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Leaning In:

A lean canvas for public-private partnerships in humanitarian action and disaster resilience

Partnership brokers use tools in staging and facilitating stakeholder interests and decisions. The most effective tools are simple, intuitive and versatile. This paper considers how adapting an ubiquitous business design tool might serve in framing a multi-stakeholder partnership agreement. Like borrowing tools from a neighbour, the tool and approach deliberately leans into partnership.

The paper considers the Public-Private Partnership lean canvas (PPPCanvas) during the ‘managing and maintaining’ and ‘reviewing and revising’ stages of the partnering cycle. It considers how use of the tool might be perceived and speculates who might be excited or less impressed by it. In summary, it considers values and risks to a partnership

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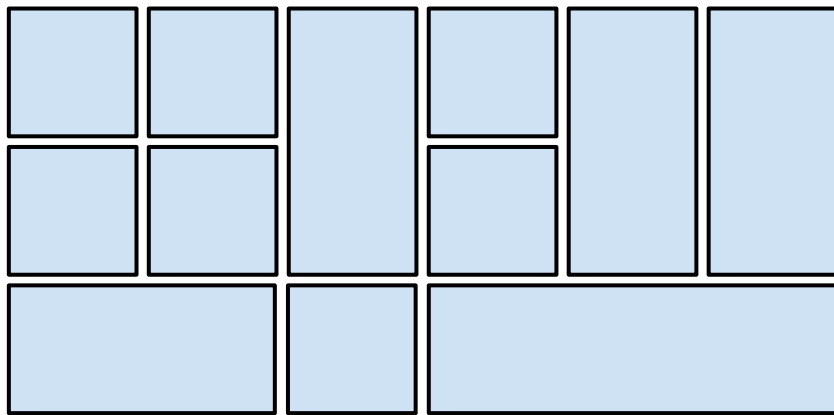
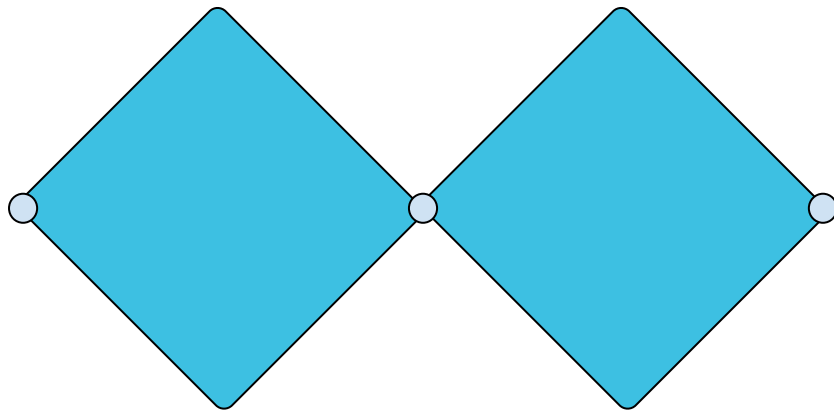
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Summary

The partnership broker's toolkit includes frameworks, exercises and approaches to support a partnership in moving from one phase to another in the partnering cycle. This paper considers how an adaptation of a business design tool may serve to frame a partnership in familiar and simple terms for parties to lean in, reflect on and refer to regarding their collective commitment and contribution.

I currently work with a multilateral organisation to coordinate and support a network of brokers responsible for shepherding public-private partnerships for humanitarian action and disaster resilience. My challenge is to remotely facilitate the ethical empowerment of brokers and to foster learning for team capacity development and organisational change.

The reflections in this paper have immediate practical relevance to the project that I am working on and I hope it will serve as a reference for other brokers in the community of practice.

Introduction

Leaning into partnership with the private (business) sector challenges the public (government, civil society) sector to consider their value proposition and ways of working towards impact. Challenging oneself and peers is arguably what serves to build a partnership around core principles such as equity, transparency and co-benefit. The broker recognises this imperative and makes use of tools in collaborative exercises to foster critical thinking among partners.

Tools serve the partnership broker in facilitating key steps and decisions for effective collaboration throughout the partnership cycle. Partnership tools are a means to an end - an instrument to achieve a goal. This paper considers the application of a tool in the paradigm of brokering Public-Private Partnerships in humanitarian action and disaster resilience.

The following discussion examines the Public-Private Partnership lean canvas (PPPCanvas) and situates its use during the 'managing and maintaining' and 'reviewing and revising' stages in the partnering cycle. It considers how the tool might be perceived by partners in the context of a specific project and speculates as to who might be excited or less impressed by it. It also considers the values and risks of partners using this tool.

Tools for partnering

The Partnership Brokers Training (PBT) exposes participants to a selection of tools in the context of the partnering cycle - some are for understanding oneself as a broker, while others are for helping partners to understand each other. To recount a few:

- *'Belbin's team inventory'* is a self-assessment tool for the broker to better understand their interpersonal approach at a moment in time, providing a footing for personal and professional self-development at all phases of a partnership.
- The *'complexity framework'* is a useful compass for the broker to navigate and steer their approach at all phases of a partnership.
- The *'partnership building tool'* serves the broker to help partners get to a "yes" and move a partnership from the 'scoping/ building' to the 'managing/ maintaining' phase (or alternatively, bringing partnership scoping to a close in the case of a "no").

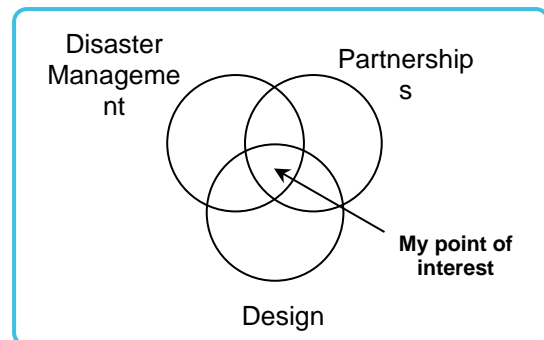
Tools for partnership brokering are different from conventional project tools in that they are either for opening up or co-creation. For the purpose of distinction, a *non-substantive* partnership tool is the conversation starter - the quintessential icebreaker. This contrasted by a *substantive* partnership tool: one that promotes honest and critical reflection, shifts in power and prompts for co-creation. The substantive tool is grounded in principles and is applied with the potential of addressing critical partnering challenges, needs and goals.

Tools for discovery and purpose

Partnership tools need to be sufficiently flexible and adaptive to needs and context. Testing and iteration in situ is a way for a broker to first anticipate, observe and adapt tools and their use to achieve a desired impact on the brokering process and its outcomes.

PBT participants engage with tools in role play scenarios for learning which leads to various permutations of the same learning outcomes. Role play is exciting and memorable - it serves in observing how we act and shaping critical reflection of how we might act differently next time. Hence where possible some bodystorming or rehearsing the use of tools prior to a meeting can be extremely helpful to iterate the staging of partnership encounters.

In the field of disaster management, practitioners are familiar with role play and rehearsal of contingency plans and preparedness through simulation exercises and drills. In the field of start-up business, the approach of 'design thinking' and 'collaborative design' (co-design) underpin prototyping as a process to craft products and services that are market fit. The intersection of these two fields is what inspires my exploration of new approaches and tools for partnership brokering.



What is the PPP Lean Canvas?

The '[PPPCanvas](#)' is a tool that can be used to analyse the business model of a Public-Private Partnership, including what value is being delivered, how partners aim to deliver this value and to whom exactly. Like the Business Model Canvas, it helps to visualise, design and pivot a business model ([PPPLab](#), 2017).



The Public Private Partnership (PPP) lean canvas, or 'PPPCanvas', is a tool for developing new and documenting existing multi-stakeholder partnership models using a strategic management visual chart adapted from the Business Model Canvas (BMC). The BMC, otherwise referred to as a 'lean canvas', is a modelling tool to deconstruct a business startup idea into its key and most risky assumptions (Osterwalder et al., 2010). In this regard the PPPCanvas has great utility for partnership brokering by laying out - simply and succinctly - a collective understanding of a partnership initiative and some of its key elements.

The PPPCanvas is an adaptation of the BMC that includes the addition of 4 new fields: 'Extended Beneficiaries' (2), 'Impact' (4), 'Governance' (11) and 'Business Ecosystem' (13).

This PPPCanvas shifts the focus of the BMC tool from being focused on business/ organisation to being partnership/ multistakeholder. It also addresses a key shortfall of BMC: its conceptual isolation from its environment, whether this is related to the industry structure or to stakeholders such as society and natural environment.

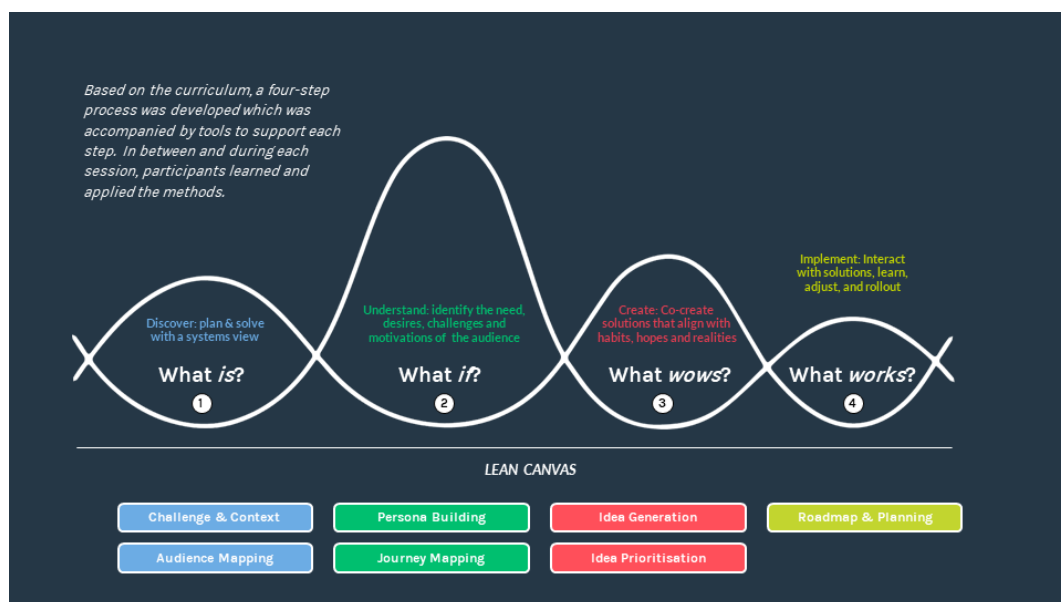
Assumptions and change in circumstance over time are factors that should be considered when this tool is used in service of a partnership. The PPPCanvas currently provides a static snapshot and hence does not capture changes in strategy or the evolution of the model, nor does it capture details about the interaction between the components and how this makes the model work. The PPPCanvas does account for who contributed, which organisation they represent and it does not prompt disclosure of their assumptions either. In spite of these caveats and limitations the PPPCanvas has certain appeal to its use as a collaborative canvas.

PPPCanvas for multi-stakeholder partnerships

How might it be applied?

I will apply the PPPCanvas for a project on building multi-stakeholder partnerships for humanitarian action and disaster resilience. As a project coordinator I am faced with the challenge of building capacity on private sector engagement and in supporting teams - both internal and external - to collaborate and frame their intentions to partner. I intend to use the tool in coaching for partnership approaches and behaviours, and in supporting teams to formulate concise engagement strategies.

While the steps for working on the PPPCanvas are inferred by sequential numbering, the facilitation of the process is generally left open to the user. The PPPCanvas has suggested fields with guiding questions but is not prescriptive in the depth and detail required, hence it accommodates for creative licence within parameters. In this regard the process is just as important as the end product to instil confidence, clarity and value for contributors.



I used this tool backstage to download key takeaways from a progressive programme of reflective exercises that drives partners to understand the challenge and each other, to map their collective journey, to generate and prioritise their ideas (see the process overview, above). Each exercise of the programme contributes to a learning objective and to a component of the canvas in the process. A note of caution: if the partnership meeting is presented simply to fill out the PPPCanvas this may, in semblance, reduce the exercise to the mundane 'box ticking' exercise and doing so would miss the opportunity to achieve a critical partnering goal.

Which partnering principles feature?

Co-creation of principles with a new or existing group of partners has to be brought to life in practice. A simple discussion on principles and bringing them into play through development and reference to the tool could be one way of addressing this. It is important to ask partners *what is required in order to work together effectively?* In establishing some consensus this will be the source of verification when reviewing input to the canvas by asking *does it reflect what was said and committed to?*

Through the process of developing a PPPCanvas I aim to encourage teams within and between partner organisations to let go of control, look past conventions, and share risk. Links of the PPPCanvas to business start-up culture may encourage public sector teams to 'lean in' to partnership using tools that are more familiar to and celebrated by their counterparts from the private sector. I expect to hear from the brokers I work with and their partners that it is important that everyone is heard (diversity), that everyone's input is given equal consideration (equity) and that partners actively work together in the process (openness).

- **Diversity.** Ensuring that everyone makes a contribution is a challenge. There is a need to put into perspective that diversity brings new value. In practical terms this may be achieved by reaching some agreement on 'equal talk time' and ways of showing respect for divergent perspectives. In this regard it is valuable to review the partnership as a process rather than just a sum of its output.
- **Equity.** Getting partners to see the value that others bring is another challenge. It is worthwhile asking partner groups (ie. business, public sector, NGOs) to consider what they are good at versus what they are not good at. When presenting back, partners see how other partner groups might squarely address their shortcomings through a partnership agreement. This is a tried and tested approach of shifting a transactional relationship to focus on the value of non-financial contributions (Serafin and Tennyson, 2006).
- **Openness.** A further challenge is helping partners to build trust in one another through the process. Businesses are reluctant to talk about their motivations, while the public sector tends to take a moral high-ground with its rights-based approaches. Exercises, including serious games like the 'chair game' that help partners lean into one another are important to help partners to open up and honestly share.

When might it be used?

The PPPCanvas is distinct in that it moves beyond the formal agreement to partner (ie. the Memorandum of Understanding) towards a plan of action. Hence it is suggested that the PPPCanvas would be of real benefit to the 'managing and maintaining' and 'reviewing and revising' phases of the partnership cycle.

In *managing and maintaining*, the PPPCanvas serves as a collaborative visual template to progressively document a partnership development conversation. At this stage partners are generally asking: *How are we going to make this work? What elements need to come together and when?* This is an opportunity for the broker to use the canvas as a medium for partners to build out what is required, especially the points on governance. The broker's goal is that partners consider the canvas a product that is *theirs*. In this regard I see the potential of the PPPCanvas serving a communications function for contributors to advocate for the partnership within their own organisation.

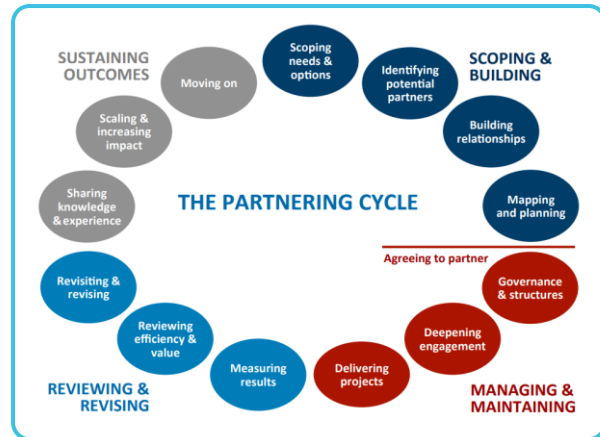
In *reviewing and revising*, the PPPCanvas may serve as a means of verification for looking back and checking how a partnership may have grown. As previously mentioned, the PPPCanvas is non-longitudinal in its current format so if it is intended for this purpose the broker may consider adapting this tool to demarcate version history, including encouraging use of illustration or imagery alongside written statements as visual markers. Partners should have established during the scoping and building and/or managing and maintaining phase what success looks like to the partnership. Aside from those success factors agreed to by the partners, a key indicator for the broker to consider as to their success may be *do the partner representatives serve as ambassadors within their organisation?*

Who is it for and how might it be received?

PPPCanvas is for current or prospective partners from both the public and private sectors. I expect a mixed reception to the proposal of using the PPPCanvas for partnership brokering.

From the public sector audience I expect:

- Eagerness to talk about funding and financial contributions of the business sector.
- Difficulty comprehending why partners should collectively frame the 'business case' in relation to public services and basic rights (ie. access to drinking water).
- Scepticism with this tool giving adequate priority to partnering principles, rights of 'extended beneficiaries' and organisational due diligence.
- General concern that this tool does not explicitly account for and manage risks.



From the private sector I expect:

- Excitement, willingness and ease in trusting a familiar process, especially where they are from an industry or organisation that embraces design thinking processes.
- Seeing this as a 'quick fix' for forging multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- A low tolerance for 'navel gazing' and box-checking exercises.
- Unease divulging motivations and areas where they are not so strong.

Why this tool?

The PPPCanvas is a tool for the broker to logically arrange discussion among partners and synthesise concise, collective statements of what a partnership is about. It has the potential to be transformative where partners actively co-create around certain elements, where it serves the broker to prompt reflection and consideration of what each partner brings to the table (ie. through newfound recognition of and respect for the value that other partners bring), and where realisation of this contribution prompts a shift in power (ie. mutual support and respect as an outcome). We aim at drawing people out to become better practitioners and partners.

To the extent possible I sought to apply and build on a tool that exists rather than reinventing the wheel. I chose to use the PPPCanvas in a deliberate attempt to lean into the interests of the private sector through a tool familiar to the counterpart. In doing so the public sector partner staff I work with will have to adjust (the business sector less so) and in this regard there may be more emphasis on perspective change for the people within my organisation. There are a number of values and risks that I consider worth mentioning:

Values:	Risks:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Addresses a gap: driving commitment to a results-oriented partnership.● Can be highly imaginative and focusing at the same time without being limiting.● Accounts for the interests of the counterpart to garner their support.● Process of working with tools gives partners an opportunity to switch roles and function differently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reliance on one tool, hanging onto it as a crutch and it not working.● Overemphasis on the tool as an output rather than its process of articulation.● Limited or too much attention is given (ie. being too prescriptive) in clarifying the objective of the exercise, expected outcomes and considerations.● Insufficient time and consideration given to adapt the tool.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to outline the potential for making use of the PPPCanvas in partnership brokering which builds on a commonly regarded business management tool. I considered the use of the PPPCanvas in the partnering process and how it may serve to achieve higher level goals, specifically I consider using the PPPCanvas as a medium to help partners lean in, open up and co-create.

The point about tools is to be systematic. Tools have no utility as stand alone instruments. Rather, their value is sharpened through deliberative exercises that include sufficient down time to reflect on what works, what is not working and how it might be applied next time. In this regard I have discussed how a partnering tool should be flexible enough to be adjusted for context whilst providing some means to structure thinking and analysis. I have also discussed the need for tools to be nested within transformational exercises.

The craft of partnering does not need to be entirely whimsical. In fact it is layered, complex and comprehensive. The broker has to frequently toggle from a systems to interpersonal mindset. Partnership brokering as a professional domain is still nascent. The partnering toolkit draws experience, working models and tools from different professional fields including psychology, project management, political science, the arts, etc. In this discussion I have made the case for drawing from the field of business design for social impact.

The PPPCanvas may serve as an addition to the partnership broker's toolkit and fill a gap in the managing/ maintaining and reviewing/ revising phases. It may serve as a backstage canvas for the broker to arrange points drawn from partnership discussions or alternatively it can be centre stage for partners to huddle around with post-its. I raise the potential value and risks of using this tool in partnership brokering and look forward to reflection upon further testing and iteration of this tool in practice.

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Author's note

The PPPCanvas is an open source product registered under Creative Commons that was developed by the PPPLab: a four-year action research and joint learning & support initiative (2014-2018) to learn about the relevance, effectiveness and quality of Dutch supported public-private partnerships (PPPs). Its mission was to extract and co-create knowledge and methodological lessons from and on PPPs that can be used to improve both implementation and policy. www.ppplab.org

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