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[The Relationship Ecosystem: Mapping Partnership Resources for Maximum Value](#)

Everyone is connected, especially in business. Your organization exists within a complex, adaptive and self-organizing system of interrelated individuals and organizations. You are nested in a matrix of relationships that affect you, and that you affect every day.

Foundations need donors, staff, volunteers, experts and causes to contribute to. Corporations need shareholders, boards, staff, bankers and customers.

As a leader in your organization and community, it is critical that you're not only aware of your existing relationships, but that you're prioritizing them based on value. [Keeping an up-to-date list](#) ensures that you're able to make sound decisions about where to invest resources, it facilitates the continual evaluation of ROI, and it enhances communication with both your staff and partners. When you have a clear picture of the relationship resources available to you, you're better able to leverage them intentionally to achieve your objectives now, and in the future. Having that kind of certainty, clarity and confidence allows you to be less distracted, confused or hesitant about the value of your stakeholder relationships.

Ignorance isn't bliss; it's costing you valuable resources

The size and value of your network has a direct impact on your organizations net worth. When you choose to ignore or avoid your partners or partnerships you will end up paying the highest price of all. Relationships are your greatest currency – they are full of multiple sources of value because they give you access to the resources you need to: increase your revenue, maximize profits, expand services or reach more people.

The good news is that you're already surrounded by all of the resources you could need to accomplish whatever your goal or cause may be. You can easily learn how to spot relationship wealth in your ecosystem, and re-frame the relationships, individuals and organizations you're avoiding to see new possibilities and opportunities for growth.

The important part is that you start looking for that wealth now. [The Partnering Economy](#) is here and growing. You can't be successful in any area of business or with any cause without the help of people and partnerships. The complexity of your industry and services is only increasing, and at some point (if not already), you are going to need more help and resources than you currently have. Understanding how to partner and collaborate based on value and shared purpose is critical to realizing all of the wealth your current and future partnerships can provide.

Get a clear picture of your partnerships with an ecosystem map

The landscape of partnering is changing. Understanding who you partners are and how they contribute to your overall success is the first step in becoming more intentional and strategic with your partnerships.

You can't leverage what you are unaware of, or avoiding which is why we encourage all executives and board members to create a Partnership Ecosystem Map. Creating an Ecosystem Map helps you identify existing and prospective partners that you're currently aware of and perhaps some you're unaware of, and the partnerships that you seek as well as the ones you avoid.

An ecosystem map is a tool or process that simply maps out the resources and relationships that exist within a defined system. By organizing your existing and prospective partners you're better able to increase the potential resources you have access to.

Understand how your spheres of awareness affect your partnerships strategy

The reality of today's business landscape is that you won't always have the luxury of only partnering with people, whom you like, know and trust. The problems and challenges facing humanity are increasing in degree and complexity.

Enemies and allies, collaborators and competitors, we will all have to learn how to work together to face the challenges that are bigger than our own individual perspectives. This means you will be constantly presented with opportunities to work with people and organizations that you would rather avoid. Sometimes you may have to participate in mandatory mergers or integrations. Sometimes it's a package deal, and a key relationship you seek comes attached to key relationships you'd rather not be part of. Example: you got married, and realized the spouse came with in laws.

Spheres of Awareness

When you shine a flashlight in the dark, it only lights up part of a room. Even though you know there is more than what the flashlight illuminates. However, in an unfamiliar room you are likely unaware of what is hidden in the dark. Whether you have a flashlight or not, there are still in that unfamiliar room that remain unknown to you.

The sphere of awareness includes both what you can and cannot see in the world. It includes three nested spheres.

Influence:

Our sphere of influence includes the individuals, organizations and relationships that we are consciously aware of and have an impact on (within our reach). It includes relationships we want, and

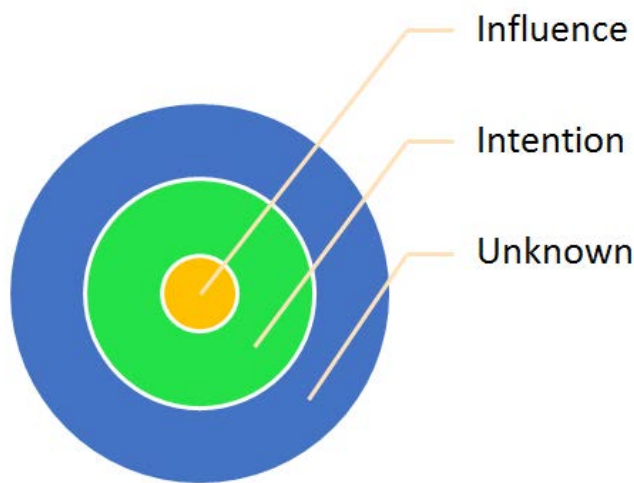
relationships we avoid.

Intention:

Our sphere of intention includes the individuals, organizations and relationships that we are consciously aware of and would like to have an impact on (just beyond our reach, where we are stretching towards).

Unknown:

Our sphere of the unknown includes the individuals, organizations and relationships that we are unconsciously ignorant to. It includes relationships we might want, and relationships we might avoid.



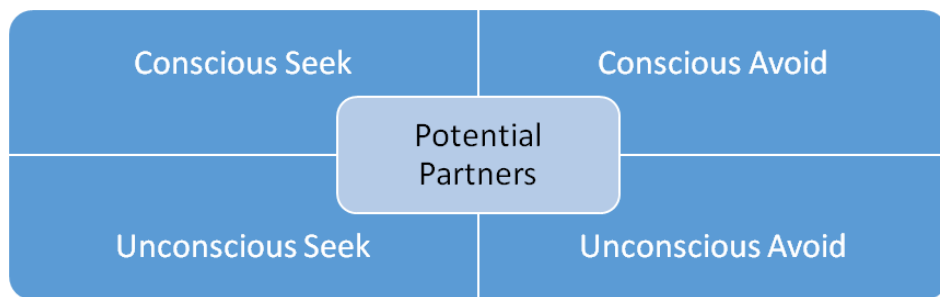
Going back to the flashlight example; you can point the flashlight around the room to illuminate the parts that were once dark, and thus increase your awareness about the contents and value of what is in the room. Expanding your sphere of awareness works in a similar way; it looks to include more information about the value hidden in your network. Doing this allows you to move relationships and resources from your sphere of Unknown to your sphere of Intention or Influence. It's the difference between hidden potential and actionable potential.

One challenge leaders often face is becoming aware of things or people in their network that they intuitively would rather avoid. When you shine a flashlight around in the dark, you are bound to notice parts of your environment that are less interesting, important or even repulsive. On the other hand, you will naturally gravitate to the other, more inviting parts of the environment. We have a natural seek or avoid response to stimulus in both our conscious and unconscious awareness, and these natural interpretations affect beliefs, perceptions and behaviours. Even with our partners.

Seek vs. Avoid is a paradox that exists in the minds of all leaders. So let's take a closer look at how this is limiting your partnership potential. If we assume that each quadrant in Matrix 1 below represents 25% of the 100% potential resources available, you would only be intentionally accessing 25% by focusing only on the partners that you are aware of and are attracted to.

This means you would be ignoring, wasting, not leveraging or misusing up to 75% of the potential relationships available to help you solve problems, access resources, increase revenue, serve more people, and have a bigger impact.

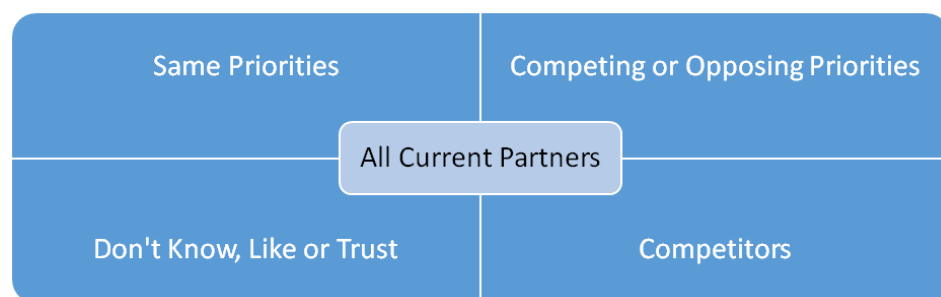
Matrix 1: Conscious & Unconscious Awareness



You're probably asking yourself, "How do I find out what I don't know? How do I become aware of what's hidden or unconscious to me right now?" And these are important questions because it means you're beginning to explore how you can look at relationships and resources differently. Let's keep looking, using Matrix 2 below.

If you reflect on the partners you've had over the years, you were probably most attracted to the ones that seemed similar to you and your organization. But if you look a little closer, what you'll likely discover is that you might have had a shared purpose or destination, but you disagreed on the process or 'how' to get there. So even the people and partners you are attracted to, inherently come with challenges and frustrations.

Matrix 2: Potential Partnership Ecosystem



You can see then how this creates the perfect opportunity to consider re-framing your perspective on the organizations you might have dismissed in the past and by becoming open to the possibilities of how you could collaborate with them in the future. You might discover your beliefs and perceptions are outdated, and uncover a gold mine of new possibilities.

After considering two matrices above, you'll likely experience an expanded awareness of the partners you hadn't considered, thus moving these individuals or organizations from you unconscious to your conscious. Once they are in your conscious awareness you get to decide if and how you want to act differently.

There are many other models and frameworks that you can build by adapting these principles and applying them to your specific context.

Example: A Partnership Ecosystem Map for a Philanthropic Cause

In this example, the Brown family has established an endowed [Donor-Advised Fund](#), and is in the process of making decisions about their future philanthropic goals and activities, including their relationship with their Community Foundation of choice. The process is complex because there are a number of factors, individuals and organizations to consider. There are many advisors who can help inform their process and decision-making – so where do they start? And what about the Foundation they support?

The Family Perspective

One step in helping the family develop their ecosystem map is to make a list of all of the existing advisors that serve the family including name, expertise, and current advisory role. In some instances, families might just consider the matriarch or patriarch, while in other cases, families could consider the advisors for the successive generations (children, grandchildren and so on). Do not assume that the trusted advisors are the same for each person. Consider the [Three Circle Model](#) of family business and enterprise, and identify advisors in the family system, business system, and ownership system. In addition, each family member may have multiple advisors within each system.

The Foundation Perspective

Foundations also rely on a series of relationships to fulfill their missions and expand their services. Relationships with donors, such as the Brown Family, are critical, especially for long-term planned giving. The ecosystem mapping process can also be helpful for the Foundation, as they organize, prioritize and expand their key relationships and partners. Using the matrices above, Foundation leaders can create a map of key individuals and organizations needed to succeed.

Here are 3 simple steps:

1. Gather a list of all of your existing relationships or partnerships

2. Sort this list into Matrix 2
3. Expand your awareness by adding partners for each of the 4 quadrants in Matrix 2

While you will end up with a larger list of existing and prospective partners, you will likely experience a connection or avoidance with part of the list.

Shifting perceptions about relationships you avoid

We all have biases and limiting beliefs that prevent us from seeing wealth, value or potential that is immediately available in our networks.

How do you transform your perceptions about partners or prospects that you are avoiding? Here are four inquiries to get you started.

1. Are you open and willing to shift your beliefs and perceptions about this individual or group, with new information?
2. Are you willing to explore new ways of working with competitors, or people you don't know, like or trust?
3. If so, the next step is to make a list of the strengths of the partners you are avoiding. What do they have to offer you, or others? What value do they provide?
4. Then consider the 3 criteria for value-based partnering.

No matter how many partners or relationships you have, there are likely potential relationships you are unaware of or avoid. You could be sitting on a gold mine of relationship currency and have access to people who can help you solve the biggest challenges and opportunities you are working on right now.

The first step in developing your Partnership Ecosystem Map is to do a complete audit of your existing partnerships. Check out [The VBP Partnership Audit](#), it gives you all the tools and templates you need to get started.

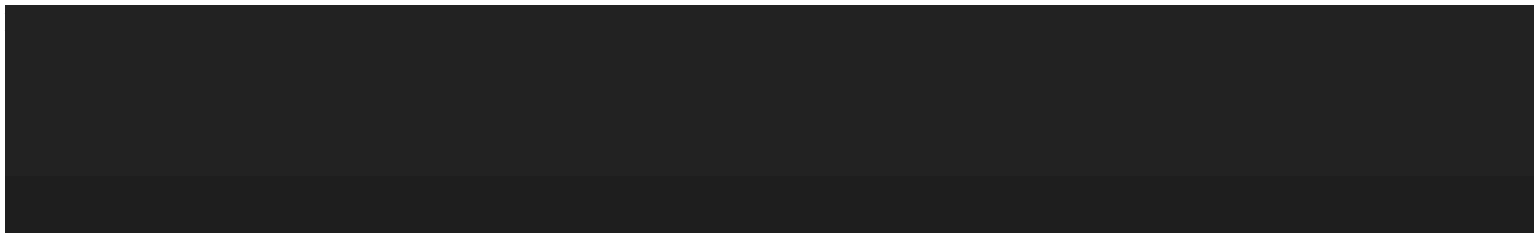
Posted by Enette Pauzé On December 5, 2016 [1 likes](#)

TAGS: alliances, partnership ecosystem, partnership strategy, partnerships map, strategic relationships, the partnering economy, value-based partnering



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