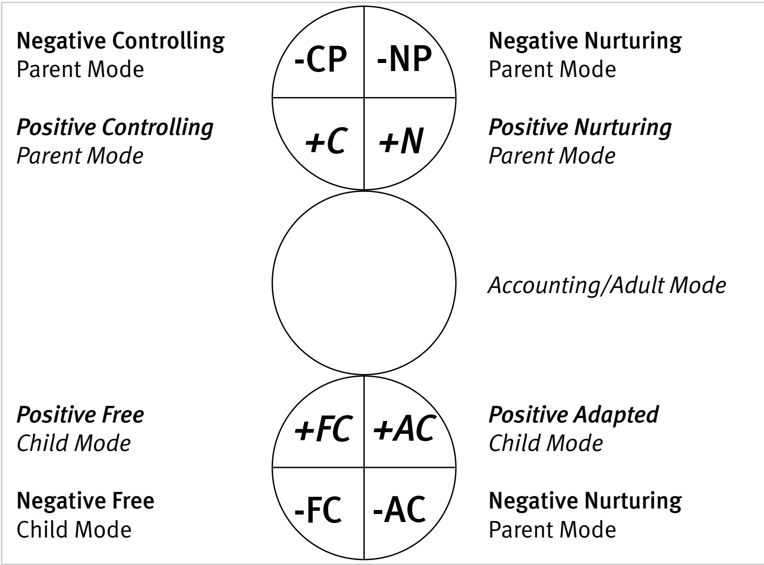
I am not OK You are OK One down position Get away from **HELPLESS**	I am OK You are OK *Healthy Position* Get on with **HAPPY**
I am not OK You are not OK Get nowhere with position Get nowhere with **HOPELESS**	I am OK You are not OK *One-Up position* Get rid of **ANGRY**

Ineffective modes, as defined in TA, are those that communicate either an 'I'm not OK' or 'You're not OK' message (higlighted by the grey boxes in *Diagram 1*). A partner exhibiting a '*dependency culture*' (needing the ongoing motivation, or support, of a broker), would in the above analysis, fall into the HELPLESS quadrant. Meanwhile, a partner exhibiting a '*blame culture'* (blaming — without due reason — a partnership broker for things that go wrong) would, according to TA, be likely to fall either into the HOPELESS or the ANGRY quadrants.

TA shows us that in partnerships we want to move towards the HAPPY position, however often our partnerships are dependent on heavy initial support or are started between a group of partners where trust is low and so 'you are not OK' is a strong feeling across the partnership. TA therefore highlights that the strong focus of PBAS on building trust between partners is vital as a building block.

TA also demonstrates that brokers need to be finely tuned to the 'OK' and 'Not OK' messages being given out by partners in order to adapt their behaviour accordingly.

Diagram 2. Berne's concept of Parent, Adult and Child ego



Berne devised the concept of Parent, Adult and Child ego states to help explain how people are made up and relate to one another, *Diagram 2* above. The italic text identifies the effective communication modes; and the normal text shows ineffective communication modes. There is not the space to give detailed description of each of these ego states here, but *Case Study 1* illustrates how this TA framework could provide useful insight to a partnership broker. In this context we will use it to shed light on how a broker might accidentally have fostered dependency in a partner.

Case Study 1

In one of our pilot areas, the broker on several occasions did things for partners that the partners were capable of doing for themselves. The partner, over time, started to expect more and more from the broker, and took on less and less work themselves. A TA interpretation of the broker's behaviour would be that they were displaying the Negative Nurturing Parent mode and were inadvertently passing a message to the partner of 'you need my help, you are not OK'.

TA theory also states that the most likely response to elicit from a message is the opposite corresponding message. Since the broker had been displaying a Negative Nurturing Parent mode, they had elicited a corresponding and opposite 'Negative Adapted Child' response from the partner. Throughout the experience the broker felt the partner's negative response was uncalled for since she was 'only being helpful' to the partner. However, when viewed through the lens of TA a new light can be shed on seemingly innocent and 'helpful' actions and it becomes clear that the partner's behaviour is not necessarily unreasonable; it might instead be a natural response to a broker's inappropriate behaviour.

Additionally, given the inherent power in the broker's role, and lack of power in some partner's cultural contexts, it is not surprising that brokers sometimes slip into 'Parent' mode, whilst partners slip into 'Child' mode. If the modes they slip into are effective modes then this is not necessarily a challenge. However if they are ineffective modes then TA theory would suggest that to be able to catch such slips before they become widespread problems, the broker needs to take immediate remedial action. However, first they need to spot that there has been an inappropriate mode used by them or a partner.

Reflective Practice

To be able to apply and use TA theory to help correct ineffective communication, brokers need to spot actions, body language, and statements made by partners and to be able to deduce from these what 'ego state' they are operating in. They also need to spot feelings, actions and words they are using themselves to identify their own ego state since this can be a strong clue as to the ego state of the partners they are responding to. To achieve this, they need to strengthen their 'noticing' skills.

Donald Schön[10] noticed that the best professionals know more than they can put into words, relying less on tools or formulas than on learning gained through experience; and went on to outline how 'reflection-in-action' works and how professionals, like partnership brokers, can apply it. 'The Guiding Hand' emphasises professional development and actively seeking out learning opportunities.[11] In order to pick up on the subtleties of their own responses, a broker needs to be able to draw on their self-awareness and noticing skills; they need to be able to do this *in the moment* and to reflect.

Combining reflective practice with psychology or therapy tools (such as TA) could provide the partnership broker with a rich body of knowledge with which to deepen their understanding of some of the issues arising in their partnerships. For example, *Box 1* is a list of reflective questions, which I have developed in collaboration with a colleague to help our brokers to understand when something might be going awry in a partnership relationship they are involved in.[12]

The first set of questions – ***Maintains stable and productive relationships with clients*** – draws on both action inquiry techniques and transactional analysis. The subsequent sets of questions draw on other disciplines in therapy, coaching and facilitation (including Gestalt, Dynamic Facilitation, Neuro Linguistic Programming and co-active coaching) and frame them in the style of action inquiry. Together they give a sense of the types of self-reflective questions a broker might create for themselves to help them in their self-reflection.

With constant reflecting back against a well-framed set of questions, a broker can then spot when they, or the partnership's partners, are not quite operating in an effective mode or 'healthy way'. Then they can take action to help move things back on course.

Strategies for Improving Communication

When a broker has created their own set of reflective questions, and has spotted through early reflection either themselves or partners operating in an 'ineffective mode', what are the steps that TA would suggest they can take to get things back on track?

Effective modes for partnership brokers

Firstly, according to TA, when a broker displays effective modes of behaviour (those italicised in *Diagram 2*) they are encouraging others to behave within an effective mode. For example, a Positive Nurturing Parent communicates the message 'you're OK' and can be caring and affirming; and a Positive Controlling Parent sets clear boundaries and provides constructive criticism, whilst giving the message 'you're OK'. Meanwhile Positive Adapted Child mode helps new partners to learn the modes of partnership in a way that helps them to live happily with others; and Positive Free Child allows creative, fun, energetic action. So, TA would suggest that all these modes would be appropriate areas for a broker and partners to operate within.

TA would also suggest that Adult-Adult (A-A) complimentary transactions are a sign of a mature and strong partnership; however, they are unlikely to be where the partnership starts out as some

Box 1.

The Broker:

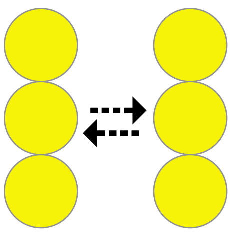
Maintains stable and productive relationships with clients
Are we all in an effective ego state?
Who amongst us are operating in adult mode?
What different roles are being played and when (by me and by the people I am with)? For example: Is my approval being sought? Am I being blamed for not doing things for an individual or group? What volume and type of work are they asking me to take on? Am I encouraging them to seek my approval? Am I being critical or nurturing? Am I styling myself as ‘expert’ or ‘knowledge holder’?
To what extent are people relying on me?
What is equal and balanced about my relationship with these people?
What is less equal and balanced?
What’s productive and healthy?
What is less productive and healthy?

Doesn’t motivate or initiate
Do I have my own agenda for this partnership/event?
Do I feel attached to achieving particular outcomes?
Do I feel the desire to lift spirits?
Do I feel responsible?

Enables people to take action
Am I being enabling (helping people see the possibilities, imagining the future, positive framing)?
Am I being open-minded (pre-judgements, biases, listening to what’s being said rather than who’s saying it)?
Is my response constructive?
Am I judging ideas or being limited by my own biases?
How have people responded to me?
How open are the individuals/groups to being enabled (do they dwell on the negative, throw up barriers etc)?

Works with the energy of the individual or group
Where are the energy flows? And where are the blockages?
Where and how is energy being created and dampened?
Where else can I untap energy?
What’s different about the energy levels compared to previous meetings?
How much and what sort of energy am I generating?
What types of energy am I noticing/valuing and not noticing/valuing?
Do I feel the desire to change (raise or lower) the energy level?
How am I hearing and seeing energy?
What would happen if I wasn’t here?

An extract from a paper produced by Ruth Townsley and Bernie Ward, ‘Local Alchemy’, The New Economics Foundation and the East Midlands Development Agency, 2005.



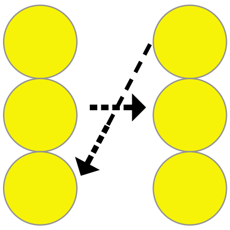
partners will be newer to the world of partnering than others.

The second rule TA would suggest for brokers is that ineffective modes need to be off limits as much as possible to the broker themselves. If a broker accidentally takes on an ineffective mode, they can accidentally set partners into the corresponding ineffective mode by their behaviour. This is because the natural flow for communications is for the recipient to respond in a complementary manner to the initial transaction: so if the broker sends a negative Parent to Child (P-C) message to a partner then the natural flow is for the partner to respond with a negative C-P, taking on the Negative Child mode. This keeps communication flowing; but in an ineffective manner.

From dependency to self-motivated

TA suggests that where a partner is being dependent (sending out communications from a Negative Child mode), a broker can fall easily into the trap of responding in a negative parent mode, and take on the role of motivating the partner, or doing the partner's work for them. *Appendix 1* shows Fat Energy People, and the dangers of a broker being the main motivating energy source for a partner (or partnership): it mitigates against the partner and partnership becoming independent. TA suggests that when we spot that someone is seeking our motivation or support (and operating in Negative Child mode) there are many strategies we can use:

- We can '*cross the transaction*' by responding from a different ego state then the parent state that the stimulus is designed to 'hook'. For example, if a partner uses a child state then the broker can provide an adult response that 'crosses the transaction' and so breaks that particular line of communication; similarly if a broker uses a parent mode a partner can also cross the transaction by responding from an adult position.



Crossed transaction, breaks the communication pattern.

- We can choose *to pick up the ulterior rather than the social message* eg when a person says 'I cannot do this' rather than saying ' let me do this for you' we can say 'it sounds like you have a problem, what do you want to be done about it' (said from the adult ego state).

- We can choose to use *motivational tools*, rather than to be the motivating force ourselves. Motivational tools can include linking people to experiences from outside their partnership through case studies, visits to other partnerships, or e-mail networks. Such experiences help to raise people's vision of what they can achieve. Other tools can be used to help the partnership create its own motivational energy: for example participative workshops to share objectives; or a specific coaching tool, the Wheel of Perspectives (*Appendix 2*), which helps a person/group to see themselves from a new angle.

Case Study 2

When I recently asked one of our brokers what he felt was the main purpose he was performing in one of our partnerships he said ' I give them a kick up the backside when they are slacking'. This set off my warning bells; TA theory had taught me that such remarks were likely to mean that the broker had been engaged in Negative Nurturing Parent mode. Within weeks I started to receive requests from that area for the long-term continuation of that broker's support since they were heavily dependent on his input. And they began to lay the blame at the door of my organisation for 'withdrawing support': something we had clarified 3 years earlier. TA would suggest that if we had effectively changed our behaviour into a more effective mode at an earlier stage we could have helped them move, in a more timely manner, into taking responsibility for their own future.

From blaming, to effective, partner

When a partner is in 'I am OK; you are not OK' mode; or is moving into blaming others, there are both structural and psychological tools that a broker can deploy.

Many tools can be used to help set the 'rules' of a partnership: setting clear and realisable expectations through the use of a partnership agreement; allowing sufficient time for trust building measures, and exposure of underlying interests; a recognition that goals need to be complementary but not necessarily common; using the Perspectives Wheel to help partners see things from one another's points of views. However, in my experience, boundaries will still be pushed by partners who are strongly in a 'blame' mindset, and this is where TA would suggest that a broker will need to change the mode of communication.

For example, when Maria in 'The New Broker' says that "… they are expecting 5 permanent health clinics and they are expecting them soon," she is providing an example of what TA would call a 'game invitation' with discounts.[13] TA suggests that one solution here might be to defuse the game with options, and this is what happened in 'The New Broker'. The key is always to match the transaction with an effective mode in response.

Case Study 3

I was recently involved in a situation where one partner tried to blame the partnership for failing to fund two of their staff members; an expectation that had never been discussed previously with any of the other partners. TA theory would say that the partner was making a 'game invitation' and that this was their first 'discount'. We agreed contractually that the partnership was not responsible, but did agree to help them out of their temporary funding crisis for political reasons. Not surprisingly, they repeated the game in different forms on many occasions in the next few months. Ultimately, we defused them by providing them with options: they move into a different pilot programme with us with different rules; or they stay within this pilot but have to match equally the resources we were committing. Initially they struggled with this, since they had got used to their discount games being successful; once they knew we were serious they started to perform much more effectively as a partner.

In this paper I have only drawn on one theoretical framework, that of Transactional Analysis (TA), to shed light on challenging situations that I have experienced as a broker. I chose this since it is a tool used in psychology and in coaching. As a broker moves away from direct delivery in a partnership, allowing the partners to take on increasingly more of the partnership delivery themselves, I think that it can often be appropriate for a broker to move into a 'coaching' mode. In such a mode, they could draw on a far wider array of coaching disciplines and theoretical frameworks than this paper had the scope to touch on.

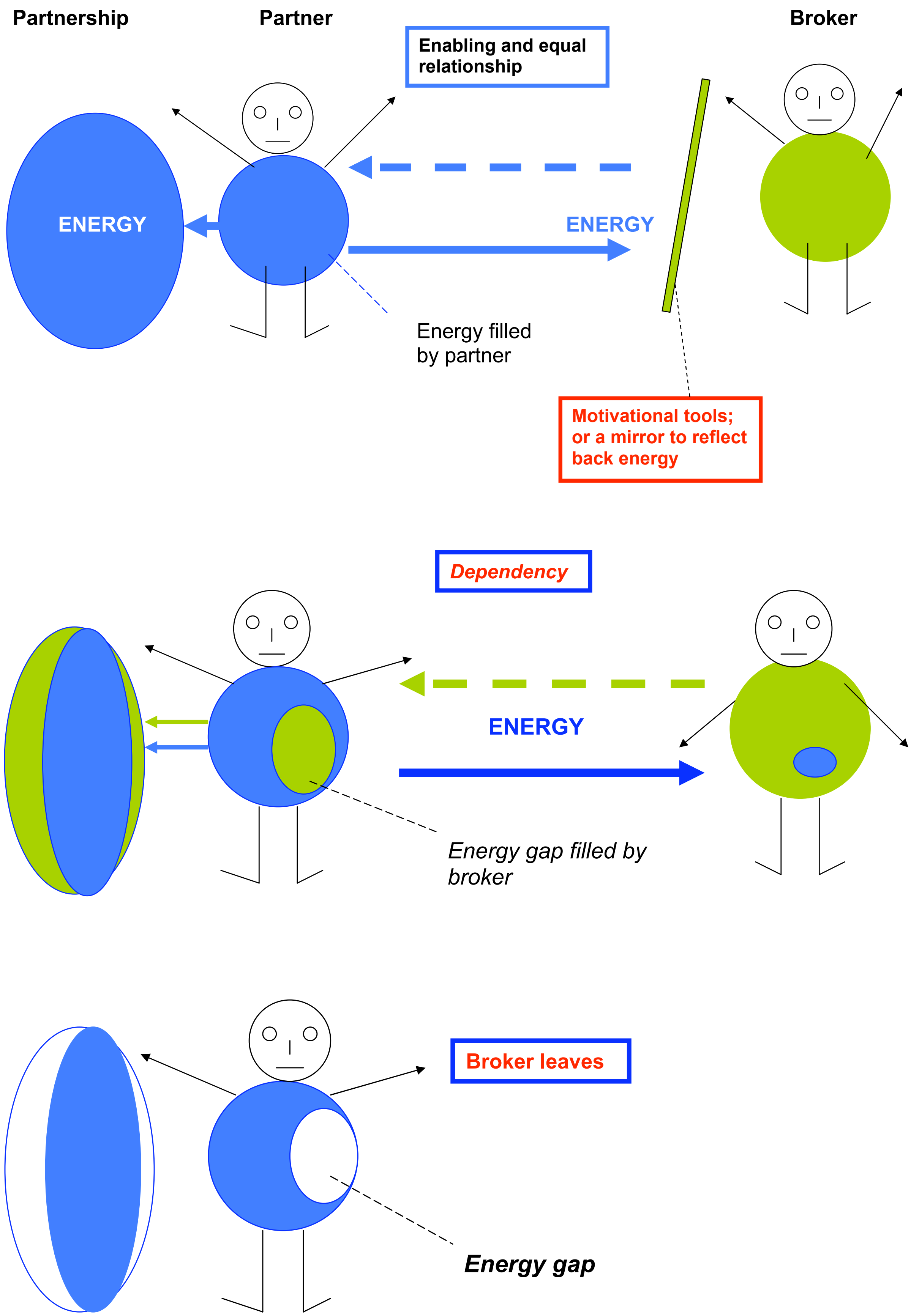
4. The Broker's Challenge

'The Guiding Hand' talks about leadership for the future and the role of the broker within this,[14] which, for me, links to the importance that James Hillman places on those with power and how they can use it through less obvious forms of power, such as what he calls maintenance and service, to change the shape of power in our modern world.[15] Our partnership brokers, in their path towards social development, need to spot key points of challenging behaviour in the partnerships they are brokering and try to use those points to re-balance power relations; even where the partner seems to be wanting to relinquish power through what TA would deem ineffective behaviour.

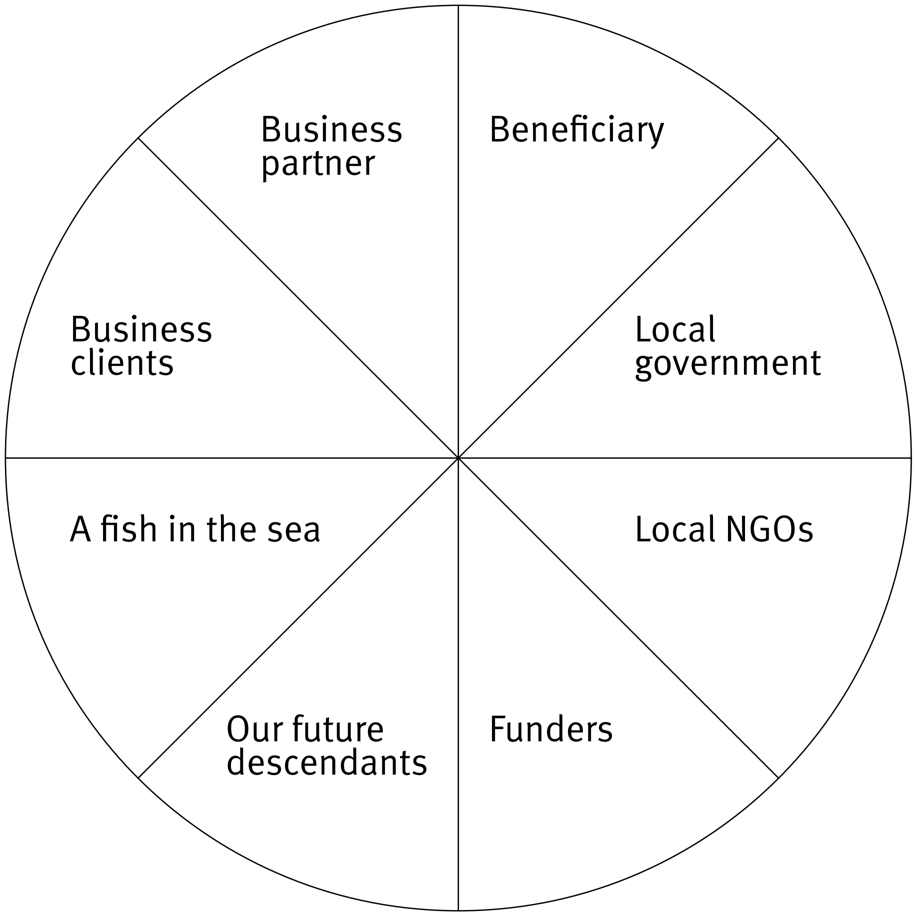
The first challenge to all brokers is therefore to choose their own set of theoretical frameworks through which they can better understand and analyse power, and the many ways it manifests itself in our communications. The second challenge is for brokers then to bring into play the corresponding tools and techniques that can help to make the dialogue in their partnerships more effective and, perhaps, more equal for those who at the outset would perceive themselves as holding less power than the others at the partnership table. The ultimate goal for the broker would be to share these tools with partners in order to add additional insight into the roles that each are inadvertently playing and help to establish a more equal, trusting and productive partnership for the benefit of all.

Appendix 1: Fat Energy People

Adapted by Bernie Ward from a diagram produced by Paul Squires (Civic Trust) and Elizabeth Cox (nef); Bizfizz 2005.



Appendix 2: The Perspective Wheel



The Perspective Wheel allows people or a group to explore a situation from a wide range of different perspectives. It is particularly useful if a person or group is feeling 'stuck'. The person/group choose the different perspectives they wish to explore (in a partnership this could be applied to its various stakeholders and the different partners; the projects beneficiaries; and entirely random 'perspectives' such as a chair or a cow in a field) to encourage people to tap into hidden issues and concerns.

From a motivational perspective, the broker could encourage the group to name perspectives from which they could gain motivational energy – their own reflection on that source can then be a constant source of energy to them.

The best use of the wheel is when it is made very large and placed on the ground so that people can stand in the place of each perspective, looking into the centre of the wheel, and answers the question: and what does the situation look like from here?

The wheel may have as few as 4 quadrants or as many as 8 sections.

Endnotes

1 *Module 4: Consultation and Communications*, by Michael Warner. London: Business Partners for Development, 2001. http://www.bpd-naturalresources.org/media/pdf/train/M4_F.PDF

2 *The Partnering Toolbook*, by Ros Tennyson. London: International Business Leaders Forum, 2003. http://www.iblf.org/csr/csrwebassist.nsf/content/f1d2b3aax4.html

3 *p73, The New Broker: Brokering partnerships for development*, by Michael Warner. London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003.

4 *Kinds of Power: A guide to its intelligent uses*, by James Hillman. Currency Doubleday, 1995.

5 *p35, The Guiding Hand: Brokering partnerships for sustainable development*, by Ros Tennyson and Luke Wilde. United Nationals Staff College and The Prince Of Wales Business Leaders Forum, 2000.

6 PBAS Principle 8: At no time promote my own continuation in a partnering process unless fully justified and acceptable to all relevant parties.

7 *p65, A New Weave of power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citzen Participation*, by Lisa Venegklasen with Valerie Miller. Oklahoma, World Neighbors, 2002.

8 *Whose reality counts? Putting the First Last*, by Robert Chambers. ITDG publishing, 1996.

9 It has some similarities to Freire's 4 stages of awareness, however it does not map entirely.

10 *The Reflective Practitioner*: How professionals think in action, by Donald A. Schön. USA: Basic Books Inc, 1983

11 *p98, The Guiding Hand: Brokering partnerships for sustainable development*, by Ros Tennyson and Luke Wilde. United Nationals Staff College and The Prince Of Wales Business Leaders Forum, 2000.

12 Note that the context of our brokers is quite specific and they have a narrower mandate than the PBAS partnership brokers.

13 A discount is when we minimise, maximise or ignore some aspect of a problem which would help us resolving it.

14 *p105 The Guiding Hand: Brokering partnerships for sustainable development*, by Ros Tennyson and Luke Wilde. United Nationals Staff College and The Prince Of Wales Business Leaders Forum, 2000.

15 *p91, Kinds of Power: A guide to its intelligent uses*, by James Hillman. Currency Doubleday, 1995.