

# STORIES FROM PRACTICE

CREATED BY PARTNERSHIP BROKERS. PRESENTED BY PBA.



## Experiencing Awareness in the Art and Science of Partnership Brokering

Based on the insight that by expanding our awareness – of the self, of the relationships, and of the wider system – collaborative processes achieve better results, this paper is focused on the importance of action-reflective practice in partnership brokering. This implies that a partnership broker must apply her or himself to three dimensions: subjective, objective, and inter-relational. Partnership brokers are part of a collaborative system; and therefore they have the responsibility (and opportunity) to do better to expand the collective (and generative) intelligence of collaborative efforts. This paper proposes an emergent way to developing and exploring a dedicated partnership brokering field – that approach is called Awareness Express.

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Experiencing Awareness  
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# Framing the idea

During my partnership brokering journey, and in particular during the recent Partnership Brokering Accreditation Scheme (PBAS) mentoring period, I experienced an action-learning shift. In simple terms, a transformational moment which consisted in widening the attention of brokering work from external (outer) dynamics to include internal (inner) processes of collaboration.

In this way, some curious questions have naturally emerged through my partnership brokering evolving state, such as: *is there a parallel or a connection between a partnership brokers subjective space and the collective collaborative field between partners? Can partnership brokering skills and attributes be applied to the individual through self-coaching work? Can we collaborate within ourselves? Can partnership brokers tap into their own resources (a kind of internal resource mobilisation) and then map across elements of that resourcefulness into the partnering, collaborative field? Can an 'inner-collaboration' produce positive effects into 'inter-collaboration' and thus strengthen the collective collaborative field?* And to these various questions I have had one answer - yes.

The initial idea thus started to form; of a dedicated *brokering space*, where soft and meta skills (among others) could be experienced by practitioners' in their action-learning work; and that would contribute to the quality and impact of partnering processes. Initially the idea originated more as a self-coaching approach for individuals passionate about social change, which would in turn integrate some partnership brokering lens. But then, through an iterative process during the PBAS mentoring period, I realised that the premise of the approach was much deeper (and wider): a *dynamic action-reflection resourceful space and energy* is required if we, brokers, are to uphold quality and impact of brokering collaborative dynamics. Why is this? We brokers are part of a collaborative system (healthy or not). We have thus the responsibility (and opportunity) to do better to expand the collective (and generative) intelligence of collaborative efforts.

This paper explores the idea of *developing and exploring a partnership brokering space, field or energy*, through an *emerging model*. This is called *Awareness Express*. Here I explore how by bringing our attention to the subjective space, individual and collective, of brokering (that which lies within ourselves and in relation to others) we have the possibility to contribute to the quality and impact of partnering processes.

# The Heart of the Matter

## 1. Realising a brokering action-learning passion

I have always been interested in the *soft* and *meta skills* that humanitarian and development professionals in general, and partnership brokers in particular, could develop in order to make their work more meaningful and impactful. During my PBAS mentoring period, I ran a workshop for holistic health practitioners interested in social change, on how to use diverse *self-coaching* approaches. During that capacity development intervention, I became aware that my own competencies, relationships and work as a partnership broker, probably benefit much from my regular self-coaching and meditative practice. And that led to the simple realisation that I could do more in order to contribute to the development of brokers and the partnership brokering community of practice.

*“I have grown up in this journey to assume my passion for the brokering (subjective) space and not only the partnering (external) space; this includes the connection between the subjective dimension and the external one as a connectedness to the collective inter relational field. This was not envisioned as such at the beginning of the journey!”*  
Mariana’s Log Book final entry - Conclusion.

Whilst I have found (and continue to find) the various tools and approaches taught at L1 Training<sup>1</sup> essential<sup>2</sup>, it is now evident to me that the focus my attention is more on what I would call the *subjective operating space of a broker*. This, I recognise, might have emanated from a specific interest in improving my reflective practitioner dimension. In addition, I have always had an interest in exploring the connections between partnership brokering and coaching<sup>3</sup>.

One day, in a certain partnership brokering intervention, also during the PBAS mentoring period, and rather unexpectedly, I became aware that *“the moment you enter a relational dynamic within a collaborative or partnering frame, you become part of that dynamic - that implies going beyond your perspective and the other’s perspective, and becoming part of a wider collaborative whole.”*<sup>4</sup> This was a transformative realisation of *non-duality*. As a result, I believe that exercising *non-duality* in a partnership brokering context, allows to generate a certain *collaborative energy*, and to explore it in a resourceful manner within a collaborative *space* or *field*. This is both about *intra-collaboration* (inner, within the broker) and *inter-collaboration* (outer, between broker and participants and amongst partners).

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<sup>1</sup> Since completion of L1 training (January 2014), I have been fortunate to experience much diversity in my partnership brokering learning journey. This included a L2 Training certificate, the possibility to act in external and internal partnership brokering capacities, various reflections over my personal and professional learning, and the ability to use partnership brokering lenses in various areas of work.

<sup>2</sup> Such as partnering cycle, designing workshops, resource mapping, interest based negotiation, Belbin roles, map making, record keeping, capture value of partnerships.

<sup>3</sup> I gave some form to this when I wrote for Betwixt and Between article, late 2014 - *“Developing a Soft Humanitarian Field”*: brokering can be used in a specific coaching capacity, so that the partnership reveals its “true path”.

<sup>4</sup> Mariana’s Log Book entry, p.26, *Finding a Certain Kind of Collaborative Brokering Energy*.

## 2. A new approach in the art and science of brokering

*“A human being is part of a whole, called by us the Universe’ —a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts, and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”* Albert Einstein

With references such as *non-duality, theory of change and complexity* and *systems thinking*, my premise for transformative brokering today lies on the following: we are part of a wider process of change, therefore we have the responsibility (and opportunity) to express our part with *awareness*<sup>5</sup>. When we do so, partnering processes, and the inherent web of relationships with which brokers interact (and are part of), will benefit

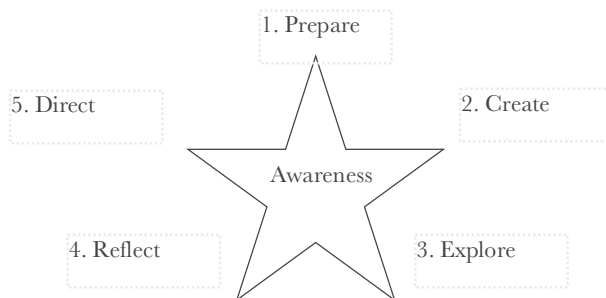
from *an energy of attention, presence and authenticity*. When interrelating within the collaborative field, a broker must give the attention of awareness to ensure that change processes are *generative* and *transformative*.

So the simple question really, is this: *if we, partnership brokers, are part of a wider relational dynamic, what (else) is it that we can and should do to improve its quality and impact?*

### 2.1. Tap into the simple presence of awareness

Often brokers are the ones *holding* the collective space within a partnering relation. The ability to *hold* implies being able to exercise one’s own attributes, wisdom and competencies. And in doing this, there is one underlying common element, within the action-reflection learning and change dynamic, which a broker must tap into and bring it to the collaborative field: awareness.

By being fully present, aware of the (authentic) self, the context (system) and the relation between individuals (or groups), brokers can experience a dynamic awareness field, through action learning like this:



Going through preparation, creation, exploration, reflection and direction allows brokers to experience *transformational* and *generative* relational dynamics. Here brokers, individuals and groups who are the active participants of the partnering interaction, can be empowered to support their own change process. With the purpose of increasing the quality and impact of brokering work, and by tapping into the presence of awareness,

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<sup>5</sup> “Awareness is the ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, objects, thoughts, emotions, or sensory patterns. In this level of consciousness, sense data can be confirmed by an observer without necessarily implying understanding. More broadly, it is the state or quality of being aware of something” Wikipedia

brokers can help to support, coach and guide intra-collaborative (self) and inter-collaboration (with and within the others) relationships within a partnership.

### 2.2. Ask *powerful questions*

We cannot become indifferent to questions; they force us to think about our experience. Powerful questions are empowering, resourceful and solution oriented. Asking questions helps us notice what is happening (or not) in change processes and will often lead to action.

### 2.3. Formulate well defined *outcomes*

A broker needs to formulate simple outcomes that answer questions such as *what do I want now?* and *what is it needed here? when? what will that do for me, and the partnership?*

### 2.4. Use and develop *soft and meta skills as harmonious disrupters for change*

We brokers need to *disrupt* the tradition that technical skills and knowledge will, alone, be enough to change the world. Helping the self, others and relationships in partnering for transformation, requires wisdom (rather than knowledge), more presence (less *persona*), unity (not duality), complexity (instead of linearity).

### 2.5. Bring *values* to the front of our minds

Values are, inevitably, at the centre of what a partnership or collaborative effort represents; and similarly, of a brokers work. They represent the energy driving and committing partnering and brokering action. We brokers must be able to elicit and to exercise core values, within ourselves and a partnership. This will help with the quality and impact of brokering work<sup>6</sup>.

The table below summarises the model of *Awareness Express*. Rather than a process, it is an approach that proposes the exploration of a dynamic space (energy or field) of awareness for partnership brokers. Different moments of learning and change (another version of action learning cycles<sup>7</sup>) are combined with four dimensions of *brokering resourcefulness*: powerful questions, outcomes, soft and meta skills, and values. *Awareness Express* proposes some core content across the various moments and dimensions. But brokers would be free to adapt and develop the approach accordingly.

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<sup>6</sup> Along my brokering learning-action journey, I have become more attentive of the importance of values. Authenticity, learning, empowerment, wisdom, creativity, collective intelligence, quality, self-realisation, awareness of the self and the collective are some values which (self) manifested during my journey thus far. Not knowing what our values are may lead to frustration or irritation rather than commitment. Brokers must develop a dimension of awareness around those values which guide (and must guide) brokering work, those that float around in a partnering dynamic, and those that are of importance to the broke themselves. The fact is that values permeate all areas of a practitioner's reflection, principled action (the Partnership Brokering Good Practice Principles contain underlying values) and interaction.

<sup>7</sup> See Kolb's Action-Reflection Cycle and Mota and Retolaza's Multi-dimensional nature of Learning and Change

**Awareness Express - an approach for deepening awareness in brokering**

Designed to improve the quality and impact of brokering. By bringing the presence of awareness to the self (broker), other(s) (persons and partners being supported), and the collective (common) collaborative field, a 'resourceful' space for partnership brokering can be experienced.

| Moment  | Powerful Questions   | Outcomes  | Soft and Meta skills  | Values   |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Prepare</b></p> <p>analysis; hypotheses; understand potential problem symptoms; be open</p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What space do I want to create? How? For whom? for what? When?</li> <li>• What are the immediate issues and interests here?</li> <li>• Who is (might be) involved?</li> <li>• What is important here?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designed initial brokering space</li> <li>• Connected to partnering dynamics</li> <li>• Identified purpose of interventions</li> <li>• Initial system analysis</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System mapping</li> <li>• Mental rehearsal</li> <li>• Formulation of questions, hypothesis and assumptions</li> <li>• Open to possibility</li> <li>• I am'ness presence</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Thoroughness</li> <li>• Rigour</li> <li>• Appropriateness</li> <li>• Participation</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Create</b></p> <p>generate a resourceful space; hold opposites; connect</p>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the best way to bring a generative quality to the relational dynamic?</li> <li>• How can I create a 'holding' space (where opposites can emerge and express themselves 'safely')?</li> <li>• What are the resources?</li> <li>• What are the underlying assumptions?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created a resourceful space</li> <li>• Identified 'problem elements' need addressing</li> <li>• Held opposites</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Holding space</li> <li>• Presence</li> <li>• Centring and connecting</li> <li>• Resource identification</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connectedness</li> <li>• Wisdom</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Attention (quality of)</li> <li>• Ownership</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Explore</b></p> <p>different perspectives; emerging themes and patterns; common ground</p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the different perspectives? How can they contribute to a generative collective field?</li> <li>• Are there recurring patterns?</li> <li>• How can a collaborative-leadership space be enhanced?</li> <li>• Which parts of the collaborative system need to be connected / related to which other parts?</li> <li>• What matters here?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experienced different perspectives</li> <li>• Identified common ground</li> <li>• Presence brought to collective collaborative leadership field</li> <li>• Identified values at stake and needed</li> <li>• Experienced non linearity</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensorial awareness</li> <li>• Use of silence</li> <li>• Connect with bigger picture</li> <li>• Interests based negotiation</li> <li>• Questioning</li> <li>• Creative thinking</li> <li>• Active listening</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective intelligence</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Embrace Complexity</li> <li>• Resourcefulness</li> <li>• Ownership</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Reflect</b></p> <p>notice changes; capture learning; self-observe; consider emerging options.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is changing here?</li> <li>• How far have I / we come?</li> <li>• What am I / are we learning?</li> <li>• Are there new possibilities?</li> <li>• Are there aspects of generative collaboration?</li> <li>• What do I / we get out of doing this?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified own limitations and competences</li> <li>• Captured learning and reflections</li> <li>• Identified emerging possibilities</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-observe</li> <li>• Let go, let come</li> <li>• Reviewing</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Challenge Assumptions</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Realisation</li> <li>• Open to possibility</li> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Emergence</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Direct</b></p> <p>identify (new) outcome(s), direction</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the direction?</li> <li>• What is / might be the outcome?</li> <li>• In which part of the system will an action make the biggest difference?</li> <li>• Who needs to be involved?</li> <li>• What are the steps?</li> <li>• Timeframe?</li> <li>• Why do I want this?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisions made</li> <li>• Outcomes stated</li> <li>• New system mapped</li> <li>• Purpose identified</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Envisioning</li> <li>• Action planning</li> <li>• System and resources mapping</li> <li>• Find metaphor</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Impact</li> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Connectedness</li> <li>• Relevance</li> <li>• Innovation</li> </ul>  |



### 3. Who can benefit? When? How?

*“Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself”* Rumi

Anyone. Particularly those who wish to expand their awareness as part of a broader action-learning journey and active agents of collaborative change processes. This includes external and internal brokers.

Some of the benefits of using the *Awareness Express* approach include developing and exploring further the *energy of collaborative leadership*, or *collective intelligence* while partnering.

The model can be referred to (and used) before, during and after partnership brokering interventions, at various stages of the partnering cycle. It does not (and should not) be applied as a linear process 1-2-3-etc - instead it can serve as an evolving and participatory approach to iterative learning and change processes. It is not a tick-the-box tool. It is intended to be *generative*; for example, by developing soft and meta skills, a broker will generate transformative context sensitive ideas and action.

Awareness express is not a purely cognitive action-learning approach; it is about reflecting and acting with our hearts, minds and gut, and while doing so connect and centre within the partnering collective intelligence.

## Concluding or Continuing?

This paper has presented *Awareness Express*, an emerging brokering approach which is based on various expression of (pure) awareness.

*“Every thought and every breath is a breath and a thought occurring in awareness; and we are that awareness, that thought-less and breath-less*

There is a core of authenticity, within brokers and collaborative intelligence, to which we must connect to when partnering for transformative change.

By tapping into the presence of awareness, we can improve the focus, energy, creativity and self-realisation of collaborative processes.

There is much more to experiment, define, learn, document and transform with *Awareness Express*. The journey continues.

# Some Inspiring References

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