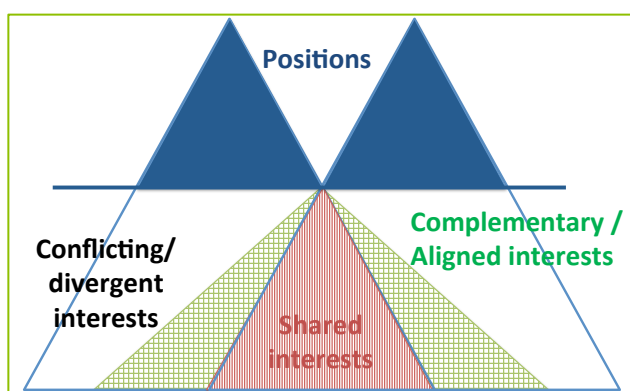




Guidance for Effective Negotiation in Partnerships

In the early stages of building a partnership, it is common for representatives of the potential partners to be 'positional' about what they want and what they are prepared to give to the collaboration. In other words, they put their own/organisation's interests first.

The diagram below illustrates 'positions' as the tips of two icebergs – the bits that are immediately visible.



In the context of dialogue and conversations, 'positions' suggest taking a stance and being somewhat dogmatic and inflexible. Statements like 'This is what I want' are not a good basis for making progress and reaching alignment amongst the partners.

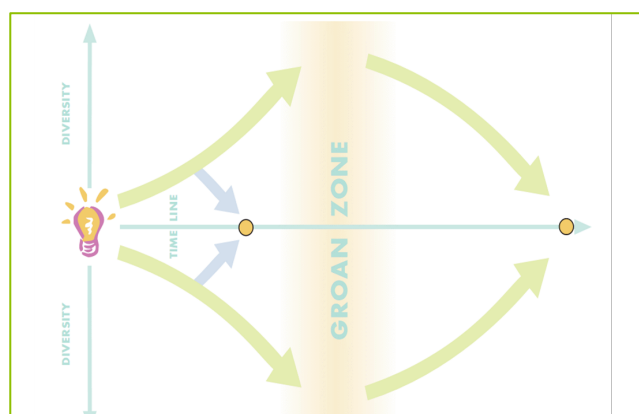
However, if we look at the icebergs again, beneath what is immediately visible is a far larger amount of iceberg. And we start to see that what first looked like separate structures (the 'position' tips) are in fact overlapping. So, the suggestion is that when you delve beneath the surface, you will discover numerous 'interests' and 'needs' that underlie the 'position', and that, using effective 'interest-based' negotiation techniques it is highly probable that you will reveal

common ground upon which genuine agreement can be reached.

Central to effective negotiation – whether a partnership broker takes on the negotiating role or simply encourages and supports partners to negotiate effectively themselves – is to ask well-chosen questions (see the tips overleaf). Indeed, as a partnership broker, selecting questions is significantly more important than providing answers!

In asking questions, the partnership broker opens up space for exploration and exchange – a brave space for open communication. There may be contentious issues that should be discussed frankly. That is when breakthroughs will occur. But this space can also become challenging as divergent views, opinions, concerns and expectations are expressed, and therefore where differences emerge. This can lead to the so-called 'groan zone', where partners start to misunderstand each other, react on the basis of assumptions, indulge in mind-reading. All of this can lead to projecting negative emotions and intent on each other.

However, the groan zone is exactly the space where potential new insights emerge.



This framework from Sam Kaner shows the importance of giving time and space for divergent views and interests to emerge. Opening up discussion is about allowing difference to appear; partnership brokers need to ensure that this happens equitably.

A good decision is not usually one that is proposed early on; it tends to come through at a different level, taking on board others' views

As a partnership broker, we create and hold the space for 'groaning' and, in doing so, try to help build empathy with, and growing respect for, each other in order that mutual understanding of each other's perspectives can emerge.

Please note: mutual understanding is not the same as agreement. It is empathy with each other's point of view, appreciation of where they are coming from. The emergence of mutual understanding helps to move towards convergence and thus allows the partners to close on the decision.

The groan zone framework helps us to see the risk of closing down discussions prematurely. This may be indicative of someone exercising power, or of avoiding confrontation/conflict by 'smoothing' over tensions. But differences will continue to bubble under the surface; or partners may resent the individual/partner who pulled rank and pushed for a decision; partners may start to disengage...

The partnership broker's role in opening up the groan zone is important, but can be challenging, especially when brokering online. In an online setting, tensions and 'conflicts' may manifest both as aggressive

behaviour and as passive non-cooperation. The latter may be more difficult to manage.

A couple of questions to ponder: What does a free flowing conversation mean in an online setting? What does 'holding space' entail? How do you express empathy? How do you ask strategic questions?

What does interest-based negotiation involve for a partnership broker?

1. Demonstrating genuine interest in the individual's position. So your questions are warm not hostile (*'help me to understand why you feel this so strongly...'*).
2. Gathering information from a range of sources to have insight into the surrounding circumstances / issues.
3. Being sensitive to issues of power (real or perceived) and being respectful but – where necessary – firm (*'I can see that in your position it must be very difficult to ...however ...'*).
4. Widening the options by helping partners to explore a range of new approaches or alternative solutions (*'I wonder if there are other ways we could ...'*).
5. Reaching agreement that takes account of the underlying interests and adds most value for all those involved.

Tips for asking questions:	
a	Introduce a question before you ask it: explain its purpose and why you are asking it to reduce the chances of it being misinterpreted. If it is difficult, give advance warning to reduce shock or insult.
b	Keep questions short – long questions make it easier to pick and choose which part to answer.
c	Use the simplest words you can to help focus the answer; avoid using any words that need defining.
d	Start with straight-forward questions and move to harder ones; end with easy ones to maintain an on-going relationship.
e	Group together questions on similar topics to deepen responses.
f	<p>Different types of questions get different types of answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Open' questions invite complex, layered responses - 'Closed' questions invite yes/no answers - 'Why?' questions generate explanations and justifications - 'What?' questions generate information - 'How?' questions are the most demanding and often get 'what' answers – which may be a clue that people know what they want but not how to achieve it. This may be a useful way to open up opportunities for advice or assistance.
g	Avoid 'leading questions that suggest pre-ordained answers or outcomes – unless the purpose of the question is to float an idea, in which case presuppositions may be useful.
h	Above all, never ask a question if you don't want to hear the answer.
<p>Source: Andrew Acland, <i>Perfect People Skills</i>. Formerly external examiner for Accreditation in Partnership Brokering.</p>	