

OPTIMISING VALUE CREATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

PART 2 - The Dance of Partnering

PART TWO

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- The Dance of Partnering
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This article is presented in two parts:

The first presents a “Case for Partnering”. We offer a warning story to support the case and then discuss the foundational elements of partnering.

The second draws the distinction between the formal and social contracts of partnering. It looks at the “Dance of Partnering” and shares the story of an eco-minded response that arose from a natural disaster. The conclusion of both parts is offered as a Provocation to Partner.

THE PREMISE

In organisations today, much is at stake. Great opportunity is counterbalanced by great challenge.

At times, we believe we're able to effect positive change, and at other times we're held back.

In the 'to and fro' we ask ourselves: to what, to where and to whom should we turn?

The unequivocal response, we believe, needs to be:
To One Another!

While we can choose to 'go it alone' in these current and emerging times, we are most certainly better together.

The principle way of 'being better together' is in true partnership.

As we navigate the field of opportunity and risk, partnership becomes our greatest resource. In true partnership we unleash our combined inherent potential to optimise value and create valuable solutions together.

THE DANCE OF PARTNERING

The Two Contracts of Partnering - *the one we think about, and the one we don't*

With the basis for partnering established, we can now move to the agreement to Partner.

While an **informal** agreement to partner may be achieved through a set of agreed expectations and ways of working on a handshake; in **formal** agreements, a contract will need to be drafted and scrutinised. The legal people will conduct a thorough approach to the contract. On paper, the risk will be managed, and the prospective benefit of the partnership enabled through clear, unambiguous, explicit text in the form of headings, paragraphs, clauses and subclauses. Ideally, our interests and our partner organisation's interests will be well represented, and everyone will be satisfied.

So, let's say we have in front of us the ideal written contract.

At this point we might think the job is done and all we have to do is stick to the agreement to make it work. If this is the case (and we have worked with leaders who have made this assumption) then we have made a potentially fatal mistake. Many a formal partnership have come undone on this basis.

What was missing in these instances was the other contract - the one that is less obvious and often overlooked; takes longer to embed; is never static, and cannot be written on parchment. We're talking about the social contract.

The social contract refers to the quality of connection, cohesion, trust and mutual benefit. The human side of the agreement.

The social contract in partnerships, informal and formal, is key to the optimisation of value creation.

The social contract is as important, perhaps even more important, because it is the human element that will always enable our carefully considered and strategically important contracts to come to life. It cannot be otherwise.

THE DANCE OF PARTNERING

The Social Contract - *how we dance*

We offer a behavioural model of partnership that brings the social contract to life and addresses the goal of optimising inherent value. This model involves embracing a mindset and set of behaviours that assume partnership will offer greater outcomes if its component parts work or 'dance' together. It also assumes that a successful partnership will contribute far more than it costs; that it arises as a strategic response to the needs of the whole.

Partnering is a continuous movement, a cycle, a dance.

Let's work with the 'dance' analogy for the moment. We have noticed two distinct movements in this dance of partnership: one is '**joining**' and the other is '**differentiating**'. And within this dance are **seven key behaviours** or qualities that facilitate the movement.

Joining is first about developing the relationship to create connection and mutual understanding. It is a convergence where shared understanding and intent brings us together in alignment. When we **join**, we focus on creating a shared language and being deeply curious to understand how others interpret the world.

We **join** before we **differentiate**. This helps us create connection and understanding as a foundation, as it is likely that we interpret the world differently and come from different cultural paradigms or frameworks of belief.

We **join** with the behaviours or qualities of **curiosity, empathy, and trust through Integrity**. Think for a moment of the impact when another person shows genuine interest in you. When someone authentically asks: '*what do you think?*' or caringly asks '*how are you feeling?*': notice the impact of this and most importantly how you lean in and connect.

THE DANCE OF PARTNERING

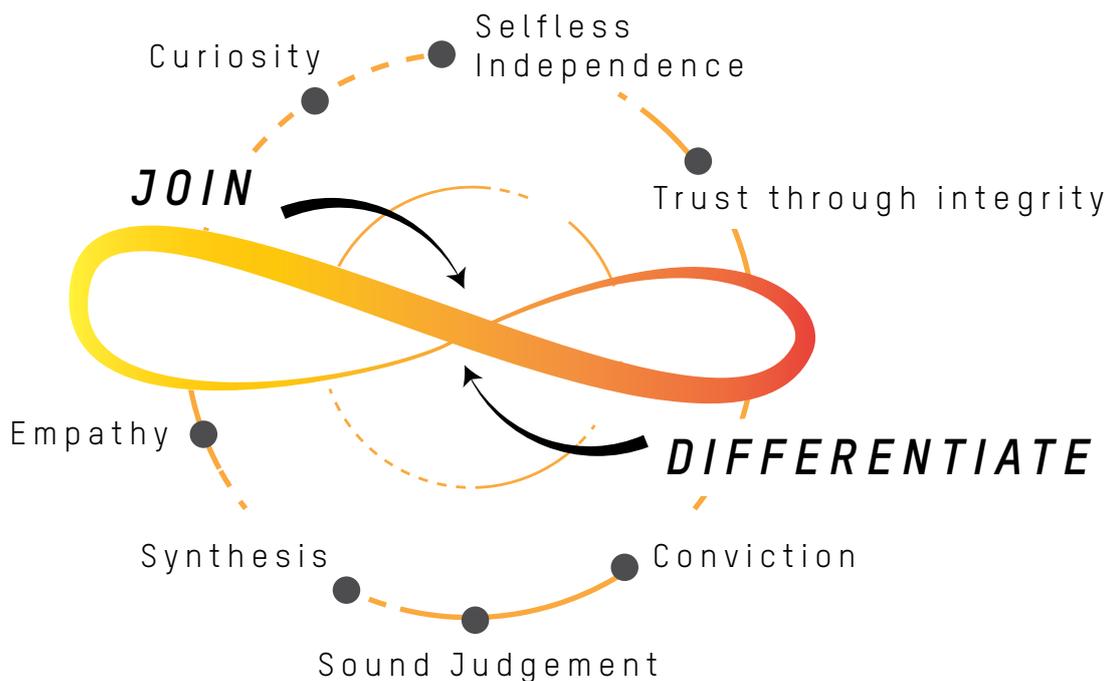
The Social Contract - *how we dance*

Differentiating is the complementing movement where we explore and embrace multiple perspectives and possibilities by way of divergence. When we differentiate well, we are able to hold the “tension of opposites” and navigate towards mutually beneficial solutions. We work with the recognition that co-creation, collaboration and partnership optimise the inherent potential of an ecosystem. In one sense, it is the symbiotic exchange of ‘give and take’. And in another, it is the alchemy that arises as diverse perspectives and energies combine to form something they cannot achieve without the other.

We **differentiate** with behaviours or qualities such as **curiosity, selfless independence, conviction, good judgment** and **synthesis**.

In the cycle of **joining** and **differentiating** we converge and diverge repeatedly. Within the movement of the partnership we achieve value through the experience and through what emerges as ideas, accomplishments and outcomes.

OPTIMISING VALUE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS



THE DANCE OF PARTNERING

Joining and Differentiating- *time to tango*

To help us carry the 'dance' metaphor further, a partner and friend of our organisation who holds a senior executive position in one of Australia's largest companies heard us speak about the idea of the 'dance' of optimising value through the partnership model. For him, it brought to mind the time he was asked to learn the Waltz with his fiancé in preparation for their wedding.

When the couple arrived at the dance hall for their first lesson, the dance instructor was standing in the centre of the room in a flowing flamenco dress in full splendour. She told them she would not be teaching them the Waltz, but rather, the Tango.

The Waltz, she reasoned, requires the man to lead, and in that sense, one becomes subordinate to the other. The Tango, on the other hand, invites both dancers to lean-in equally and within the construct of the steps to be spontaneous - to offer a differentiated vitality to bring spark, flair and full passionate expression to the occasion. After weeks of dedicated practice, the blissful couple performed the Tango in magnificent style; much to the joy and celebration of their beloved families and friends.

No doubt you can appreciate this story, as we did, in the way it exemplifies the creation of value. And how, by both **joining** in equal participation and by **differentiating** through unique contribution, the dance becomes a whole system experience, that each component part could never achieve alone.

THE DANCE OF PARTNERING

An Eco-Minded Response - *drop everything*

To further illustrate the principle of 'better together' and the potency realised when we partner in mutual trust; think of the way communities and organisations come together when natural disasters occur.

The 2019 Townsville floods in Queensland provide us with a lived example.

Six weeks after the store was destroyed by floods, Woolworths Fairfield Central re-opened for trading. Multiple teams had worked seamlessly together to do more than replace the old store – they'd gone one step further and made many improvements. Responding to the clear need, spontaneous partnerships had arisen with an incredible sense of purpose, shared intent, trust, collaboration and extremely well managed outcomes. Teams partnered to create optimal value in an incredibly quick time frame. When asked about the rectification process, team members spoke about the 'drop everything' approach that occurred across the different departments. They spoke about the incredible energy they felt being united by a common purpose.

Given the history of the area, teams were ready to spring into action. While clearing and cleaning was going on, another team were drawing up plans, while yet another was readying to install equipment and fittings. Stock was also ordered and held in readiness in warehouses. The end result achieving incredible efficiency and positive results. People spoke about this achievement long afterwards and today some consider it one of their greater accomplishments of 2019.

What occurred in this example, as in many responses to natural disasters, is what we think of as an eco-minded response. The five foundational elements for every partnership baseline (*see Part 1: The Case for Partnering*) were clearly in place without the need for great deliberation. In examples like this, we see evidence that human beings have inherent partnering properties that intuitively and instinctively arise in the face of critical needs: we come together – we connect – we make sense of what is going on and what needs to happen and then everyone pitches in – we're coordinating, often spontaneously and without a pre-determined plan.

This example of collaborative behaviour again connects us to Scharmer's **shared awareness** and to Capra's **pervasive cooperation** (*see Part 1: The Case for Partnering*). It speaks to the power of collective will when unified by a common cause. Our response to natural disaster is highly instructive because it points to the inherent potential that arises spontaneously when we collectively sense the need. It's as if the urgency and importance of the situation helps us surpass an 'ego' state and go directly to an 'eco' state.

THE DANCE OF PARTNERING

Provocation to Partner - *ego or eco?*

We believe the significant leadership responsibility of our time is for us to ask powerful ego-busting questions of ourselves. Questions such as:

- Where, when and how might I be operating from 'ego-mind'?
- What is the inherent potential in the organisational system not being released or optimised because of this?
- What needs would I see if I became more aware of my own 'ego-state' blind spots?
- Who do I need to reach out to that I've been keeping my distance from, through my own fears and judgments?
- What is the value that could be created if I initiate the invitation for a partner to dance?
- What could happen if I become more intentional in seeing and sensing the needs of the emerging future?

To address the challenges and opportunities of the emerging future - our contention is unequivocal:

Partnering is the essential characteristic of sustainable communities and the most effective response to leverage the inherent potential of a living system.

Curiously, what gets in the way of us seeing this, is based in mindset. For the most part: when we don't partner, we, our 'ego-mind', gets in the way.

To optimise the inherent value through partnership means it's down to us: To get out of own way – to join and differentiate well together – to lean in to the dance of mutual benefit – to energise the social contract - to sense and see the need of the emerging future – to unlock and optimise the inherent potential residing in our living system. To partner and truly be better together.



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