

# Making Partnerships and Alliances

## Really Work

*By Ned Herrmann*

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### Key Ideas:

- Thinking style similarities and differences are important to know in advance of forming partnerships and alliances.
  - Using profiles to determine whether partners are thinking in similar or different ways leads to more successful outcomes.
  - Problems can be avoided by planning with the Whole Brain Walk-A-Round.
  - Key partnership and alliance issues should be diagnosed, in advance, on the basis of the four quadrant Whole Brain model.
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*An alliance is:  
A union of interest  
A body of  
common knowledge  
A connection for  
mutual advantage  
A shared vision  
A basis for joint action*

*Ned Herrmann*

The trend to form partnerships and alliances is on the upswing. Anyone keeping statistics on this process knows that it has accelerated over the past decade and will likely continue to do so for the next decade. Yet many often struggle to be successful and too often end in painful separations that could have been avoided. Why? Straight talk and trust are high on anybody's list of requirements for a successful partnership. When people are on the same wavelength, the chances are greater that their perceptions are about the same, their intentions are in reasonable alignment, and their words mean approximately the same. A proven method

of determining whether or not two people are on the same "wavelength" is to compare their thinking style profiles using the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). If they are generally similar in all four quadrants of the Whole Brain Model upon which the HBDI is based, the likelihood is high that they think alike—or are "homogeneous" in their thinking.

Homogeneity can occasionally lead to competitiveness between two people who think alike, but this competitiveness is based on a shared understanding of the common ground between them. This is significantly less true with heterogeneous or different thinking partners, because they are viewing the world from very diverse perspectives.

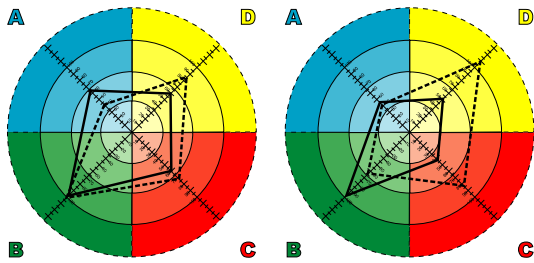


Figure 1. A comparison of homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs.

That diversity will impact the meaning we each have behind the words that we use. Thus, reaching a consensus based on shared intentionality and shared understanding of words is even harder. These are just a few of the issues involved in forming partnerships and alliances. HBDI examples of a homogeneous and heterogeneous pair can be seen in the exhibit provided. Each pair would benefit greatly from understanding of the degree of similarity or difference that their thinking preferences bring to the table. Understanding their profiles would allow them to explore how to best leverage the thinking styles available to them, and plan around the challenges their profiles might present.

A very useful diagnostic tool to explore those challenges is the Whole Brain Walk Around approach. Since with any two people, the level of understanding may vary widely between each quadrant of the Whole Brain Model, it is very revealing to examine all the critical issues by “walking them around” the four thinking quadrants. Let’s take for example, the achieving of consensus on six primary issues involved in a potential partnership. These could be:

1. The financial deal, 2. the technology transfer, 3. the organizational interface, 4. the role of the key players, 5. sales responsibility, and 6. the achieving of a joint vision and mission. Since each of these issues has a distinct quadrant tilt in the Whole Brain Model, it may be that one of the partners is more interested, more experienced, more competent, and more capable of clearly articulating the issues at hand. The other potential partner might have a different set of capabilities. Because

of the significant differences in levels of interest and capability, it is often tempting to resolve these complicated issues by sorting them out and allocating responsibility on the basis of background, experience, and competence. At this point the disaster alarm should go off. It is almost guaranteed that this approach will lead toward disappointment, frustration, sub-optimized results, lawsuits, and, in the case of a business, even bankruptcy, because the so-called partners are now operating as independent business people without the needed integration between them.

The two potential partners, with the help of their supporters, should take each of the six key issues and examine them from the mental perspective of the four quadrants in the Partnership and Alliance Building Walk Around provided. For example, by *walking around* the financial terms through all the A quadrant diagnostics, such as logical, quantitative, analytic processing, the partners can put a great deal of rational information on the table for achieving understanding. Once there is a common understanding of these financial facts, the consideration of money matters shifts to the B quadrant. This introduces a substantially different array of considerations, such as chronology, sequence, procedures, track records, and legal fine print. These issues now become the focus of a different diagnostic view of financial matters, a more conservative and safekeeping view. With these two sets of information on the table, the scene now shifts to the C quadrant, where issues of interpersonal relationships, values, and personal ethics are added to the A and B quadrant aspects. By this time there are usually twice as many issues of concern than when the process started. There is also a much more complete understanding of the deal under consideration. If this process continues around the model. The next quadrant to be involved is the holistic, imaginative, visionary, risk oriented D quadrant. When the two partners and their advisors write down a Vision statement of the proposed

# ALLIANCE BUILDING WALK-AROUND

<p><b><u>A Quadrant</u></b>  <u>Approach:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial &amp; Legal</li> </ul> <p><u>Looks for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Financial pay off</li> <li>• Technical know-how</li> </ul> <p><u>Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the money there?</li> </ul> <p><u>May overlook:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal issues and feelings</li> <li>• Strategic aspects</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>D Quadrant</u></b>  <u>Approach:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk-oriented &amp; entrepreneurial</li> </ul> <p><u>Looks for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic alignment</li> <li>• Common vision &amp; dream</li> <li>• New perspectives &amp; opportunities</li> </ul> <p><u>Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a long-term future?</li> </ul> <p><u>May overlook:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short-term planning</li> <li>• Financial issues</li> <li>• Operational details</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>B Quadrant</u></b>  <u>Approach:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservative, operational &amp; administrative</li> </ul> <p><u>Looks for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured business objectives</li> <li>• Organizational effectiveness</li> <li>• Reliability &amp; stability</li> </ul> <p><u>Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can we deliver? When?</li> </ul> <p><u>May overlook:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic opportunities</li> <li>• Long term perspectives</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>C Quadrant</u></b>  <u>Approach:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team and “partnering”</li> </ul> <p><u>Looks for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synergy between the people involved</li> <li>• Alignment of values</li> <li>• Gut feeling of “rightness”</li> </ul> <p><u>Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will others be affected?</li> </ul> <p><u>May overlook:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational concerns</li> <li>• Strategic aspects</li> <li>• Advanced financial planning</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Whole Brain partnerships and alliances walk-a-round model

partnership, they discover that there are significant differences, particularly in the long term direction of the joint effort. When they next attempt to draw a picture of the proposed partnership, they discover there are significant differences in perception between them. One very effective approach to gain clarity in the vision is to use creative materials to build a three dimensional model of the proposed alliance or partnership including the presumed organization and the presumed customers or stakeholders, even more profound differences are revealed.

At this point the two sides of this potential partnership might be miles apart from what they assumed was an obviously natural alliance. What to do? Another trip around the four quadrant Walk Around will either provide solutions to the differences

that have been discovered or provide compelling evidence that the partnership or alliance should not take place.

Why is this so effective? The application of the Whole Brain methodology forces consideration of all of the different perspectives of a critical set of issues. Since the potential partner’s perceptions of reality can be so significantly different, it is essential that any two individuals who desire to form an alliance or partnership start by developing a shared understanding of all of the key issues from all four quadrants. This approach provides a structured, safe and thought provoking way for both parties to uncover potential landmines before they become fatal. This can be most critical when one of the partners has a separate and different agenda than the other. All too

frequently, these different agendas are not discovered until the partnership has been formed, the financial deals have been set, and the die is cast. And this, of course, is a recipe for disaster.

Another major reason Whole Brain Technology tools and techniques work so well in this application is that these tools help greatly to *depersonalize* issues such as conflicting perceptions, misunderstandings, miscommunication, and competitiveness that result from thinking style similarities and differences.

The world, as we now know, in reality, has every possible combination of mental preferences amongst the candidates for alliances and partnerships. Even if the key people involved are on the exact same wavelength, which would be a rare condition, it is absolutely necessary to apply some method of achieving real understanding of the issues involved. This very straightforward whole brain walk-around process has a logic to it that many people find highly easy use and persuasive. It is a discipline that, when applied, guides the potential partners through a rigorous examination of all the key issues involved in their proposed alliance on the basis of the *mentality* of each of those issues. This offers the advantage of relatively neutral ground in order to clearly identify and process what usually are potentially emotional issues. The result is breakthrough clarity that builds the way for a successful, open and thought-through partnership, avoiding most of the pitfalls that doom so many alliances of this nature. The inherent strength and richness of the whole brain process helps to ensure that necessary evaluation is done before it is too late.

## So what?

- A proven method of determining whether or not two people are on the same “wavelength” is to compare their thinking style using the **HBDI** profile.
- Homogeneity can occasionally lead to competitiveness between two people who think alike. When understood through the lens of whole brain thinking, it can be addressed and roles can be clarified.
- Allocating separate roles and responsibilities solely on the basis of background, experience, and competence can lead toward disappointment, frustration, and sub-optimized results because the so-called partners are operating as independent business people without the needed integration.
- Using tools and techniques, such as the HBDI profile and the Walk-Around diagnosis early on in the partnership greatly helps to depersonalize issues that result from thinking style similarities and differences.
- The business world, in reality, has every possible combination of mental preferences amongst the candidates for alliances and partnerships. Even if the key people involved are on the exact same wavelength, it is absolutely necessary to achieve real understanding of the all of the issues involved through the Whole Brain approach to have a successful and comfortable partnership.