

The Dance of Partnering

Joining and Differentiating.

Coming together is a beginning. Staying together is a progress Working together is success.

- Henry Ford

It Takes Two to Tango

A long-time friend of the Performance Frontiers team once shared a story that got us thinking about the dynamics of partnership: something we often liken to a dance.

In 2019, the senior executive set out to learn the Waltz with his then fiancé in preparation for their upcoming 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 full splendour, wearing a flowing flamenco dress.

To their surprise, she told them she would not be teaching them the traditional Waltz. Instead, they would be learning 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, flourish, and full expression.

After weeks of dedicated practice, the delighted duo performed the Tango in magnificent style, each showcasing their own unique flair, much to the joy and celebration of their beloved families and friends.

The spectacle of the Tango represents the value created by two parties working in partnership. The dance is something that each could never achieve alone, and only possible by both parties first coming together, **joining** in equal participation within an agreed framework of dance, and then by **differentiating** through each bringing their unique contribution.

Optimising Value Through Partnership

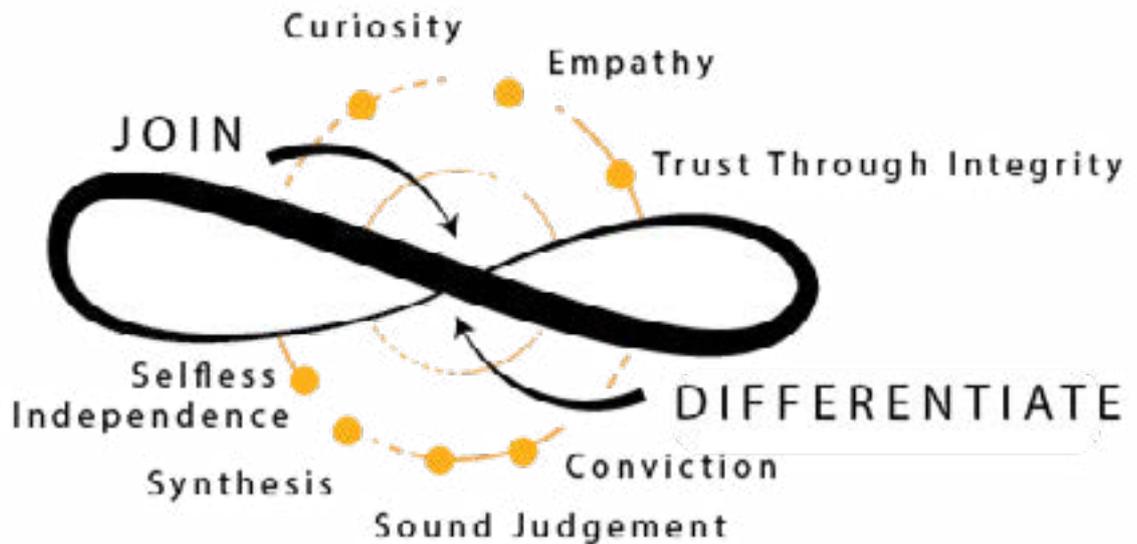


Figure 1.0 Optimising Value Through Partnership Model - Performance Frontiers

The Dance

Partnering is a continuous movement. A cycle. A dance of two distinct movements: joining and differentiating.

In one sense, joining and differentiating 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.

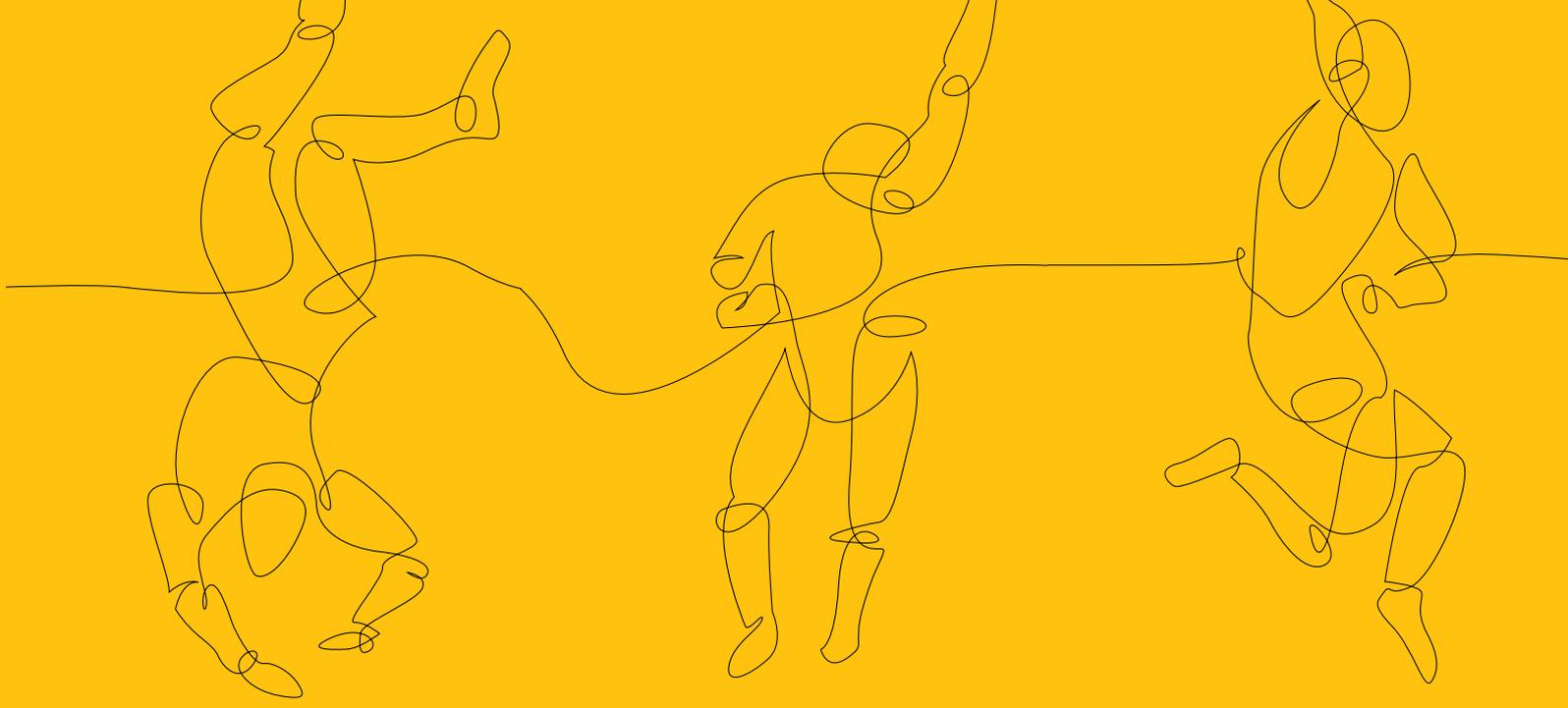
Joining

Joining is first about developing the relationship. 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 with the behaviours or qualities of curiosity, empathy, and trust through Integrity.

In any relationship or interaction, it's important to join before we differentiate. While it is likely that we each have our own needs and interpret the world differently or come from different cultural frameworks, we are both human with many common goals, and should connect on this level first.

Think for a moment of the impact when another person shows genuine interest in you. When someone authentically asks: 'what do you think?', 'how are you feeling?' or 'what's been going on for you?'. Notice how this makes you feel valued, how you lean in and connect. Also consider how asking these questions of others makes you feel about them - how it breaks down "black and white", "good guy, bad guy" thinking, opening the door to another person's humanity and their valuable viewpoint.

Joining first lays the foundation for mutual understanding and strengthens the relational container enabling us to differentiate safely.



Differentiating

Differentiating is the complementing movement where we explore and embrace multiple perspectives and possibilities by way of divergence. This is where creative tension arises: it provides a source of energy that propels action from both parties towards a common vision.

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 the system of which all are a part (i.e. community, world, organisation). By each offering our differing strengths, viewpoints, resources, and ideas towards a common goal, we access different thinking, make visible alternative pathways and generate new possibilities. Creative tension is where innovation is found and value creation is maximised.

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

Learn the Steps

In reality, the dance of partnering involves ducking and weaving between joining and differentiating, to maintain a constructive level of creative tension. Learning how to perform this dance of partnering with ease requires preparation and a particular mindset. We need:

- 1. A deep appreciation and awareness of the whole context from which we’re operating:** Connecting to and understanding the field in which we operate from a whole systems

perspective requires us to be curious, gather data, appreciate multiple perspectives and, most importantly, the needs of all stakeholders.

- 2. An intent to create value and be mutually aligned on purpose:** Shared intent is the aligning force to successful partnerships. While all partnerships are strengthened through diversity of views, ideas and skills, they cannot function at an optimal level without alignment.
- 3. All participants working from a platform of trust and transparency:** Trust is the primary enabling agent in human relationships. Transparency facilitates trust as it creates certainty and clarity.
- 4. A recognition that co-creation, collaboration and partnership optimises the inherent potential of the ecosystem:** We appreciate that none of us, alone, are smarter or more capable than all of us working in dynamic and constructive relationships, together.
- 5. A commitment to setting agreed success criteria and embedded ways of working:** Forming and upholding expectations and agreements provides a framework in which we can operate with certainty and clarity, and facilitates alignment and a sense of shared purpose.

When striking up a conversation with any key collaborators, don't forget the dance of joining and differentiating. For it is only by valuing the dance of partnership that we can partner to create value.



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