

# STORIES FROM PRACTICE

CREATED BY PARTNERSHIP BROKERS. PRESENTED BY PBA.



## Developing the inner place

Developing personal awareness about the place from which we partner has the potential to deepen connection with partners, strengthen practice and enhance outcomes. This paper proposes a brokering practice continuum that can support brokers to delineate, appreciate and reflect on the difference between outer place and inner place focused partnering. It is an evolving collection and reflection of early insights into how and why the shift to inner place partnering can support: deeper connection with partners; greater alignment with the partnership's emerging potential; shifts in outcomes that have previously been slow to gain momentum; and brokers to role model Partnership Brokers Good Practice Principles.

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## Developing the inner place - a critical tool for effective partnership brokering practice

*This paper explores how developing an awareness of our inner place can enhance partnership brokering practice and offers a continuum for how brokers can consciously shift attention to their inner place to build stronger partnerships.*

### Early insights

During my mentored period I experienced a shift from *outer* to *inner* awareness that transformed the way I practice partnership brokering. Through consistent reflective practice, I observed that my brokering was unintentionally driven by factors and dynamics *external* to me and I made limited use of *internal* processes to deepen my practice. To understand how I could shift my partnership brokering practice, I developed a continuum to delineate, appreciate and reflect on the difference between *outer place* and *inner place* focused partnering.

My early insights are that partnering from an *inner place* means I am more connected to partners and the partnership's potential. My *inner place* partnership brokering practice is more strongly aligned with the Partnership Brokers Good Practice Principles (1) and I have observed shifts in outcomes that have previously been slow to gain momentum.

### A brokering practice continuum: shifting from *outer place* to *inner place* focused partnering

The brokering practice continuum (Table 1) collates insights from my exploratory *outer place* and *inner place* focused partnering across six areas of partnership brokering (relevant to my mentored period). It illustrates examples of distinctions I made between my *outer* and *inner place* partnership brokering practice and offers partnership brokers reflective learning tools I adapted from relevant literature.

The development of the continuum was largely inspired by Theory U (2). The essence of Theory U is that we cannot transform the behaviour of systems unless we transform the quality of awareness and attention that people apply to their actions within these systems, both individually and collectively (3). More specifically, the quality of outcomes in any partnership is a function of the *consciousness* from which the people in the partnership operate. Other partnership literature that informed continuum insights include papers on: values based leadership, power, systems thinking, reflective practice and communication style.

**Table 1: A brokering practice continuum to shift from *outer place* to *inner place* focused partnering**

Area of partnership brokering	<i>Outer place</i> focus ←	→ <i>Inner place</i> focus
Approach to partnership brokering	Views partnering as a series of required tasks to <i>do</i> with a focus on <i>what</i> tools to use and <i>how</i> to apply them.	Partnership brokering is a mindset – a conscious way of being with partners to enable their full potential.
Basis for partnership practice	Partnership practice is based on selective use of evidence or on partnership brokers imperatives.	Partnership practice is based on evidence and sound theoretical foundations that align with partner’s needs.
Influence and leadership	Leadership is role dependent.	Leadership and influence is a practice and activity that is <i>not</i> role dependent.
Communication style	Listen and converse in a way that assumes knowledge on what is best for the partners. Smooth over and avoid conflict, disagreement and uncomfortable conversations.	Listens and converses in a way that pays attention to what is best for the partners to reach their full potential. Open heart, open mind, open will.
Reflective practice	Ad hoc, unstructured, not essential to partnership broker role.	Consistent and courageous reflective practice that uses evidence-based strategies to encourage deep thinking so partners can reach full potential. Essential to effective partnership brokering practice.
Personal awareness	Awareness of <i>what</i> we do (results) and <i>how</i> we do it (process).	Awareness of <i>what</i> we do (results) and <i>how</i> we do it (process) and the <i>where</i> (source) from which we operate.

### Approach to partnership brokering

<i>Outer place</i> focus: ←	→ <i>Inner place</i> focus:
Views partnering as a series of required tasks to <i>do</i> with a focus on <i>what</i> tools to use and <i>how</i> to apply them.	Partnership brokering is a mindset – a conscious way of <i>being</i> with partners to enable their full potential.

Approaching partnership brokering from an *outer place* means the broker’s focus is on selecting tools to progress required tasks as a means to reach an end outcome in the partnering cycle. The broker’s focus is on the mechanical *doing*. Alternatively, approaching partnership brokering from an *inner place* focus means the broker uses a partnering mindset - a conscious way of *being* with partners. Being present with partners to align individual and collective behaviour with overall partnership intent is viewed as primary and related tasks are secondary. The tasks completed and tools selected are done so based on merit to connect partners with their full potential at any given moment in the partnering cycle. The mindset that partners bring to tasks is as important as the desired outcomes – the means is of equal importance to the end.

Dwonyczk explains that... *a partnering mindset brings a genuine curiosity together with the ability and willingness to explore diverse perspectives and experiences. It establishes equity and respect where little may have existed before. It builds openness and enthusiasm for all voices (even those without perceived power) to be heard. It explores and validates both individual and mutual interests and seeds courage to make a difference on issues that are important to those involved (1).*

Based on Dwonyczk’s considerations, I developed the following questions to shift and sustain a partnership brokering approach that is grounded in an *inner place* partnering mindset.

- How am I exploring partner’s diverse perspectives and experiences with genuine curiosity?
- How am I building openness between partners and enthusiasm for a broad representation of issues that impact partners?

- How am I building equity for all voices to be heard (even those without perceived power)?
- How am I exploring and validating partner’s individual and mutual interests?
- How am I setting out to make a difference on issues that are important to the partners involved?
- Are partnering tasks and tools selected based on a capacity to connect partners with their full potential?

I noticed a distinctly different experience in engaging partners when I developed a genuinely curious mindset as my primary focus compared to my previous task-driven focus. This shift in mindset meant I developed a deeper understanding about partner’s needs and used this to redesign a more relevant and effective partnership engagement strategy.

### Basis for partnership brokering practice

<p><b>Outer place focus:</b> ←</p> <p>Partnership brokering practice is based on selective use of evidence or on partnership broker’s imperatives.</p>	<p>→ <b>Inner place focus:</b></p> <p>Partnership brokering practice is based on evidence and sound theoretical foundations that align with partner’s needs.</p>
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A partnership broker practising from an *outer place* basis uses a limited range of evidence and theoretical process to guide their practice. The broker may push a personal or organisational agenda not connected to the defined partnership purpose or grounded in theoretical evidence. Whereas a partnership broker operating from an *inner place* focus bases their practice on transparent and sound theoretical foundations that align and change with partner’s needs at any point in the partnering cycle.

Theory U (2) provides a practical theoretical process that can be applied to partnering situations and aligns with any stage of the partnering cycle (1). To shift basis for practice to an *inner place*, partnership brokers can follow the Theory U sequence of co-initiating, co-sensing, co-presencing, co-creating and co-evolving outlined in Figure 1. However for the process to work, Scharmer emphasises the need to connect to two deeper levels: principles and your deepest *source*. Principles and practices for aligning with *source* is outlined in the ‘personal awareness’ continuum component.

Shifting my basis for partnership brokering practice to an *inner place* has helped to align my focus with the partnership’s needs. As an internal broker, filtering multiple (and often competing) needs can be challenging. Using Theory U’s five stages has helped to clarify and anchor my focus in the partnership’s purpose.



Figure 1: Theory U 5-stage process that partnership brokers can use to develop an ‘inner place’ basis of practice (2)

### Influence and leadership

<p><b>Outer place focus:</b> ← Leadership is role dependent.</p>	<p>→ <b>Inner place focus:</b> Leadership and influence is a practice and activity that is not role dependent.</p>
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A partnership broker practicing from an *outer place* views influence and leadership as role dependent and the work of senior positions. The broker views themselves as having limited capacity to lead on behalf of the partnership. Alternatively, a partnership broker practising from an *inner place* focus believes that all people can effect change, regardless of their formal positions or titles. They use their partnership brokering role to influence and lead change that is in the best interest of the partnership.

Tennyson and Houghton (4) propose that, leadership in the partnering context is more of a practice or activity rather than a specific position or job. They state that not all partnership brokers are in recognised leadership roles per se, but they all need to think about facilitating and growing the capacity of a range of people to lead on behalf of the group. Waddell (4), refers to a set of leadership competencies which include a combination of skills and attributes that partnership brokers could use to optimise their leadership and influence (Table 2).

When I embraced that my role as an internal broker is to influence and lead (despite not being in an official leadership role), I was more proactive and accountable. Rather than waiting for direction from senior managers, I experimented with using Waddell’s leadership competencies and felt more empowered to design and propose change that was in the best interest of partners.

**Table 2: Leadership competencies that partnership brokers can consider to optimise their effectiveness (1).**

Skills	Attributes
Connecting	Systems intelligence
Stewarding	Being 'leaderful'
Handling paradox and uncertainty	Trustworthiness
Inspiring	Entrepreneurial flair
Systems thinking	Empathy
Community development	Visionary
Strategising	
Empowering	

### Communication style

<b>Outer place focus:</b> ← Listens and converses in a way that assumes knowledge on what is best for the partners. Smooths over and avoids conflict, disagreements and uncomfortable conversations.	→ <b>Inner place focus:</b> Listens and converses in a way that pays attention to what is best for the partners to reach their full potential. Open heart, open mind, open will.
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A partnership broker's communication style grounded in an *outer focus* means the broker will communicate based on assumptions. The broker will smooth over conflict and disagreement to avoid feelings of discomfort. Whereas a partnership broker with an *inner place* communication style will listen and converse in a way that pays attention to what is best for the partners. To support partners achieve outcomes, they will ask the hard questions and genuinely explore the real answers – even if conflict emerges. An *inner place* communication style values conflict as an opportunity to explore diversity (1).

In Theory U Scharmer (2) provides a way to listen and converse that could support partnership brokers to consciously shift their communication style. It provides four levels of listening and fields of conversation with an explanation about how the partnership broker can open their mind, heart and will (Table 3) (5).

Using Theory U's Listening and Fields of Conversation has enabled me to hear and generate new ideas with partners that had not previously surfaced. It helped to redirect perceived blocks as learning opportunities and momentum formed around new ways forward.

**Table 3: Theory U four levels of listening and fields of conversation (5)**

Levels of listening	Open mind, Open heart, Open will	Fields of conversation
<b>Listening Level 1 - <i>Habitual</i>:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening to confirm what I already know.</li> <li>Reflecting the past rather than the present moment</li> </ul>		<b>Downloading ‘Talking nice’</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking from what others want to hear</li> <li>Polite routines, only hearing that which confirms our own story</li> </ul>
<b>Listening Level 2 - <i>Factual</i>:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accepting differences from what I already know.</li> <li>Attentive to new ideas and data</li> </ul>	<b>OPEN MIND:</b> is based on our ability to access our intellectual intelligence. This allows us to see with fresh eyes, deal with objective figures and facts around us.	<b>Debate ‘Talking tough’</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking from what I think</li> <li>Debate, emphasis on divergence of views, ‘I am my point of view’</li> </ul>
<b>Listening Level 3 – <i>Empathic</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeing through other person’s eyes</li> <li>Sensing what is unspoken, beyond words and facts</li> </ul>	<b>OPEN HEART:</b> relates to our ability to access our emotional intelligence, that is our capacity to empathise with others, to tune into different contexts, and to put ourselves into someone else’s shoes	<b>Dialogue <i>Reflective inquiry</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking from seeing myself as part of the whole</li> <li>Empathic connection to speaker, ‘I have a point of view’</li> </ul>
<b>Listening Level 4 - <i>Generative</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paying attention to the potential arising in us</li> <li>Sensing the future wanting to emerge</li> </ul>	<b>OPEN WILL:</b> relates to our ability to access our authentic purpose and self. This type of intelligence is also referred to as intention or spiritual intelligence or self-knowledge. It deals with the fundamental actions of letting go and letting come.	<b>Collective creativity – <i>Generative flow</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking from what is moving through us</li> <li>Co-sensing what is new and emerging, co-creating future</li> </ul>

### Reflective practice

<b>Outer place focus:</b> ←	→ <b>Inner place focus:</b>
Ad hoc, unstructured, not essential to partnership broker role.	Consistent and courageous reflective practice that uses evidence-based strategies to encourage deep thinking so partners can reach full potential. Essential to effective partnership brokering practice.

A partnership broker conducting reflective practice from an *outer place* focus will prioritise to-do lists over reflective practice. Reflective practice may happen in an ad hoc manner but will not be structured, consistent or considered a necessary component of their role. Alternatively, a partnership broker working from an *inner place* focus will prioritise consistent and courageous reflective practice that attempts to better understand how partners can reach their full potential. Essential to effective practice, they use evidence-based strategies to ask themselves genuine questions and explore the real answers – even if they are painful (6).

Tennyson (6) offers questions that partnership brokers could use to develop their reflective practice (Table 4). Burke (7) acknowledges that it takes courage to reflect on practice in the honest and deep way that the *inner place* focus calls for. However, she reminds partnership brokers that courage is essential to achieve transformational change and therefore critical to embed in practice. She provides six courageous practice prompts that partnership brokers could use to reflect on and inspire courageous reflection and partnering (Table 5).

Investing attention in courageous reflective practice has enhanced the quality of my partnership brokering. I have combined Tennyson’s questions and Burke’s prompts to develop a consistent

reflective practice process. *Inner place* reflective practice has matured my understanding of how to *be* a partnership broker and the potential for my own vulnerabilities to either restrict or empower outcomes for partners.

**Table 4: Reflective practice questions (6).**

Reflective practice questions	
<b>Why...</b>	did ## happen?
	was that conversation so difficult?
	did I do/say ##?
<b>What if...</b>	we didn't reach a decision?
	## had/had not been there?
	I/they had done X instead of Y?
	we had waited until...?
	we try something completely different
<b>What...</b>	would be the best possible outcome of X activity?
	would it be like if it was working brilliantly?
<b>What next...</b>	needs to change/happen to make a difference?
	should I do/no to help with this process work?

**Table 5: How partnership brokers can embed courageous practice prompts in their reflective practice (7)**

Courageous practice prompts	Reflective practice questions to embed courageous partnering
<b>Show up</b> – with your whole heart despite never being certain of what each interaction and process will bring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do I understand the context and seek to reduce uncertainty where possible?</li> <li>- Am I grateful when others 'show up'?</li> <li>- How do I encourage partners to ask for what they need?</li> </ul>
<b>Be present</b> – to whatever arises and encourage the partnership to do the same.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o model presence and take a moment to draw people in?</li> <li>o seek to engage people fully helping them to 'seize the day' by drawing on contextual knowledge and the 'accumulated wealth' of human experience?</li> <li>o encourage openness and 'not knowing' as a state of enquiry that can lead to learnings and break through results?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- How am I prepared and prepared to change?</li> </ul>
<b>Change culture</b> – support open and diverse views and hold the line on behaviour that is unhelpful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o model behaviour?</li> <li>o hold the middle ground and encourage the partnership to step into it?</li> <li>o assist the parties in developing emotional assets that embed healthy partnership culture?</li> <li>o see conflict as a moment of promise and practice blending with challenge and transforming it?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Sit with discomfort</b> – lean into the discomfort of the work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o acknowledge and feel the fear and vulnerability and continue to 'show up'?</li> <li>o have a relentless faith in human desire for connection and the positive value that collaboration and partnering can make?</li> <li>o use uncomfortable silence and open questions as tools for awakening insight innovation and break-through results?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Share tension</b> – assess and share in the different appropriate levels of uncertainty, unknowability and risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o manage risk while encouraging a 'spirit of innovation'?</li> <li>o acknowledge and encourage partners to sit comfortably with the tension of knowing and not knowing, certainty and uncertainty?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Reflect courageously</b> – in my own practice – even when it feels like this threatens the very foundation of courage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o allow voice to the fear of not being good enough or not getting it right?</li> <li>o ask the hard questions and be vulnerable to the real answers?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## Personal awareness

<b>Outer place focus:</b> ←	→ <b>Inner place focus:</b>
Awareness of <i>what</i> we do (results) and <i>how</i> we do it (process).	Awareness of <i>what</i> we do (results) and <i>how</i> we do it (process) and the <i>where</i> (source) from which we operate.

A partnership broker practising from an *outer place* personal awareness focuses on *what* needs to be done (tasks) and *how* to do it (process) but has a blind spot to the *inner place* or *source* they are operating from. There is a disconnect between understanding how the quality of their actions impacts on partners and outcomes. Alternatively, the partnership broker who focuses on an *inner place* awareness pays attention to the tasks and the process from a context of *where* - the place *their* actions are coming from. This means the broker pays attention to the quality of their behaviour (i.e. listening, conversing) and asks themselves '*how does that quality change the course of action in the partnership from moment to moment*'. *Inner place* personal awareness is calling the partnership broker to pay attention to their own attention.

Scharmer (2) explains that there is a blind spot in leadership and social change. The blind spot concerns the *inner place* – the *source* from which we operate when we act, communicate, perceive or think. Scharmer (3) refers to Bill O'Brien, (the late CEO of Hanover Insurance) about leading transformational change. O'Brien said, 'The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.' As we conduct our partnering practice, Scharmer challenges us to consider that if we were asked *where* our actions come from, would be able to provide a clear response?

The aim of Scharmer's Theory U method is to orient our attention to these sources of action and thought and shift our practice from ego-system (i.e silo view) to eco-system (i.e system view). He provides 12 principles and practices that may help partnership brokers advance their practice to an *inner place* focus of personal awareness (3) (Table 6).

**Table 6: Theory U principles and practices for partnership brokers to advance their practice to an *inner place* focus of personal awareness (3)**

Theory U Principle	Reflective 'inner place' personal awareness prompts
1. <i>Practice, don't preach</i>	How am I listening: to others, to myself, to the whole and what the partnership is calling me to do?
2. <i>Observe, observe, observe: became a blackbelt observer and listener</i>	How am I observing and listening with an open mind, an open heart and an open will? (see Table 3).
3. <i>Connect to your intention as an instrument</i>	How am I connecting to the intention of the partnership's work to establish an alignment between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who I am as a partnership broker?</li> <li>- What I am here in the partnership for?</li> <li>- How I can link my processes with the intent of the partnership group?</li> </ul> Have I clarified what I can be in service of so that I can act as an instrument for bringing the emerging future into being?
4. <i>When the crack opens up, stay with it – connect and act from the now</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How am I paying attention to when opportunity presents itself?</li> <li>- In moments of opportunity, how am I acting from courage and full attention?</li> <li>- When such moments occur, how do I stay with it, connect with it, and then <i>act</i> from the <i>now</i> – that is, from what wants to emerge?</li> </ul>
5. <i>Follow your heart – do what you love, love what you do</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do I remind myself that at least 1-2 of my projects and activities need to be things I love doing?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do I remember that when this element is missing, I am in danger of losing my way or living someone else's life?</li> </ul>
6. <i>Always be in a dialogue with the universe</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How am I paying attention to the larger context that supports my partnering work?</li> <li>- How am I listening to and identifying those elements of feedback that are helpful to further evolve an idea?</li> </ul>
7. <i>Create a holding space for deep listening that supports your journey</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do I have a daily cultivation practice – a moment of stillness or contemplation in which I can filter out all the noise from the <i>outer place</i> and focus on what's essential for my practice?</li> <li>- How do I practice deep (generative listening)? (see Table 3)</li> </ul>
8. <i>Iterate, iterate, iterate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I practise and adapt to what I see emerging?</li> </ul>
9. <i>Notice the crack to the field of the future</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I pay attention to and attend to the opening of potential future opportunities?</li> <li>- How do I explore the edges of the system and the self to sense a field of future possibility that is wanting to emerge?</li> </ul>
10. <i>Use different language with different partners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I stay mindful that single-focus approaches are almost certain to fail?</li> <li>- How do I practice mastering the art of broadening and deepening the definition of the problem so that all the relevant partners (who need one another to change any system) are committed to participate?</li> </ul>
11. <i>If you want to change others, you need to be open to changing yourself first</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I nurture quality relationships with partners?</li> <li>- How do I pay attention to and build and strengthen relationships with partners?</li> <li>- How do I demonstrate that I am open to changing myself <i>first</i> before I expect partners to change?</li> </ul>
12. <i>Never give up. Never give up. You are not done</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I remind myself that every profound journey of innovation and renewal takes an enormous amount of perseverance?</li> <li>- How do I reflect on what I can learn from failure, get back on my feet and try again?</li> <li>- How do I consciously lead change from a place of courage: the courage to go to the edge and leap into the unknown?</li> <li>- How do I use courage to connect with the deep dimensions of my being – with who I really am (the source) - my <i>inner place</i>?</li> </ul>

### Evolving the continuum

The brokering practice continuum is in its humble infancy stages. It is an evolving collection and reflection of early insights into *how* and *why* the shift to 'inner place' partnering will support brokers to strengthen their practice and enhance outcomes.

I commenced my PBA Accreditation with the expectation that I would learn about *external* tools to improve my partnership brokering practice. Instead, I learnt that developing awareness of my *inner place* will be the most critical tool I can use to enhance my partnership brokering practice.

My hope is that sharing these insights will support other partnership brokers to grow insights about how *inner place* partnering can deepen connection with partners and lead from the future that is wanting to emerge.

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