THE PARTNERSHIPS RESOURCE CENTRE

PARTNERING SKILLS
The basic philisophy

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1. Introduction: entering a partnering society

These are challenging times, surrounded by considerable uncertainties. Issues are complex, interests are high and often conflicting, and convenient paradigms or ideologies no longer exist to guide us. The solutions of the past, where governments, civil society or firms had clearly delineated responsibilities and actions, have reached their limitations as highlighted by large numbers of failures and a long line of consecutive crises. Solutions to societal problems have to be developed and implemented in collaboration with other actors, which creates the need for a partnering society (Van Tulder, 2010). Effectively operating in the "partnering space" (Figure 1) that appears between the traditional spheres of state, market and civil society, requires new combinations of specific attitudes and skills:

Figure 1 The Partnering Space
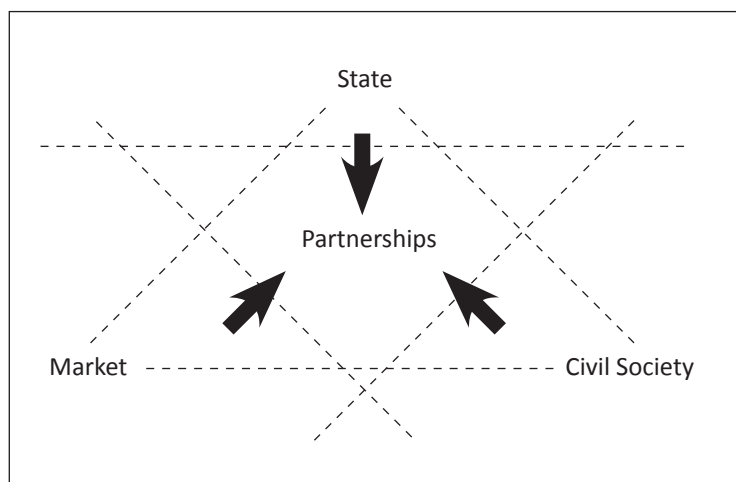
Source: Van Tulder, 2009

[1] You enter into a bargaining arena where there are no set or proven rules.
[2] You have to create new rules, institutions and traditions, rather than follow the ones that are already there.
[3] This implies that you have to move beyond your own comfort zone, based on previous ideas.
[4] This means that you have to be flexible and to a certain extent philosophical, because most things become relative.
[5] This requires a high tolerance for ambiguity (which has been identified as one of the most important characteristics of successful managers, entrepreneurs, as well as researchers and leaders).
[6] Managing the intellectual and institutional void of the partnering space necessitates considerable people skills, since problems are always shared problems, whereas solutions can only be created in collaboration with other people.
[7] Effectively managing or leading people requires effectively managing oneself, which in turn necessitates a considerable degree of professionalism and a great willingness to learn.
[8] The actual form of partnership that is chosen makes you want to play different roles over time, and requires you to understand your own and other's interests (otherwise no sustainable solutions are possible).
[9] Finally, the danger of 'deskilling' looms large in partnering processes. Processes of deskilling imply that you lose touch with your previous constituency and skills and that a completely new set of skill is necessary.

2. Four skill development challenges

The specific requirements linked to the partnering space, present four challenges for skill development: relevance, reliability, timeliness and sharing.

Relevance

Instead of hierarchies, relatively open communities increasingly interact with each other. Access to knowledge grows partly due to the spread of the internet, but also due to the breaking down of ideologies and other shared values.

Communities of peers pragmatically get together to interactively produce joint knowledge. This is also known as the 'network society' and is perhaps best exemplified by the Wiki-phenomenon in which an open community of often un-registered participants – aided by collaborative software and the internet – generate knowledge through quickly adding, removing and editing content. 'Wiki' means 'able to be edited quickly'. In some instances, quick and open Wiki networks have already led to better and more accessible knowledge than the slower networks of closed communities dominated, for instance, by scientific peers. The networking society has multiple centres of power and decision-making although this also makes it more difficult to change course once it takes the wrong route. The declining number of shared values can lead to the disintegration of societies that were built on these values, with nothing to replace them (cf. Etzioni, 1998). The power vacuum produces an institutional void, in which the lack of common rules and practices can also lead to chaos (cf. Van Tulder, with Van der Zwart, 2006). This process is further reinforced by the failure of states, civil society and market players to find effective solutions to the most pressing needs of society. Rather than develop independent solutions, 'network' approaches are becoming the rule of the game and 'partnerships' the most important organisational carrier.

• The first skill challenge of a partnering society is to identify and enter into relevant networks of collaborating partners.

Reliability

This network society also changes the traditional selection criteria for identifying the quality and the relevance of knowledge. Absolute quality is becoming less relevant than relative quality, not in the least because there is no mutually accepted authority that can define absolute quality standards. Increasingly benchmarking and rankings are used to distinguish 'best-practices' and help individual participants specify their own rules of engagement. But who defines the 'best-practice' and who compiles the rankings? It has been shown that the more independent ranking agencies are, the more reliable knowledge they produce. However, in a bargaining society independence is a very relative concept. At the same time, 'peer reviews' act as an increasingly important mechanism through which information and influence is regulated. In the media, accountancy, the medical and legal sectors, science in general, and even in countries, peer reviews are considered the only feasible way to come to judgements. But how independent are these peers and who defines who 'the peers' are? Networks of peers often constitute rather closed communities, which in turn limits the trend towards 'openness'. There is, finally, a constant quest to produce ratios, rankings, exact measures. What counts is what you can measure, and in the bargaining society that also applies to the unmeasurable. The resulting 'numeracy society' creates another (bargaining) problem – that of a growing number of innumerate people. Innumeracy is the "inability or unwillingness to understand basic mathematical ideas involving numbers of logic as they apply in everyday life" (Dewdney, 1993). It is the mathematical parallel to illiteracy. In bargaining processes, actors (companies, governments, special-interest groups, the media) increasingly use mathematics – in numbers, surveys, percentages – to sell their ideas and products. But this use can easily turn into abuse, as actors exploit the innumeracy of their audience by twisting logic and distorting numbers (ibid: 2).

• The second skill challenge of a partnering society is to produce high quality and relevant knowledge on the basis of peer review and benchmarking. It requires high skills levels to identify, select and reproduce reliable knowledge primarily developed in partnerships with others.

Timeliness

The partnering society can empower skilful participants. But as a societal model, it seems to come at a considerable price. Knowledge creation and diffusion is basically a slow process. In a bargaining society, there is less time available for slow progress. Under the constant pressure of the media, customers, funding agencies and people in general are often stimulated to put more emphasis on timely rather than relevant information. In this context, two new phenomena have appeared: (a) choice stress and (b) 'infobesitas' (Kraaijeveld and Weusten, 2010). The overdose of information and the constant pressure to make choices can cause lack of concentration, tiredness and lack of sleep especially among younger people who often operate more actively in the partnering space, but lack roots in any of the three societal spheres or previous ideologies. As a result, instead of collaboration and dialogue, society becomes governed by the principles of a 'debate society', in which sound bites and smart one-liners are more important than solid argumentation. At the same time, this spurs a degree of 'negativity', criticism and cynicism that is considered by many observers to be underrepresented in contemporary history. This trend is based on a fundamental human trait, i.e. that people tend to remember four negative memories for every positive one (Roberts et al, 2005). This makes distant and negative commenting easier than committed and positive feedback. Enter the idea of a 'low trust' society (Troman, 2000) in which calculating behaviour prevails.

- The third skill challenge of a partnering society entails producing relevant and reliable (controllable) knowledge for specific audiences. It requires high skill levels to produce (often together with others) timely knowledge with sufficient independence.

Sharing

What is the outcome of all of the above parallel developments? Two final societal concepts are relevant in this respect: the risk society and the hyperkinetic society. The term 'risk society' was first coined by Ulrich Beck (1992) . He focussed on competing scientific and political ways in the management of the increasing risks associated with modern society. Modern risks are 'manufactured' and much more the result of human activity than in the past. The operation of a risk society has a boomerang effect, in that individuals will also increasingly be exposed to these risks. But the distribution of the causes and consequences of risk can be unequal. According to Beck, the unequal distribution of risk is fundamentally dependent on the knowledge and access to information of individuals. This brings us back to the above mentioned skill challenges. To what extent can individuals become aware of the threats and opportunities of the risk society? Here the challenge can become very personal. The present risk society has also manufactured a 'hyperkinetic society' (cf. Hallowell, 2005) in which fast thinking is more important than deep thinking. The demands on time and attention of the human brains have exploded over the last two decades. Life has accelerated tremendously. According to Hallowell (2005) the human mind is filled with noise and the brain gradually loses its capacity to fully and thoroughly do anything. As a result, even smart people tend to underperform and suffer from serious attention deficits. They can only perform under stress. Stress stimulates the production of adrenaline which resembles the chemicals used to treat Attention Distraction Disorder – a neurological disease. Firms, universities, and society at large ask people "to work on multiple overlapping projects and initiatives, resulting in second-rate thinking" (Hallowell, 2005). The hyperkinetic society tends to reward those that do much and punish those that try to focus. As a consequence of the comming-of-age of the hyperkinetic society in many countries, corporate managers, researchers, administrators, citizens and politicians are increasingly operating in a continuous 'survival' mode. This affects the functioning of the brain, which in turn further precipitates calculating behaviour. In a bargaining society, everyone has to become a calculating person to a certain extent. You can do that smartly or not. For instance, engaging in many activities at the same time requires priority setting and management, which in turn requires smart calculating. Calculating is a fact of life in a multi-faceted, rapidly changing society. It is difficult to attach negative or positive connotations per se to calculating behaviour.

- The fourth challenge for a partnering society entails the production of shared knowledge that takes into account the outcome of societal processes, and assesses their desirability in order to come up with effective solutions. This requires an integrated approach to skills. This book aims to give you sufficient support for such an approach.

Four skill challenges

1. Relevance: Use the abundant availability of knowledge produced by groups of peers to access and produce relevant knowledge.
2. Reliability: Identify, select and reproduce reliable knowledge.
3. Timeliness: Produce together with others timely knowledge with sufficient independence.
4. Sharing: Produce shared knowledge that takes the outcome of societal processes into account.

Table 1 links the various challenges of a bargaining society with the prime skill challenges of a partnering approach (column 3).

Table 1 - Partnering skill challenges in a bargaining society

Types	Characteristics	Prime skills challenges	Selected partnership challenges
The Network society	You are who you know.	Communication, self-management	Relevant networks: timely intensification/extensification of networks, partnership portfolio management
The Knowledge economy	Access to knowledge is abundant and decisive for active participation. Problem of 'infobesitas'	Research, Reading	Trilateral thinking,; issue management
The Wiki Society	Quick and open is better than thorough and closed.	Research, reading, writing	Timing of transparency;
The Open Society	Interrelated open networks create better results than closed, isolated, networks.	(self) management	Constructive communication; feedback processes,; dealing with groupthink in partnership
A peer review society	Absolute quality does not exist, it is all in the eye of the beholder.	Research	Leadership, monitoring/evaluation
The Benchmarking society	Doing it right is relative to the 'best-practices'.	Descriptive research > prescriptive research	Monitoring/evaluation: what is your benchmark and when do you use it? Control group yes/no?
The numeracy society	What counts is what you can measure even the unmeasurable.	Relevant research and management	Monitoring/evaluation; quantification yes/no? Zero measurement
The Deadline-society	It is only relevant if it can be achieved within the deadline.	Effective time-management	Entry/exit conditions of partnerships
The Mediacracy	What/who you appear to be is more important than what/who you are.	Presentation	Transparency, governance
The calculating society	Getting it right is only right if it takes the least amount of effort.	(self)management, presentation	Negotiation/mediation, primary responsibility attribution
Multi-individualist society	Everybody opportunistically bargains with everybody else	Bargaining	Establishing the counterfactual; what is the added value of partnerships?
The low-trust society	Low mutual trust in skills and integrity	Learning skills, dealing with the discomfort zone	Monitoring progress, capacity building, trust building; understanding complementary interests (and related trust)
A second opinion society	Two is more than one	Speech	Effective evaluation
The Debate society	You do not have to win a debate, but do not lose it in any case	Speech/listening	Effective decision-making, stakeholder dialogue or debate
A Protestocracy	If you do not protest, you will be ignored (and hit twice as hard)	Dialogue and debate skills	Negotiation, bargaining
The Cynical society	Commenting is more important than commitment	Constructive communication	Ownership, communication
The Risk Society	A society that is preoccupied with the future, 'manufactures' risk and distributes it unevenly	Learning, self-management, management	Effectively dealing with free riders, partnering is risk taking not as luxury but as necessity
The hyperkinetic Society	Fast thinking is more important than deep thinking	Self-management	Timely preparation, appraisal, long term evaluation

3. The partnering skill circle

Many tool books and skill compendia have been developed about partnering skills. Below is a list of the specific partnering skills that are included in the most popular tool books (Carneiro, 2010)

The list is composed of relatively obvious skills that are primarily required to successfully manage a project but not necessarily a cross sector partnership. The implicit suggestion in most tool books is that because partnerships develop in an uncertain environment, political and lobbying skills are needed for external representation, whereas conflict resolution and negotiation skills are also needed for the internal management of partnerships. This is of course true, but cannot be treated independent of the particular type of partnership (content). Furthermore, most of these tool boxes only scantly explain how these skills are related, nor do they specify how and who should develop and apply these skills and how. What should be done? The challenges of the bargaining society require systematic skill development and learning. The listing of 'smart' partnering skills hardly suffices for this purpose. For example, people might become extremely skillful in efficiently managing (or lobbying for) a particular partnership project, but this might not be effective for the intended goals.

Even in skill development a higher level of shared intelligence is needed, which starts by acknowledging that mastering a large variety of interrelated skills at the same time is needed to effectively use partnerships. In order to position these skills and understand how interrelated they are, the kill circle can be used (Van Tulder, 2007) which identifies seven distinct basic skills along two overlapping scales. First, skills can be positioned from purely individual to social/group skills along a social scale. Secondly, skills have a process scale that runs from input oriented to output oriented skills. This basic distinction results in seven relevant basic skills (Figure 2a): (1) research and analytical skills form the core of the circle; (2) individual self-management skills and (3) team and project management skills relate to the following individual social oriented process skills: (4) reading and (5) listening are input oriented skills; and (6) writing and (7) presentation are outward oriented skills. Everybody is as strong as the weakest link in their personal skill circle (ibid). For partnering skills, there is a kind of a hierarchy of skills.

Box 1: The Partnering Skills

- Awareness raising
- building relationships/partnerships
- Coaching / capacity-building
- communications
- consultation
- Co-ordination / Administration
- creative thinking
- Facilitation
- influencing
- Institutional engagement
- Institution-strengthening
- intelligence gathering
- interpretation of key statistics
- managing conflict
- managing external advisers
- managing people
- Managing relationships

- Managing teams
- Marketing
- Mediation
- Monitoring
- Negotiation
- Networking
- Partnership / project 'championship'
- Political awareness
- Presentation
- Project / programme management
- Project / programme planning
- Relationship management
- Resource mobilisation
- Strategic Analysis
- Synthesizing information
- Trends Analysis

Source: PrC Tool database

Figure 2a+b The (Partnering) Skill Circle
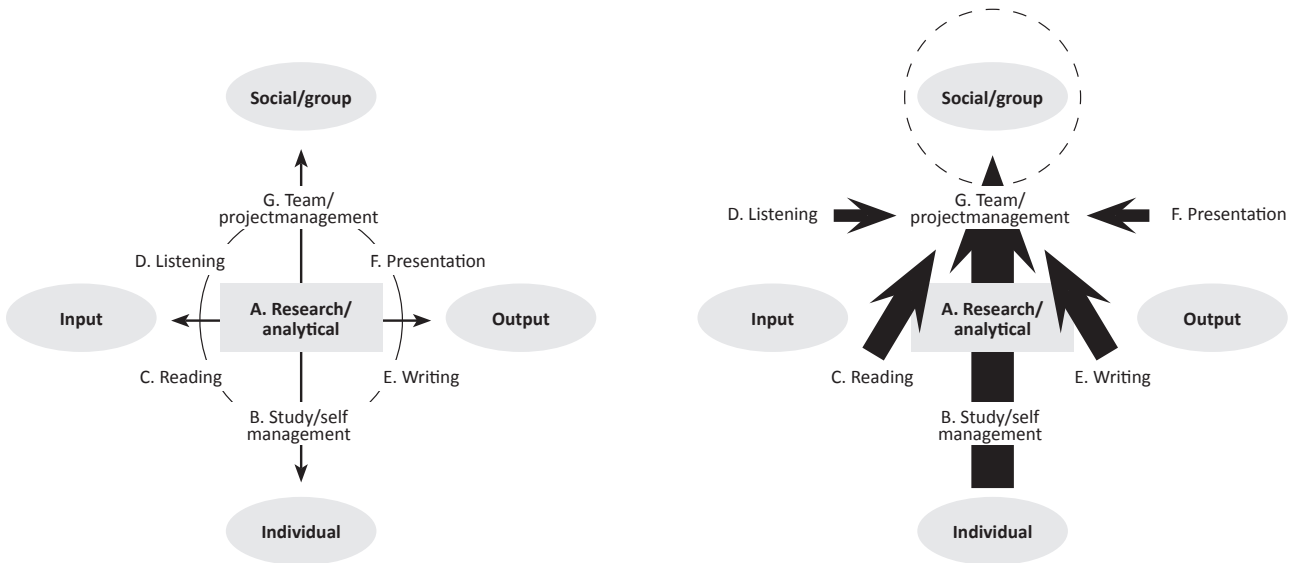
The Partnering "Skill Highway" constitutes the central vertical axis of the skill circle. It runs from self-management skills via research skills to team/project-management skills. "We can know others only by knowing ourselves, but we can know ourselves only by knowing others" (Whetten et al., 2000: 79). The challenge of mastering these skills is that they have a somewhat complicated process dimension - lying in between input and output. Research and analytical skills are prerequisite for giving or asking for reliable advice, and constitute the basis for effective self-management and team-management. Mastering research skills has individual as well as social ingredients. It first implies that you are able to learn from your own experience. Any learning experience commences with personal awareness (self-management) and is followed by a number of learning phases: aware of being relatively incompetent (but blessed in the ignorance of that incompetence) to often agonising periods of awareness of incompetence to a phase of awareness of competence (Figure 3).

Figure 3a+b The learning cycles of Individuals and Teams
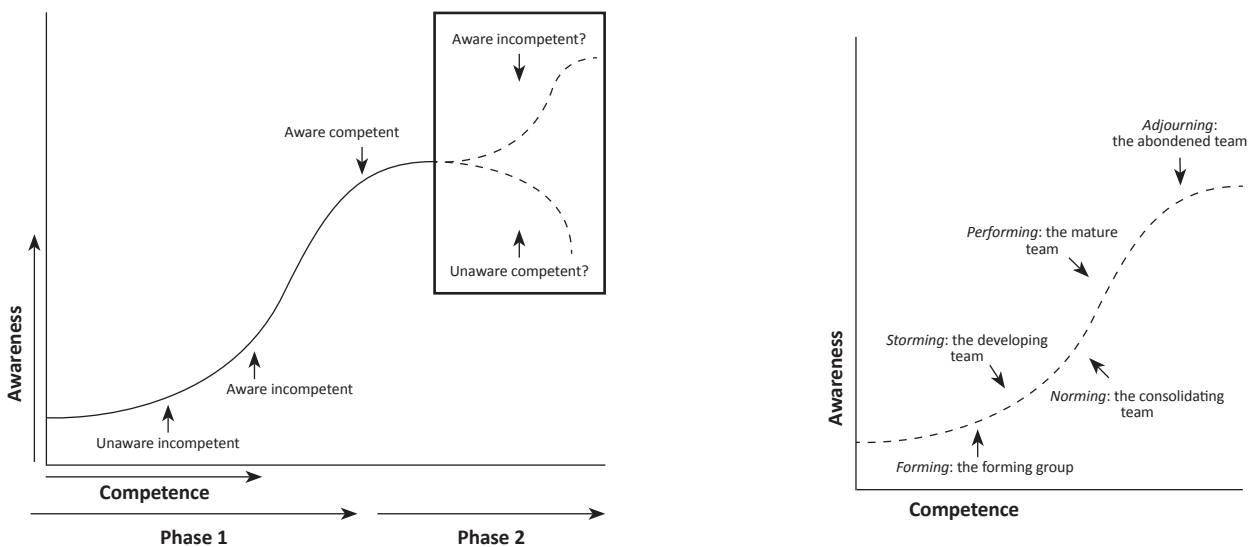
Then you enter a new phase (2) and begin a new cycle of learning new competencies. In learning psychology, the ultimate stage of the learning cycle is considered to be when you are unaware of your competence. This is perhaps important when having to perform complex physical tasks as, for instance, driving a car, but it is not very functional when you have to engage in the continuous learning process that most managerial and research tasks demand. Effective learning requires that you dare to move into the discomfort zone of being aware of your own incompetence again and again, certainly if you want to address a complex issue to which there is no simple answer. Going through the cycle time and

again requires a solid research orientation, which will help you to develop any other skill as well. A research/investigative attitude and the related skills always constitute the linking pin between all the other skills. A research orientation is vital for learning and feedback even in very practical situations. Managers of cross-sector partnerships need to have three vital abilities:

[a] Auto-abilities: to constantly and consistently engage in research themselves (understand limitations of assumptions and research methodologies, also do regular self-assessments and work on own competencies).
[b] Commissioning abilities: to commission relevant and timely research to others (ask relevant and feasible questions and abstain from prescriptive research).
[c] Interpretation abilities: to correctly interpret and build upon the research done by others (solid reading skills also of academic texts).

Figure 3b shows the phases any project team goes through: from forming the group, via developing and consolidating the team to the mature team. The parallel with individual learning processes is obvious. What counts for individual learning processes is equally relevant for group/team learning processes. If partnering teams do not dare to go through a 'discomfort' zone and/or engage in meaningful feedback, the project will be less efficient and effective. The transition from a 'group' of relatively unrelated stakeholders (often with conflicting interests) towards a 'team' of interrelated stakeholders (with shared goals and well elaborated working practices) constitutes the biggest challenge for cross-sector partnerships. As soon as members of a partnership start to derive part of their identity from the team, the partnership moves towards a mature stage, which is denominated as the 'performing' stage. The transition from group to team is often as painful and uncomfortable as the learning process of an individual towards awareness of competence.

The important link between the ability of self-assessment/awareness and project management is regularly stressed in partnering tool books. Take, for instance, these two quotes from The Partnering Inititiative (TPI):

• "Partnering skills are most easily acquired by those who already have a level of self-awareness and self-management. (..) effective partnering requires people who can read and control their own emotions, who are quite confident, and who embody qualities such as empathy, optimism, imagination, open-ness and modesty. Partnerships also crucially require partners who are good at taking initiative" (Tennyson, 2003: 19)
• "in partnerships, it is important to self-assess partners' own partnering skills – in order to build confidence about skills strengths and strategies to address any skills weaknesses. It can be used by the partners as a group to build a picture of the competencies within the partnership and to identify which individual is best equipped to undertake which tasks/roles. It can also be a tool for enabling partners to recognise when specific skills might need to be brought in from outside the partnership" (TPI, 2003).

Partnering processes are also often portrayed as professional learning journeys, in which individuals get the opportunity to develop their own skills and to build their own capacities, as a process of self-discovery and development, through the social process of partnering. This is an insight that is gradually emerging from neurosciences as well: rational thinking is difficult and not an isolated activity;, sophisticated thinking is more of a group process in which we attach meaning to our world in interaction with the surrounding environment. But it is important to understand that these 'learning journeys' are never smooth but are filled with dilemmas and trade-offs. This is the essence of learning, research and partnering processes.

Instrumental Skills. The other four skills (input as well as output oriented) can be considered instrumental to the skill highway. It seems obvious that the participants in a partnership project should also master these skills at a relatively decent level of sophistication, although some of these skills can be outsourced. Any of these instrumental skills are often a necessary, but never a sufficient requirement for effective partnering. During the development of a partnering project, these instrumental skills are particularly important. First, reading skills are the easiest skill to learn mainly because reading can be done almost everywhere on an individual basis. It presents the most effective way to acquire knowledge accumulated by others, but is also a means to develop a personal approach. Reading represents the highest speed of processing information (much higher than listening). By gaining insight in what others have found or thought, it becomes possible to figure out what you can (or should) add to that and thus slowly start developing your own approach. However, not all relevant information is presented in written form, and some information on paper or on the internet is biased. So the second input oriented skill is the ability to obtain information from presentations and by listening to others. Effective listening is a social activity which requires that you understand that what you hear, and is partly the result of your own constructive communication skills. Listening skills are interactive and for management jobs in particular they are more important than presentation skills. Output oriented skills are needed to communicate the results of your research, learning processes and partnering projects. The writing process itself gives you the most concrete feedback about your level of understanding of the topic at hand. Famous novelists like George Orwell – but also Stephen
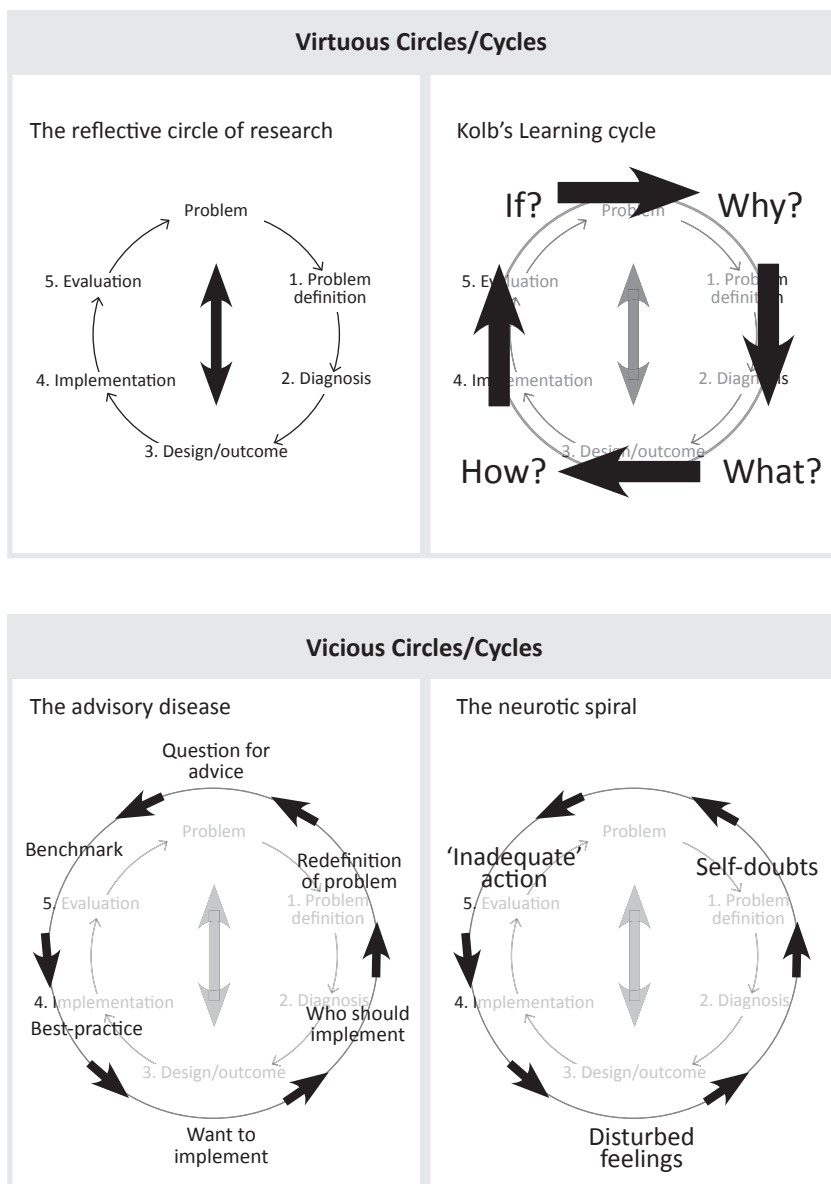
King - are known for having stated, "I write to find out what I think". By writing in a scientific manner, your knowledge becomes reproducible. Enabling reproduction is a basic characteristic of any science which strives for the accumulation of relevant knowledge. It is also important for partnering processes. Committing your research results and ideas to paper creates the best preconditions for getting feedback from others. The final communication skill is presenting orally. Presentations are the least effective in making your knowledge reproducible, but often a good and direct way of getting instant feedback from your audience (provided they listen). This applies particularly if you are still in the middle of a learning cycle. In this case, presentations can enable the formulation of further research questions. A presentation also provides you with information concerning your own understanding of the topic, particularly when it leads to debate and an interaction of opinions. Good presentations, therefore, are always aimed at co-production with the audience. On the other hand, a bad presentation,, at best gives you feedback on your inability to present information, but usually does not lead to any meaningful feedback at all ('questions?.... no questions!'). Presentation skills are a necessary but often not a sufficient condition for partnering. More partnering projects have been lost due to a bad presentation than gained through a good presentation.

4.   The Partnering Research Process

One final technique should be introduced as the basis for an integrative skills approach in partnering processes: the reflective cycle. Research skills are the undisputed linking pin of all other skills and forms the intervening variable of the partnering skill highway (Figure 2). The learning cycles of research and (self) management can also be portrayed as a 'reflective' circle or cycle (Figure 4). Going through the circle in the right order or sequence then becomes vital to the learning process: from problem, via problem definition, diagnosis to the design of a possible solution. Only then can you try to design appropriate solutions and evaluate them. If the solutions can be linked to the real existing problem (problem definition), a 'virtuous circle' of research can be created. In every research and management project – no matter how small – you go through the reflective cycle, sometimes more than once. The idea of the reflective cycle closely resembles the famous learning cycle of David Kolb (1976) who developed his learning cycle as a sequence that moves from concrete experience, reflective observations, via abstract conceptualisations, towards active experimentation and testing. Whetten et al., (2004) further specified Kolb's learning styles for managers and suggest that four basic questions need to be asked in the right sequence and need to follow a comparable logic as the reflective cycle of research: (1) Why? (problem definition), (2) What? (diagnosis and design), (3) How? (implementation) and (4) If? (evaluation and next problem). Kolb concludes that a successful manager or administrator is not really distinguished by any single set of knowledge or skills, but by the ability to 'adapt to and master the changing demands of his job and career – by his ability to learn" (Kolb, 1976:21). Linking Kolb's ideas to the reflective cycle of research specifies the skill highway: good research is a matter of adequately integrated management and self-management skills.

However, people in the bargaining society and under complex partnering projects, are strongly inclined to go through the reflective circle in a different order. For example, management gurus are primarily supposed to provide 'solutions' – catchy concepts, quick scans, simple methods – which do not always clearly relate to the problems at hand. Time pressure in many projects stimulate managers to move from identifying a problem directly to a (perceived) solution, without spending proper time on defining the problem. Another technique often used is 'benchmarking'. The problematic project/organisation at hand is compared to a more successful benchmark or best practice. The question then does not focus on the origins of the particular problem, but how the successful benchmark project should be implemented. Best practice reasoning can lead to an initial evaluation, but can hardly ever provide appropriate implementation lessons, because the problems are rarely the same. Certainly in complex partnership projects, problems are highly context dependent and therefore difficult to compare to the experience of others. People that first benchmark with a successful model, which is usually developed by consultants hired to explain 'how the best-practice did it', run the risk of falling prey to the 'consultancy disease': if you only have a hammer at your disposal, you define every problem as a nail. This type of reasoning sets a vicious cycle of learning in motion, which has proved difficult to stop. A comparable mechanism exists in the human psyche. It has been characterised as the 'neurotic spiral' (cf. Fensterheim & Baer, 1975). People adopt self-doubts because they take inadequate action. If they only analyse this by benchmarking and evaluating against the action of others, they can develop seriously disturbed feelings, heighten their self-doubts and thus engage in further inadequate action. Going through the reflective cycle the wrong ('left') way can thus trap you or your project in a vicious circle and can lead to many of the societal problems that are related to the bargaining society. In sections 1 and 2, it was concluded that one of the biggest skill challenges for the partnering society was to deal with high levels of uncertainty and ambiguity. The search for best practice often signals a longing for certainties that do not exist. Whetten et al. formulate it as follows: "the more tolerant people are of novelty, complexity and insolubility, the more likely they are to succeed as managers in information-rich, ambiguous environments." (Whetten et al., 2004: 71) Tolerance of novelty therefore implies going through the reflective circle the 'right' way.

Figure 4 Virtuous and Vicious circles of research and learning

Virtuous Circles/Cycles

The reflective circle of research

Kolb's Learning cycle

Vicious Circles/Cycles

The advisory disease

The neurotic spiral

Applying the reflective cycle in the right manner and sequence can also be linked to each phase of the partnering process. Many partnering tool books or monitoring frameworks do not start with the problem definition and diagnosis of a partnership project, but immediately jump to the intended outcome and design. This is exemplary of the advisory disease, in which the advisor does not question the relevance of the partnership, but is primarily interested in advising an organisation how to make the best out of an already chosen partnership. Questions about efficiency rather than effectiveness (added value of the partnering process for the particular problem) become leading. In one of its publications, The Partnering Initiative (Tennyson, 2003), for instance, starts the partnering process sequence with the identification of the 'outcome' and 'design parameters', while not referring to the actual problem the partnership is supposed to solve. The partnership format is presupposed, after which the process is made up of implementation and evaluation challenges. This mirrors the finding that evaluation and monitoring research often focus on the process rather than on the outcome of partnership projects. The research question then focuses on how to optimise the partnership process, and not necessarily on whether the partnership provides an adequate approach to the problem. The latter is, of course, a much more difficult question and will not be posed easily by the leaders of partnering processes. This requires an open and learning attitude that is not always easy to achieve in politically sensitive environments, and within prestigious projects which often involve cross-sector partnerships.

Each partnership project will go through these virtuous research and management cycles many times. Partnership processes are not easy to plan, are often iterative (problem definition changes over time, project designs are adjusted) which requires constant feedback loops in the process. Nonetheless, each stage of the partnering process will focus on one part of the reflective cycle. In Figure 5, two relevant techniques for sequencing research questions are related to different stages of the partnering process: the twelve stages of the Partnering Toolbook and the four basic stages of partnering (exploration, building, maintaining, phase-out).
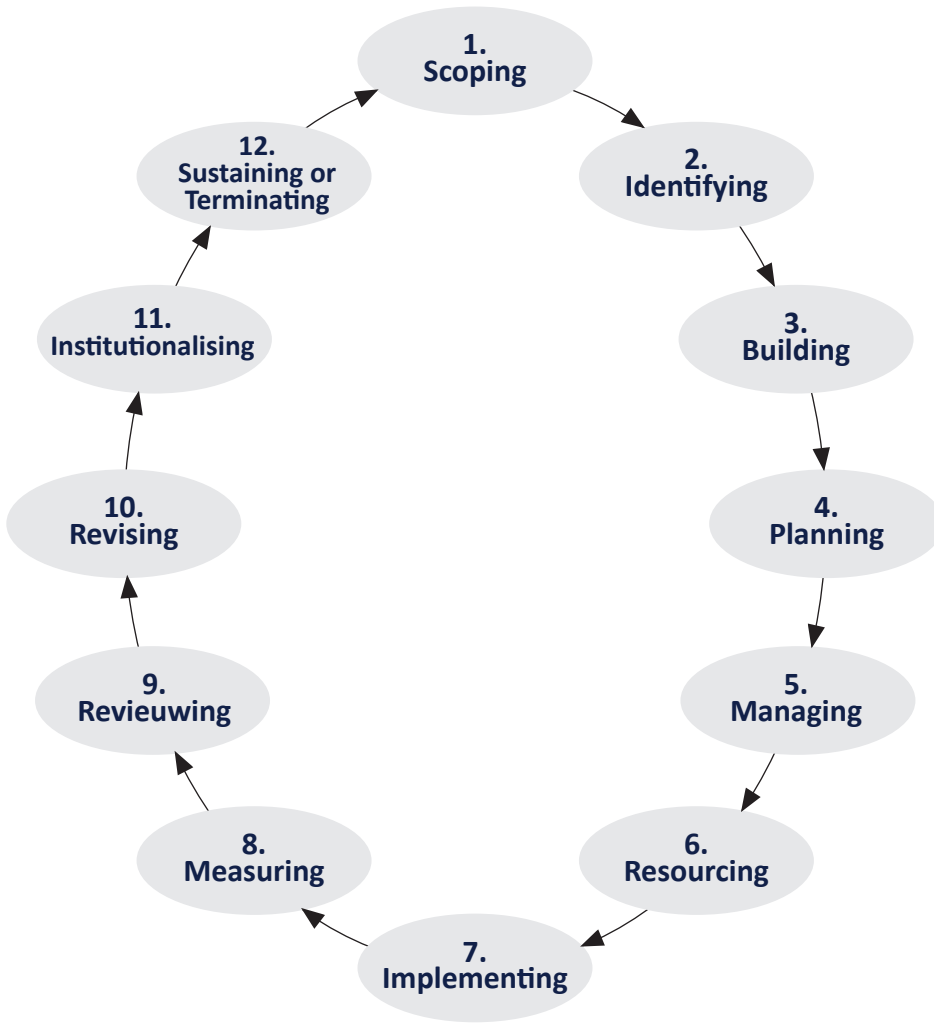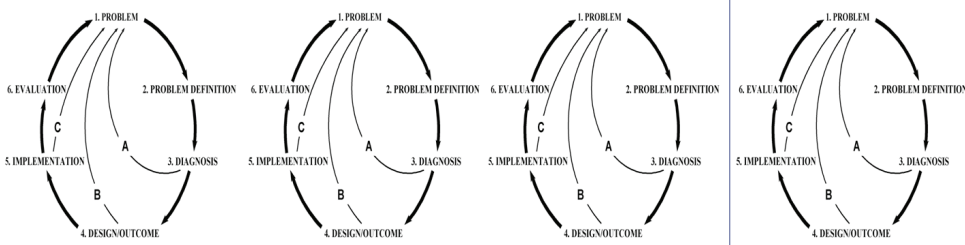
Figure 5b The Reflective Cycle and Partnering Stages

In linking each stage of the partnering process to the reflective cycle, the following picture emerges (Figure 5b and Table 6). [1] In the exploration or appraisal phase of partnerships, the focus should lie on problem definition and identification. TPI refers to this as the 'scoping' phase in which the basic challenge has to be understood. Whether potential partners can already be identified in this phase critically depends on the ability to properly diagnose the problem. The partner selection in this phase can strongly influence the problem definition, which in turn strongly influences the ultimate effectiveness of the partnership. Major reflective skills in this phase are related to problem identification and diagnosis skills, which, for instance, includes identifying the relevant stakeholders. The descriptive question of relevant stakeholders is often different from the prescriptive question of involving willing stakeholders. More input oriented instrumental skills (reading and listening) prevail in this phase and a zero measurement of the problem can be attempted.

[2] In the partnership building phase, the 'input' of the partnership is defined: who participates and brings what kinds of expectations, goals and resources. This phase requires that the diagnosis of the problem (and the hypothesised added value of a particular partnership) can be linked to an intended outcome of the partnering process. The outcome of a partnership differs from the 'output' in that it considers the way in which the partnership can contribute to solving the actual problem. The immediate output of the partnership can only be defined in terms of the intended longer term 'outcome' of the partnership. The practical design and planning question then depends on the intended outcome. Major reflective skills in this phase are related to the translation of the problem diagnosis into the actual partnership design. More output oriented instrumental skills prevail in this phase, since the project plan has to be formulated and the project presented to the stakeholders and potential financiers. Management skills concentrate around lobbying and networking skills. In this stage, the zero measurement of the actual partnership is made, for which a number of quantitative variables are developed.

Table 6 Reflective Characteristics of Each Partnering Stage

Phase	Partnering/monitoring evaluation model	Reflective cycle skills	The partnership tool-book
1. Partnership exploration	Appraisal Zero measurement	Problem definition → diagnosis	Scoping, identifying
2. Partnership building	Input Quantification	Diagnosis→ design/outcome	Building, planning, managing, resourcing
3. Partnership maintaining	Throughput Internal feedback	Design/output→ implementation	Implementing, measuring
4. Partnership phase-out	Output/outcome External feedback/control group	Implementation→ Evaluation	Reviewing, revising, institutionalizing, sustaining/terminating

[3] In the partnership maintaining or throughput phase, the actual management of the partnership requires skills for moving the outcome design to more operational (output oriented) terms, which includes a large number of implementation and management questions. Deliverables are defined and a governance structure is fine-tuned. Feedback and learning loops already need to be in place to accompany the iterative process of the partnership. Whether effectiveness questions can be posed at this stage is a matter of debate and also depends on the duration and aims of the partnership. Progress in achieving the specific output of the partnership is part of internal feedback processes. In this phase, correct application of feedback processes can lead to a revision of the partnering goals. Major reflective skills relate to process and management oriented skills such as feedback, governance, mediation, bargaining, expectation management and constructive communication. Progress is probably best monitored through qualitative standards. Benchmarking with external groups can be functional but has to be carefully applied.

[4] In the phase-out or output/outcome phase, the partnership is reviewed on its effectiveness towards obtaining the short term and longer term goals. A means towards this is institutionalizing the partnership, first within the participating organizations, as well within each separate organisation. In this phase, formal evaluation is used to decide whether the project should be continued or terminated. The counterfactual problem of partnerships is particularly relevant in this phase: what is the added value of the partnership and would the partners have been able to achieve the output on their own? One of the challenges in this phase is to find relevant control groups that can provide a more objective benchmark

for the success of the partnership. The evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the partnership critically depends on the availability of a good zero-measurement (stage 1). In this phase, major reflective skills relate to evaluation and general research skills. Instrumental skills are primarily writing and presenting.

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