EVALUATING BROKERS

A 360 degree approach to evaluate a broker’s impact on partnerships

By Surinder Hundal
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Partnership Broker Assessment

A framework to support a rounded evaluation of a partnership broker’s impact on partnerships

Overview

During the life time of a multi-sector partnership for sustainable development, the partnership broker is accountable to partners as well as to a line manager and/or the employing organisation. It is important that the broker receives regular, honest feedback on his/her performance, as they need to understand how their role contributes to overall partnership aims and objectives and how they are performing against agreed criteria. From an early stage, all partners should be involved in reviewing the broker’s work.

The Guidance Note 2 ‘Assessing a Broker’ in The Brokering Guidebook1 covers the necessity of assessing a broker’s performance and recommends that a partner’s assessment of a broker can be done on a formal basis (for example, through the use of a questionnaire) or on an informal basis (for example, through discussion or interviews with the partners).

This paper builds on the Guidance Note to propose one ‘formal’ evaluation framework – a questionnaire driven approach that seeks to build a rounded picture of a broker’s performance by collecting information from the key people involved in a partnership.

It begins with a FAQ, followed by an overview of the roles and competencies of a broker and practical guidance on how to carry out the evaluation. The author has developed an evaluation tool which is accessible to Level 1 alumni of the Partnership Brokering Association (PBA) from the tools section of the PBA website.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the rounded evaluation framework?

A: It is a performance appraisal tool that gathers feedback on an individual operating as a broker from a number of sources who would normally work with the broker in a multi-sector partnership for sustainable development. The evaluation process centres on the production of a questionnaire for people to complete, together with a report setting out the findings of the exercise.

Typically, eight to 10 people will complete a questionnaire describing the broker’s performance. The broker also fills out a questionnaire, assessing his/her own performance. The questionnaire consists of a number of statements around a broker’s competency (an area of behaviour or performance) rated on a scale from one to five, and includes the opportunity to add free text comments. The answers given are summarised in a report, showing the actual ratings given for each question, as well as averages for each question and for each competency and any written comments. The feedback can then be used in a review meeting with the line manager and one other person nominated by the partners to represent their perspective, to discuss both the broker’s current performance and forward planning.

The evaluation framework can be used to assess the performance of individual brokers in any of these situations:

• Partnership with an internal broker – “managers from within a partner organisation who prepare their organisation for collaboration in a multi-sector partnership; negotiate and represent their organisation’s involvement in a partnership; and play a key role in initiating/managing/developing a partnership agreement”.

• Partnership with an external broker – “independent professional contracted by one of the partners or the partnership to explore the feasibility of adopting a partnership approach; facilitate negotiations to develop a partnership and/or a partnering agreement; maintain or monitor the effectiveness of partnerships over time; and build institutional capacity to deliver partnerships and sustain outcomes effectively”.

• Partnership with multiple brokers - where more than one person acts as a broker at one time or another – and where a smooth transition is required between brokers for handing over responsibilities.

It gives the broker an opportunity to get feedback on his/her approach to partnership brokering from multiple sources he/she interacts with during the brokering cycle. As such, it provides richer information about his/her skills and performance, as well as working relationships, compared with the more traditional appraisal arrangements based on line manager’s assessment.

It focuses on the performance as well as development of a broker, helping a broker to:

• Track progress in delivering pre-agreed objectives and activities against the terms of reference in their contract ;
• Demonstrate his/her achievements and gain support from their own organisation /groups (e.g. internal broker)
• Provide evidence of good brokering practice;
• Improve the quality of his/her partnership working arrangements;
• Augment their reflective approach to work with other perspectives;
• Identify areas for improvement and capacity building.

Over time, as the volume of evaluations build across the globe, it will be possible to identify a benchmark standard or norm for the partnership brokering profession. This will make it easier to view an individual broker’s performance against his/her peers and contribute to the development of appropriate professional training and personal development plans.

The rounded feedback approach generates coherent and cohesive data as all the assessors use the same criteria to rate performance and hence makes their assessment easy to compare and analyse.

The line manager can use the evaluation report to explore the views of partners and the broker; address any accountability, governance and management issues; discuss any changes that might be required to the terms of reference, changing roles, transfer of responsibilities/handing over of responsibilities or even exiting from the role; and explore any specific personal and/or professional development training requirements.

Q: What kind of brokers would use the framework?

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Q: How does it benefit a broker?

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Q: How does it benefit a line manager?

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2 The definition, originally developed for Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme, is taken from The Brokering Guidebook: Navigating Effective Sustainable Development Partnership (2005), Ros Tennyson, International Business Leaders Forum – page 10.
3 Ditto.
The structured evaluation framework is a useful opportunity for the partners to reflect on both their own and the broker’s contribution to the effectiveness of a partnership.

The Brokering Guidebook suggests that a “well-conducted review process can be a useful way for partners to think more fully the developing nature of the broker’s role and their own changing responsibilities in the partnership. The process itself may play a significant part in partners recognising their responsibilities and lessening their reliance on the broker as the partnership moves through the partnering cycle”.

The assessment of a broker is a useful component in the overall evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of a partnership as it influences both its inputs and outputs. It can stand on its own merit but it can also be used to develop understanding of a broader ‘ecosystem’ of partnership evaluation:

A broker’s evaluation is an integral part of the partnership evaluation ‘ecosystem’

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The rounded evaluation framework can be used during the life cycle of a partnership in any of these situations:

- At the completion of all or of each of the four phases in the partnering cycle (Annex 1): scoping and building; managing and maintaining; reviewing and revising; closing/renegotiation/sustaining
- Exit from a partnership (e.g. external broker) – including handover of responsibilities to a partner/partnership
- Move into a newly defined role (e.g. internal broker) – including handover of responsibilities to another broker /partner

The framework plays a useful role in improving the overall effectiveness of the partnership by helping the broker and the partners to learn from a continuous process of assessing, planning, doing and reviewing their progress and achievements.

It should be an integral part of the core processes put in place by the partnership - it can be built into the normal working arrangements of the partnership and not impose an additional burden.

**The Role of the Broker**

**Defining the Broker’s Role**

The evaluation will benefit if there is a common understanding of the role of the partnership broker.

The Brokering Guidebook provides detailed descriptions of the role of a broker and the practical ways the many tasks a broker undertakes on behalf of the partners during the life-cycle of partnership.

It defines a partnership broker thus: “an active go-between or intermediary between different organisations and sectors (public, private and civil society) that aim to collaborate as partners in a sustainable development initiative”.5

A partnership broker may be required to perform multiple roles and undertake different types of activities on behalf of a partnership during different stages of the partnering cycle. An overview of such activities is provided in the diagram below from The Partnering Initiative:

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5 The Brokering Guidebook: Navigating Effective Sustainable Development Partnership (2005), Ros Tennyson, International Business Leaders Forum – page 8
Key Brokering Skills

Irrespective of the role a broker performs or the stage of the partnering cycle, he/she needs expertise in some core skills. The Partnership Brokering Project website (http://partnershipbrokers.org/w/brokering/roles-and-skills) provides a description of the core professional partnership brokering skills, which form the basis of a broker’s performance evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BROKERING SKILLS</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Brokers will need to help partners to differentiate between ‘hardball’ negotiation (where everyone’s objective is to have their own way no matter what the cost) and negotiation based on meeting each other’s underlying interests (aiming at win-win-win scenarios for all players)</td>
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<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Successful convening and relationship-building – particularly in the early stages of a partnership – requires brokers to manage a range of encounters between key players, whether in the form of one-to-one meetings, small group activities or larger task-oriented workshops</td>
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<td>Synthesising information &amp; record keeping</td>
<td>Brokers will need to be highly capable of managing complex data and layers of information and experience. They will need to ensure that meticulous records are kept of meetings and decisions – either by themselves or in overseeing someone else in undertaking this important function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; presentation</td>
<td>Brokers will need excellent communication skills especially in: social interaction; active listening; empathy; concise speaking; ability to tailor written communications to different audiences and conducting meaningful conversations. A broker may well need to present the idea of partnering or details about the partnership itself to different audiences. This requires good story-telling and presentation skills (whether formal or informal in style).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching &amp; capacity building</td>
<td>As a partnership progresses, the broker will have a new focus – transferring responsibilities to partners (or project staff). This involves stepping back from a front line role and working in the background to support and coach individual partners or staff in building their own partnering and brokering skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution-building</td>
<td>Brokers may have a crucial role in increasing the engagement of partner organisations as well as helping each organisation become more ‘fit for purpose’ in their partnering approach. Brokers will also need to help partners build governance and accountability procedures as the partnership itself becomes more ‘institutionalised’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing &amp; revising</td>
<td>Partnerships benefit from regular reviews to ensure that they remain animated and do not lose momentum. As someone with close knowledge of the partnership, the broker is uniquely placed to facilitate reviews themselves or, if they are seen as too close to the partnership to do this objectively enough, to brief someone else to facilitate the review on behalf of the partners. They may also have a critical role in revising the partnership based on experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Principles of Good Brokering Practice

Professional partnership brokers are committed to maintaining the integrity and professionalism in brokering practice. They typically adhere to a number of good practice principles which provide support and structure to their individual brokering activities:

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; and
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.

The rounded evaluation framework makes it possible for partnership brokers to review their practice against these principles, reflect on where their approach may be deviating from them and take steps to make the necessary changes – especially when working in challenging situations.

Combining Skills and Practice as Basis for Evaluation

Both the core brokering skills and the principles of good brokering practice can be used to select the criteria for the rounded evaluation framework.

A framework for assessing a partnership broker’s performance
Evaluation Criteria

The following process- and values-based dimensions can be used to rate the broker’s performance:

• **Negotiating and Influencing**
  A broker with good negotiating and influencing skills builds a vision of/ for the partnership and directs people towards that shared vision.

• **Planning & Organizing**
  A broker with good planning and organisational skills transforms targets and priorities into action plans and timetables and manages time and resources well.

• **Implementation**
  A broker with good implementation skills ensures transparent and effective management of the partnership.

• **Communication**
  A broker with good communications skills communicates with partners and other stakeholders in ways and at times that can be easily understood, interpreted and acted on.

• **Decision Making**
  A broker with good decision-making skills uses sound judgement and comes to conclusion for appropriate actions in a timely manner.

• **Capacity Building**
  A broker committed to effective partnering motivates others and invests effort in developing people, coaching, and support.

• **Integrity**
  A broker lives according to ethical standards and good brokering principles, earning trust and credibility of the partners and other stakeholders.

• **Empowerment and Trust**
  An effective broker creates a climate of innovation, enthusiasm and trust.

• **Dealing with ambiguity and conflict**
  An effective broker is able to manage uncertainty (no evident solutions) or complexity (multiple, difficult choices).

• **Continuous Learning**
  An effective broker takes steps to grow and continually self-renew by accepting feedback and new ideas.

• **Future Orientation**
  An effective broker shows good strategic skills to create future scenarios and make them achievable.
Conducting the Evaluation

The author has developed an evaluation tool which is accessible to Level 1 alumni of the Partnership Brokering Association (PBA) from the tools section of the PBA website. The tool comprises an evaluation sheet and a template for a spider web diagram to visually summarise the findings of the evaluation.

Assessments can be formal or informal.

Making a formal assessment

A formal rounded evaluation framework process can be initiated by the broker’s line manager, a lead partner or the broker.

Steps for an assessment process

- Brokers & line manager identify partners, colleagues & others to be invited to participate in the evaluation
- A feedback facilitator is engaged to support the evaluation process
- Partners, colleagues etc are invited to participate in the evaluation, complete the evaluation sheets & return by a specified date
- Feedback session / review meeting with the broker
- Feedback facilitator collates feedback, prepares a report & sends it to the broker & line manager
- Broker, line manager & other feedback givers send their feedback to the feedback facilitator

It might be useful to engage a feedback facilitator to support the process. He/she could be from the HR department of a partner organisation or an external facilitator skilled in performance appraisals. He/she can administer the questionnaire, collect the feedback on behalf of the line manager or the partnership, analyse it, prepare and submit a report.

Typically, eight to 10 people – including the broker - should be invited to complete a questionnaire (evaluation sheet) describing the broker’s performance.

The answers given should be summarised in a report, which can then be used in a review meeting with the line manager and one other person nominated by the partners to represent their perspective, to discuss both the broker’s current performance and forward planning.

In a formal evaluation, you can use a spider web diagram to record the average total ratings from a number of partners and other stakeholders in a high level and simplified shape. It provides a useful visual summary of the results of the assessment, showing where the variations and similarities in assessment exist.

The spider web diagram can then be used in several ways:
- To support discussions with the line manager around the current reality
- To develop a personal and performance development plan for the broker
- As one of the tools in monitoring and reviewing the brokering approach and how it is contributing to the work of the partnership.

The feedback report should provide an overview of the results and highlight the broker’s main strengths and areas where he/she might like to develop further.
Making an informal assessment

There might be situations where the broker's line manager, a lead partner or the broker does not want to or needs to do a detailed or formal assessment but sees the benefit of assessing the brokering approach more informally. This might involve a discussion between the broker, the line manager and a few partners around some or all of the process- and values-based dimensions. Time can be set aside specially for such an informal assessment or it can be added to the normal schedule of reporting and meeting activities. It is advisable, however, to record the key points of such an assessment as well as key actions and outcomes agreed.

Next steps

The author is looking for feedback on the position paper as well as opportunities to test the evaluation tool with brokers to help further develop the tool.

How to contact

Surinder Hundal can be reached on surinder@rippleseed.com

References

- The Brokering Guidebook: Navigating Effective Sustainable Development Partnership (2005), Ros Tennyson, International Business Leaders Forum
- The Partnership Brokering Project website (http://partnershipbrokers.org)

Biography

After a career in the corporate sector where she led work on communications, strategy and partnerships, Surinder Hundal is now working specifically in the field of cross-sector partnerships, partnership brokering and partnership evaluation. As an accredited partnership broker, she works both as an independent consultant and as an Associate of IBLF’s Partnering Initiative. Building on her deep interest in partnerships for sustainable development, she completed the University of Cambridge postgraduate certificate in Cross-sector Partnerships.

Surinder has a wealth of experience in creating, leading and developing multi-cultural teams in both corporate and not-for-profit organisations. She values the importance of performance evaluation and development as a way of helping individuals to achieve their personal and organisational objectives. Whilst carrying out a partnership brokering evaluation for a global not-for-profit organisation, she identified the need for an evaluation tool for brokers as part of their development.