



A New Logic

Partner Assessment Framework

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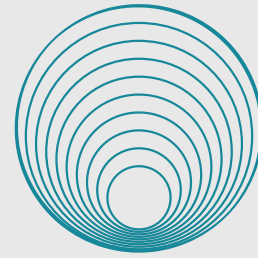
Intro

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are often widely promoted as mechanisms to deliver development goals, and rightly so.

Partnerships are now about building a never-ending ecosystem flywheel of value by transforming aligned orgs into result-drivers.

Whilst we understand more and more about how to structure partnerships, assessment frameworks of these collaborative ventures have largely been focused on tangible project outputs rather than a review of the true effectiveness of the partnership.

Given that partnerships require significant time and resources to develop and maintain, understanding how to maximise their effectiveness becomes critical



Defining a partnership

Admittedly the term partnership elicits much confusion. It is often used to describe widely different constructs from loose networks and alliances to more institutionalised joint ventures.

Commonly used definitions tend to be too simplistic. They refer to their voluntary nature, shared or pooling of resources, capitalising on synergies, etc.

Such definitions tend to mask the various obligations to participate, the overemphasis placed on financial contributions above other kinds of resource contributions

Clearly partnerships involve some form of horizontal decision-making processes (i.e. shared power), valued contribution of

different kinds of resources (beyond financing), and flexibility to adapt the objectives and activities as circumstances dictate.

Reviewing the performance of partnerships, and the viability of a new partner, involves two key elements:

- An assessment of the results of the collaboration
- An assessment of how the partners work together

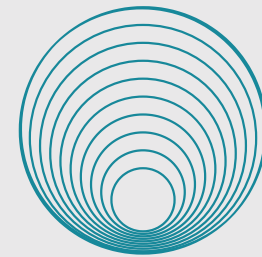
An assessment of the results (outputs) may be more straightforward and can draw on a wide variety of readily available assessment frameworks for project evaluation.

This document focuses more specifically on assessing whether partnership as an approach best meets the goals of the partners

In recent years a number of partnership assessment frameworks have emerged that are specifically aimed at assessing the rather unique characteristics of partnerships.

These include models that:

- measure a partnership's 'added value' by looking at the benefits that have been derived by different partners over time
- assess evolving partner relationships and their outcomes
- investigate the transaction-costs involved in partnerships
- examine partnerships in relation to accountability to better understand their responsiveness, transparency and compliance
- use outcome-mapping to focus on change in behaviours, relationships, actions, and/or activities of the people and organisations with whom a partnership works rather than assessing its products



The New Logic

Each partnership has a specific, though constantly changing, context that determines its scope and direction. This context can be framed around three interlocking layers:

1

The External Environment

As reflected in the financial, legal and institutional considerations that shapes the scope and ambition of the partnership

2

The Organisational Environment

As reflected in each partner's scope, mission, strategy and

capacity that dictates the resources the partners put on the table, their analysis of the opportunity presented, and the level of risk they are willing to undertake

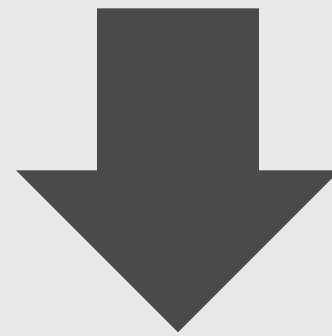
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The Individual Partner

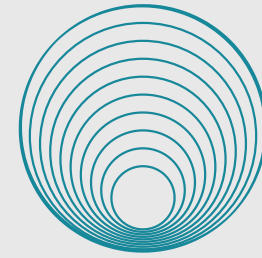
Representative incentives and disincentives to engage (influenced by their own knowledge, beliefs, interests, position, accountabilities, etc.) that dictates the attention and value that they place on the partnership

The context determines what drives partners to get involved in the first place

These drivers are then negotiated between the parties
into desired targets reflected by proposed outputs,
outcomes and impacts



Negotiated targets are then reflected in resource
commitments made by each
partner and contributions towards decision-making



The Framework

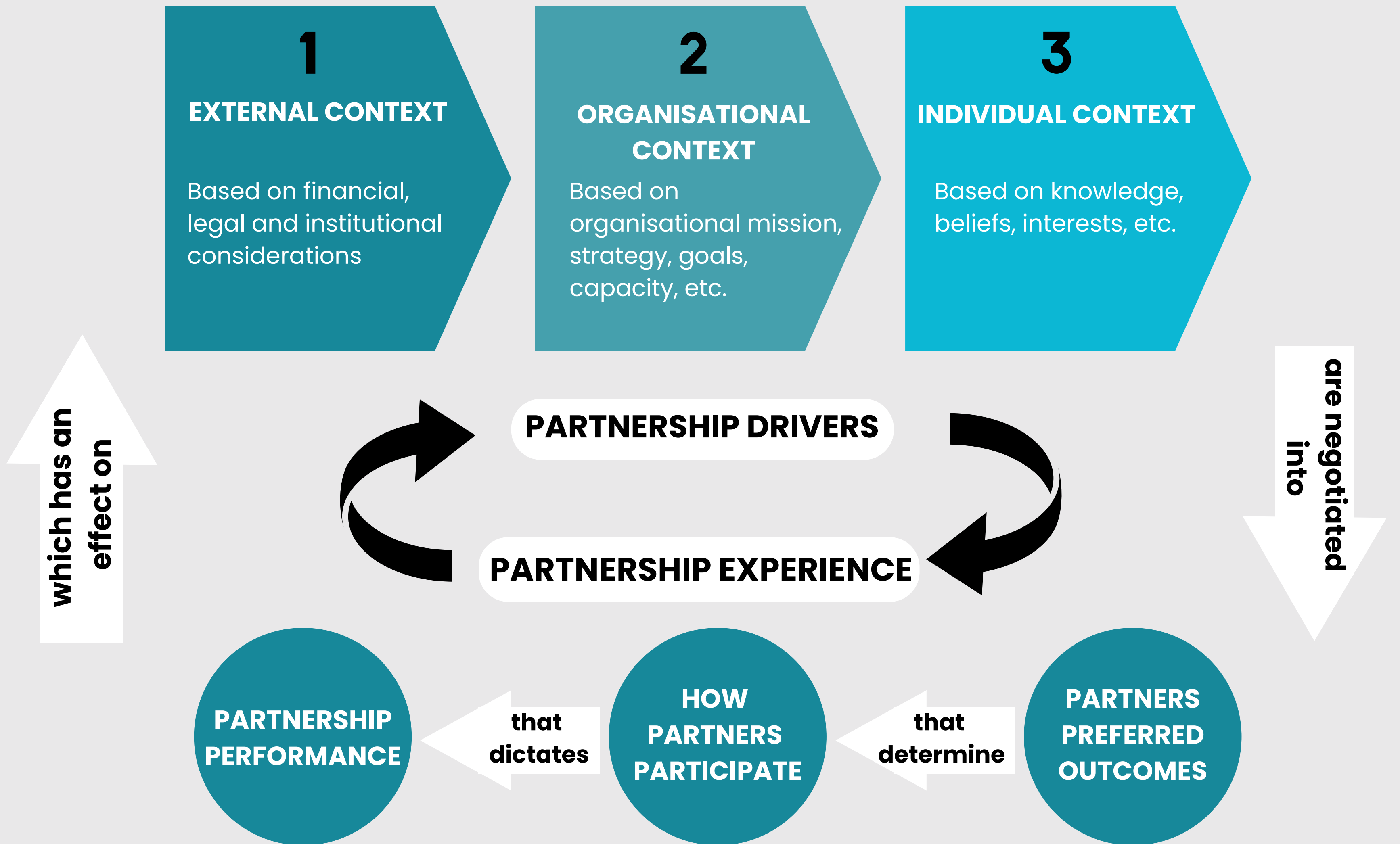
If all partners are actively and effectively meeting their resource commitments and contributing to decision-making, the partnership can thereby be deemed as effective as possible.

A partnership will by definition not be successful if the drivers for partners to participate are not sufficiently met as this may result in unilateral decisions by one partner to alter its engagement.

So we're ultimately talking about the 2 primary pillars of successful channel and ecosystem programs –

Drivers & Experience

If we were to apply this to a framework, it would look like this –



To ensure engagement and commitment from all relevant parties, the purpose of the assessment must be clearly understood and explicitly endorsed by all partners

With this in mind, partners should anticipate that an assessment may result in:

- 1) a partner(s) revisiting the rationale for their involvement in the partnership
- 2) an indication that other partners may be needed to achieve the partnership's objectives
- 3) a redirection of the partnership away from current objectives, a shift to more specific objectives or a move toward more ambitious aims
- 4) a recognition that the partnership is achieving its aims and thereby can go on to tackle other problems or can end; and/or
- 5) a recognition that the partnership is not working or is unlikely to work and therefore should end

Assessments should provide information on what works and what does not at different stages of a partnership's development.

Lessons learned may relate to a particular theme or activity or to wider issues and influences.

Internally, individual practitioners and organisations should be able to use the learning to refine their decision-making and practice around whether and how to engage in partnerships.

With that in mind, there are 6 key new assessment logics that require constant reaffirmation –

Partnerships are not contracts with clear, straightforward deliverables



They operate through horizontal accountabilities



That bring together diverse interests



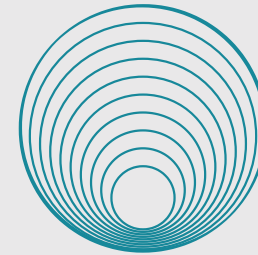
Diverse interests are captured by understanding drivers



By definition, if different partner drivers have been met, the partnership is a success



Evaluation must begin by understanding these drivers



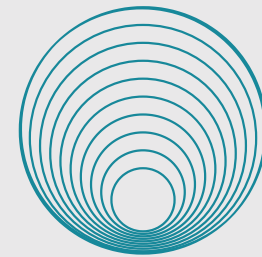
What To Assess

Performance hinges upon the right partnership construct for the context, the willingness and ability of partners to deliver on commitments, and how partners reach decisions about how to allocate resources or focus their activities.

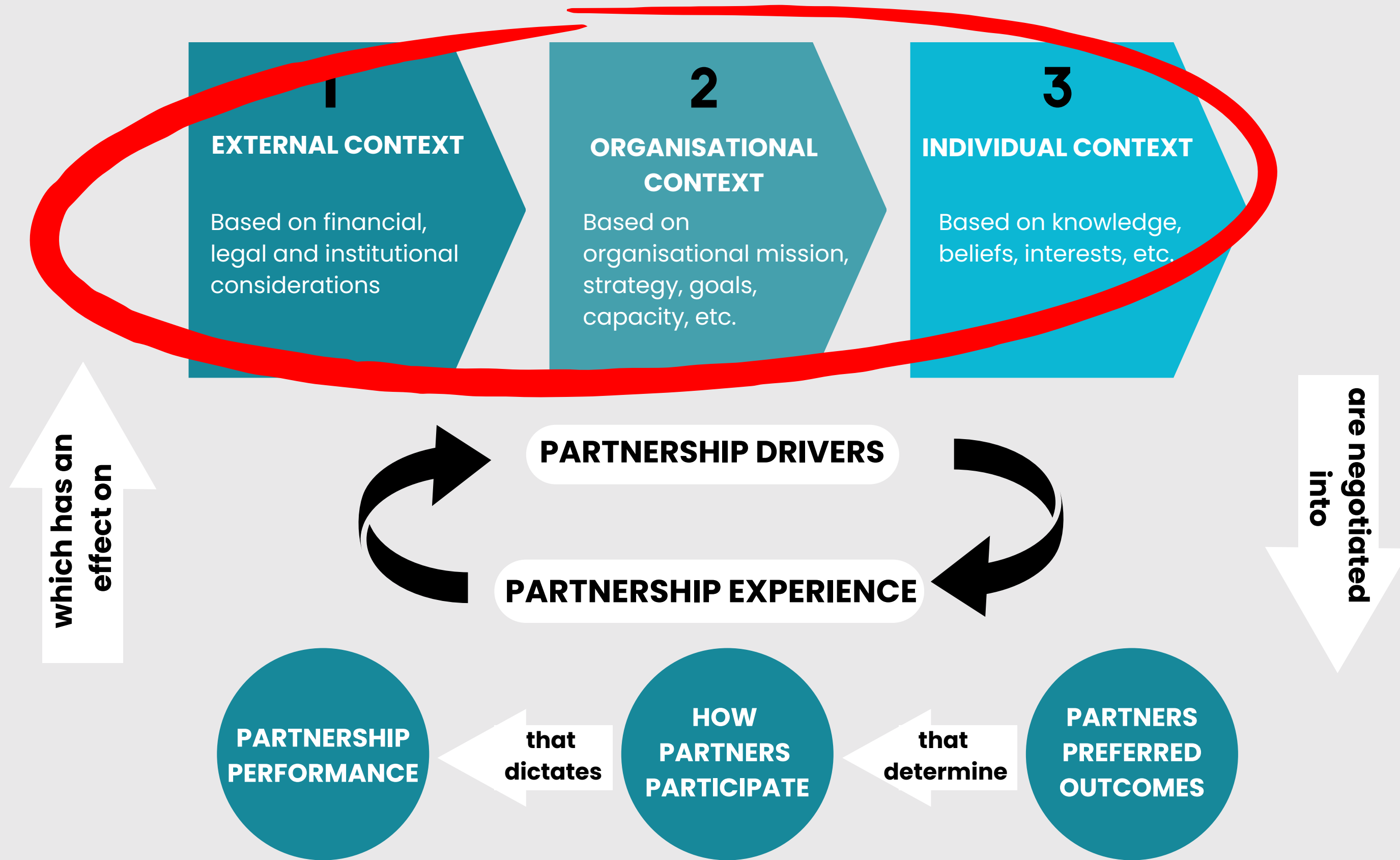
We'll now unpack each section of the framework by splitting our focus between the aforementioned x 2 primary pillars –

- **The partnership drivers**
- **The partnership experience**

Each of these primary sections drive, and rely on, the other to ensure partner success and preferred outcomes.



Unpacking the drivers to partner



Drivers are those "pushes and pulls" that determine or necessitate certain behaviour or actions.

Drivers include:

- ▶ Incentives that motivate partners to engage in the partnership. (Disincentives discourage engagement, suggesting that participating in the partnership would result in inappropriately allocated resources or foregone opportunities)
- ▶ Obligations that 'force' individuals or organisations to participate in certain processes, to provide certain inputs or produce certain outputs

And it's important to note: these drivers are changing constantly, they require constant review to see how they may be influencing participation

The External Context

Partnerships and their activities are not created in a vacuum, but must be framed around the specific contexts in which they operate.

Understanding how a partnership's processes and outcomes relate to its particular setting is necessary if we are to obtain information about how and why a partnership may work in a given situation and why it may or may not work elsewhere.

Effective partnerships will understand this context thoroughly and seek to follow closely how the situation changes over time.

Opening questions to assist this process could include the following –

- ▶ What institutions set the rules and regulate the activities around which the partnership is organised? How effective are they?
- ▶ What kinds of approaches are feasible in the setting and which have been tried before?
- ▶ What are the prevailing political attitudes within each major stakeholder group around the problem to be addressed, and towards the activities or approaches around which the partnership is organised?
- ▶ How has the economic context dictated resource allocations and thus the preoccupations and priorities of different stakeholder groups (around, for example, the use of different technologies, the expansion of services, etc.)?

All of these elements are dynamic, though some may change more rapidly than others.

Thus a baseline should provide a point of reference for later assessments.

If there are contextual changes, have they been reflected in the objectives, activities or approaches of the partnership?

The Organisational Drivers

The different visions and missions and goals of each of the partners also form part of the context for the partnership.

Indeed the rationale for multi-stakeholder partnership is to bring together diverse types of organisation with different skills and resources.

The specific dynamics of each will determine their incentives and obligations to partner. If the partners fail to understand each other in these terms, they are likely to misinterpret each other's motivations and actions.

Examples of drivers will vary from one partner to another.

Overarching questions for each partner organisation could include –

- ▶ What is our analysis of the problem that needs to be addressed?
- ▶ What are we trying to achieve within this context? What would success look like for our organisation? What kinds of changes would we like to see happen in our organisation, our partners, overall? Could we achieve these aims alone?
- ▶ Can our organisation realistically influence the wider context? Do we already have or can we generate approaches that can help us?
- ▶ Are we certain that the costs outweigh the benefits of participating? What are our make-or-break points or non-negotiables that if not met would force us to leave the partnership? (Why did we originally get involved? Does that rationale still exist? If not, what has changed?)
- ▶ Are we comfortable working with (and being seen to be working with) our partners?

Depending on the relationships that have been established between partners, organisations may have significant reservations about revealing the factors that motivate them in any detail.

How deeply they can be discussed with an assessor and how openly they can be shared with other partners and stakeholders will vary according to circumstance.

For example, it may be difficult for some organisations to be transparent about their long-term goals or their internal processes.

Setting out the boundaries and expectations for transparency should ideally occur early on in the partnership, particularly with an eye to any implications that these boundaries may create in the future.

If such boundaries are not already articulated by the partnership, then an assessment process should seek to create them.

The Individual Drivers

Partnerships are operated and maintained by individual representatives who bring with them a number of identities, including at least their professional identity, their position identity (which designates certain levels of authority within their own organisation) and their personal identity.

Each of these will influence how they interact with the partnership. For example, in a positive light –

- Their professional identity could motivate them to get involved in a partnership because they want to keep up with trends in their area of work.
- Their position identity could motivate them to get involved in a partnership because they want to enhance their career.

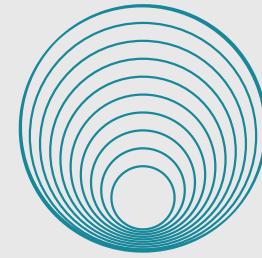
- Their personal identity could incentivise them to get involved in a partnership because they want to enhance their career.

Their personal identity could also incentivise them to get involved in a partnership because they are keen to meet new people, learn new things, make a difference, broaden their networks, etc.

Difficult as it may be, assessment processes need also to get at this more individual level to understand why certain elements of a partnership are working or not.

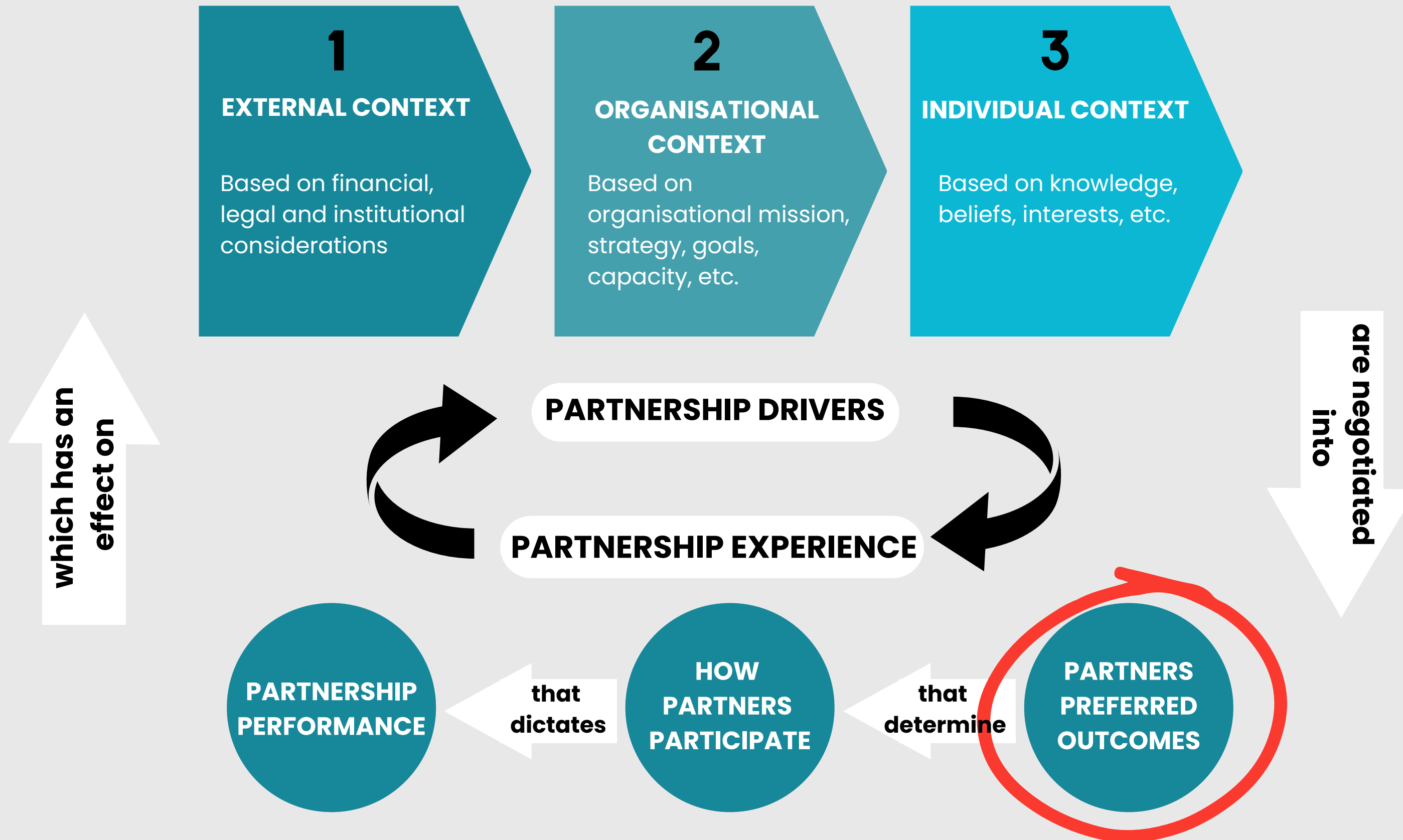
This also proves important when there are staffing changes expected that might change the dynamics.

The drivers for why individuals are at the table will influence their behaviour in, and contribution to, a partnership



From Drivers To Experience

Unpacking Preferred Outcomes



An assessment process needs to reconfirm how the partnership fits into its broader context.

The analysis of the context and definition of the scope of the partnership are negotiated and translated into a set of proposed outputs and outcomes.

Typical questions to gain this understanding might include:

- ▶ What is the partnership trying to achieve?
- ▶ What does success look like for the partnership? How would we know if we had achieved it? What would suggest it is not working?
- ▶ What kind of changes would we see? Where or within which institutions?

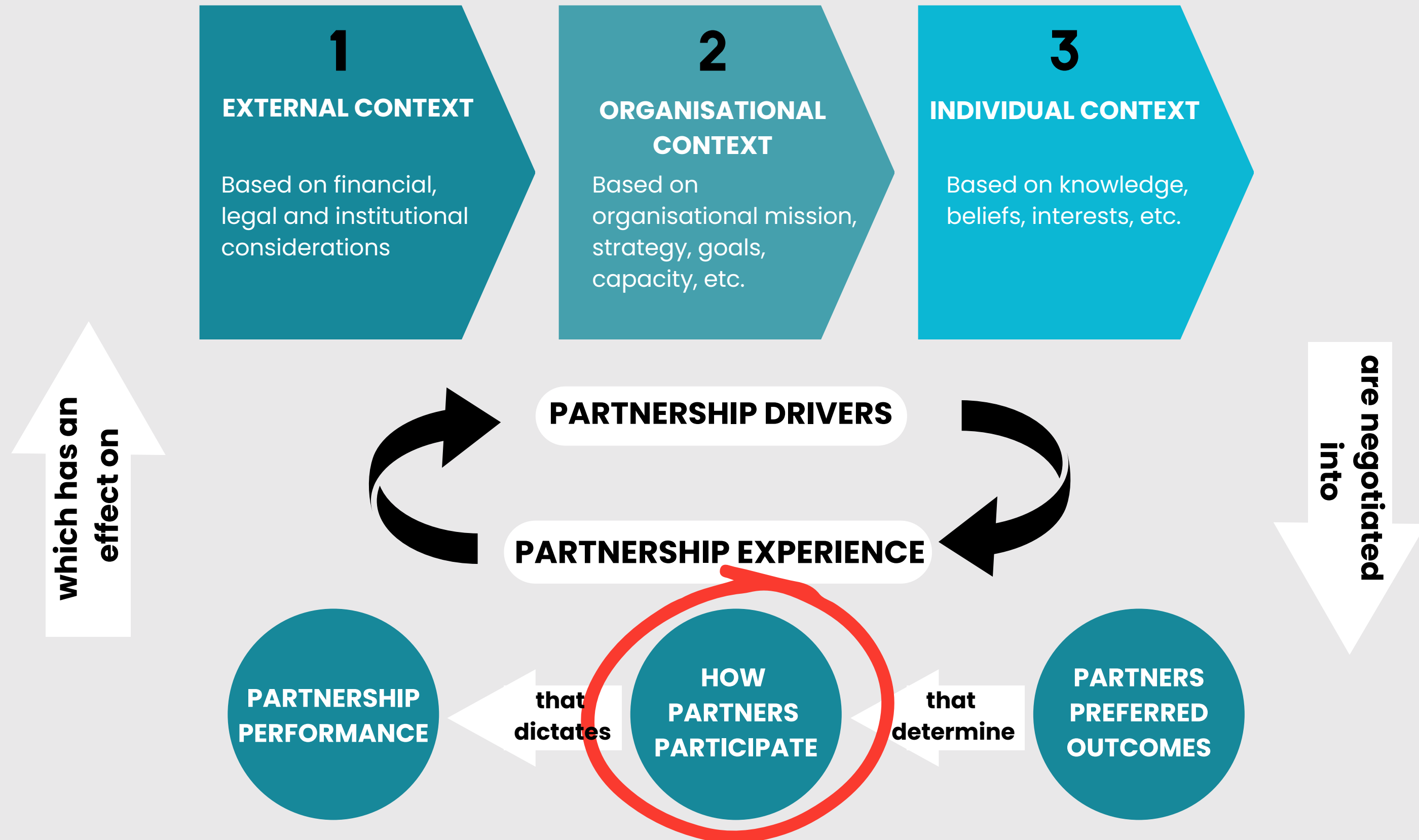
The contribution that each partner is willing to make is then matched up against these expected results.

Such resource commitments (time, money, etc.) will be based on partner incentives and obligations.

There should, however, also be enough flexibility to investigate unanticipated outcomes and consequences.

Such unintended results often yield information that reinforces the value of a partnership and offers new dimensions and incentives for working together.

Unpacking Partner Participation



Partners participate in partnerships in two primary ways –

- By making and delivering on their commitments to the partnership
- By engaging in the on-going decision-making processes of the partnership

Are partners delivering on commitments?

To respond to this question, we need to measure partner commitments and how well they fulfil those commitments.

These commitments are made at an organisational level but are fulfilled by individuals and can take the form of time, energy, equipment, materials, funding, work space, etc.

Individual drivers to participate are not always the same as those of an organisation.

In some cases, the organisational drivers to participate may be quite high while the individual drivers are low.

In other cases, individuals may be highly motivated but their organisations are slow to see the incentives for participating or understand the sanctions for not participating.

By identifying situations where an individual is "out of step" with her/his organisation, we can pinpoint when a representative may have difficulty in obtaining institutional buy-in for the partnership or when the individual is blocking or slowing the organisation's active participation.

An assessment of drivers may also allow organisations (and partnerships) to find ways of adjusting the incentives and obligations in order to promote greater participation.

For example:

if it becomes apparent that a partner has many obligations towards the partnership but few incentives (or sanctions), it may be necessary to review organisational targets to assess whether changes could be made either to the partner's level of involvement or, if possible, greater incentives could be created for the organisation to participate in the partnership more deeply.

Do partners have sufficient incentives to contribute to decision-making?

The overarching assumption here is that greater partner involvement in decision-making results in better ideas and greater buy-in. Partners will thus want to understand whether decision-making within the partnership –

1) allocates resources effectively and efficiently

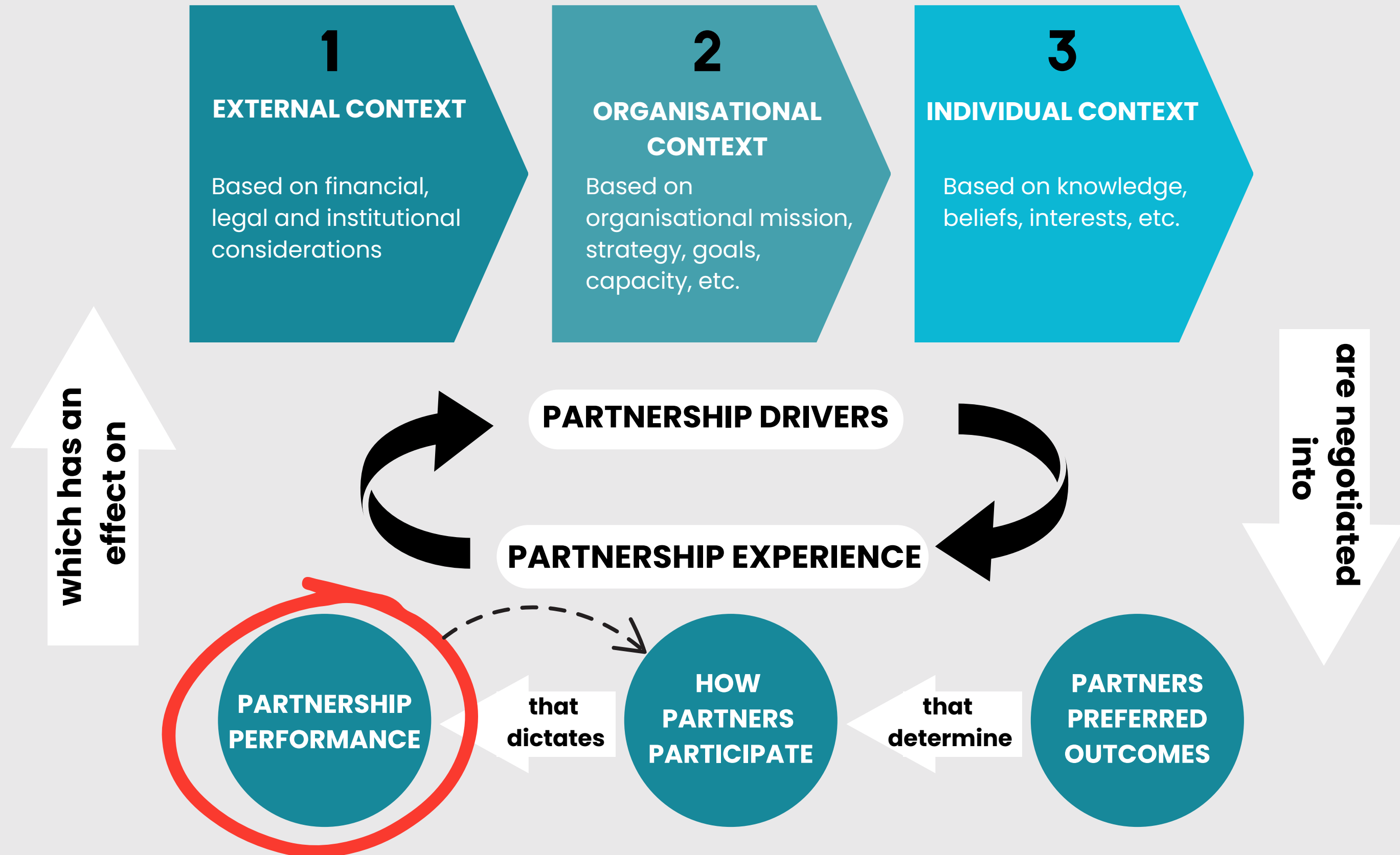
2) accommodates changes in the context

Whether partners feel that they have an appropriate say in the way decisions are taken will influence the way they deliver on their commitments.

The challenge here is to successfully capture the partnership's evolving working arrangements, while at the same time looking at how partner relationships might be optimised in order to enhance participation and thus improve performance.

Without an understanding of the processes involved, it is not possible to say to what extent a partnership is living up to its potential, or what factors are causing success or failure

Unpacking Partnership Performance



An assessment of partnership effectiveness and efficiency is critical to any performance assessment.

Partnership effectiveness is about whether the partnership gets the results it was hoping for.

Such effectiveness is dictated by whether the partners analysed the problem correctly and put forward the right response to meet that problem.

Partnership efficiency is the ability to make good use of members' financial resources, non-financial resources and time

Assessing the efficiency of a partnership relationship is primarily based on the cost (actual or opportunity) of achieving results.

Thus, efficiency has both internal and external measures.

- Internal measures relate to how well the partnership uses resources (inputs)
- External measures relate to how well the partnership interacts with its external environment

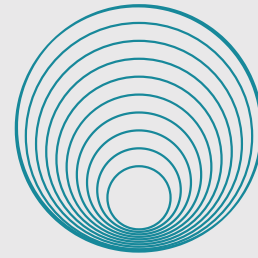
Relating back to the organisational and individual incentives to participate, greater satisfaction levels may drive further contributions that could, in turn, stimulate greater impact.

Alternatively, insufficient satisfaction with the partnership may have the opposite effect and result in a partner unilaterally deciding to reduce their commitments. If this happens without full discussion by the partners, the partnership is almost certainly destined to fail.

An assessment process should therefore determine not only how well the partners know the various contexts in which they are operating, but also how concretely they follow a structured dialogue process.

The dotted line from Partnership Performance back to How Partners Participate represents how a partner(s) might unbalance the partnership by failing to frame their own actions in an on-going wider discussion amongst partners around the context and desired targets.

This indicator, more than any other, suggests a failure of the partners to act effectively as a partnership



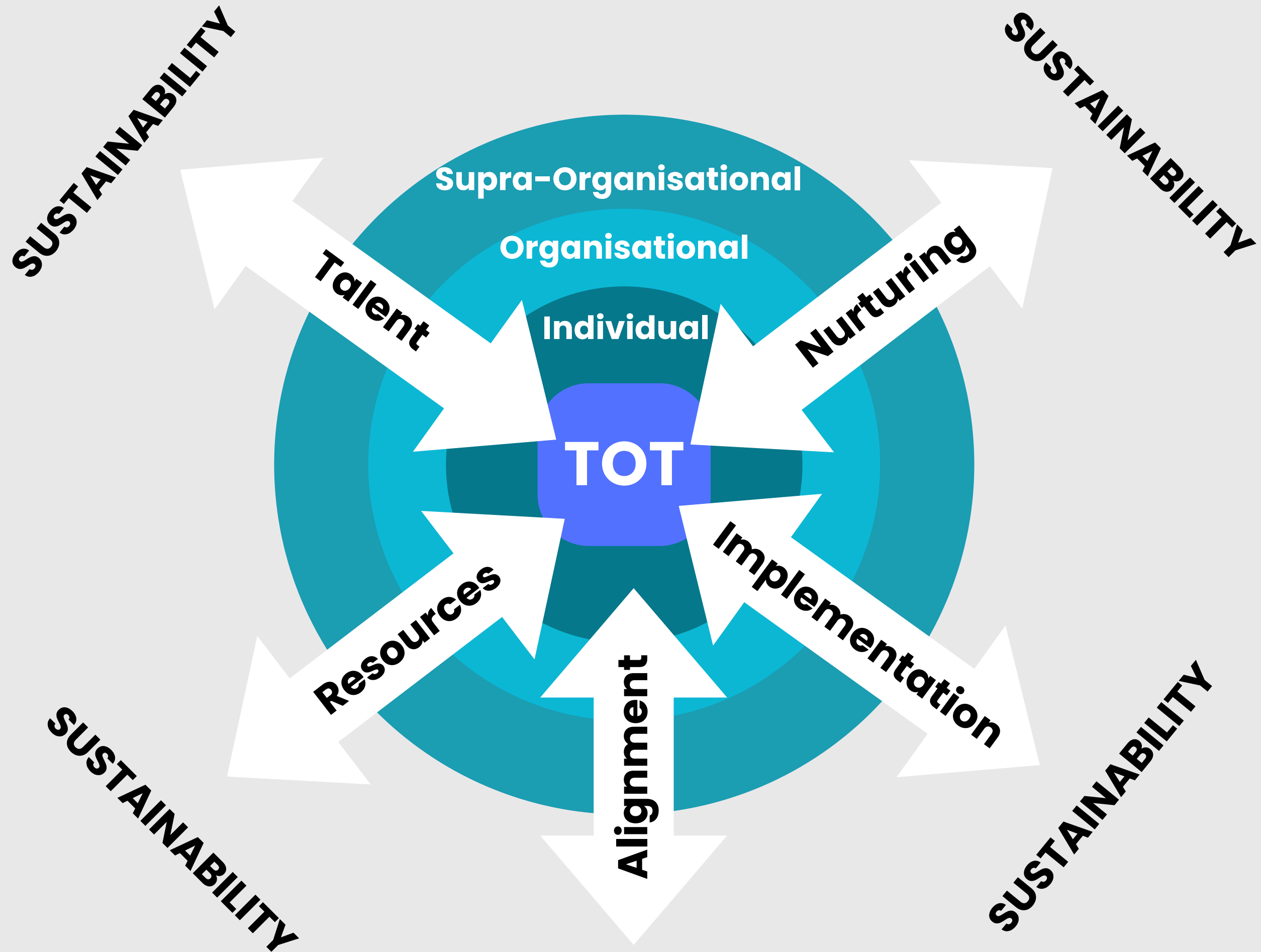
A Note On Attribution

To address the question of attribution, assessment processes should focus on a 'plausible' rather than 'direct' connection between intervention and impact.

Being reasonably positive of an association between the two requires careful triangulation of findings.

Useful tools for this include The Ripple Model, where impact is viewed as spreading out from individual to organisational and ultimately wider behavioural change, as follows:

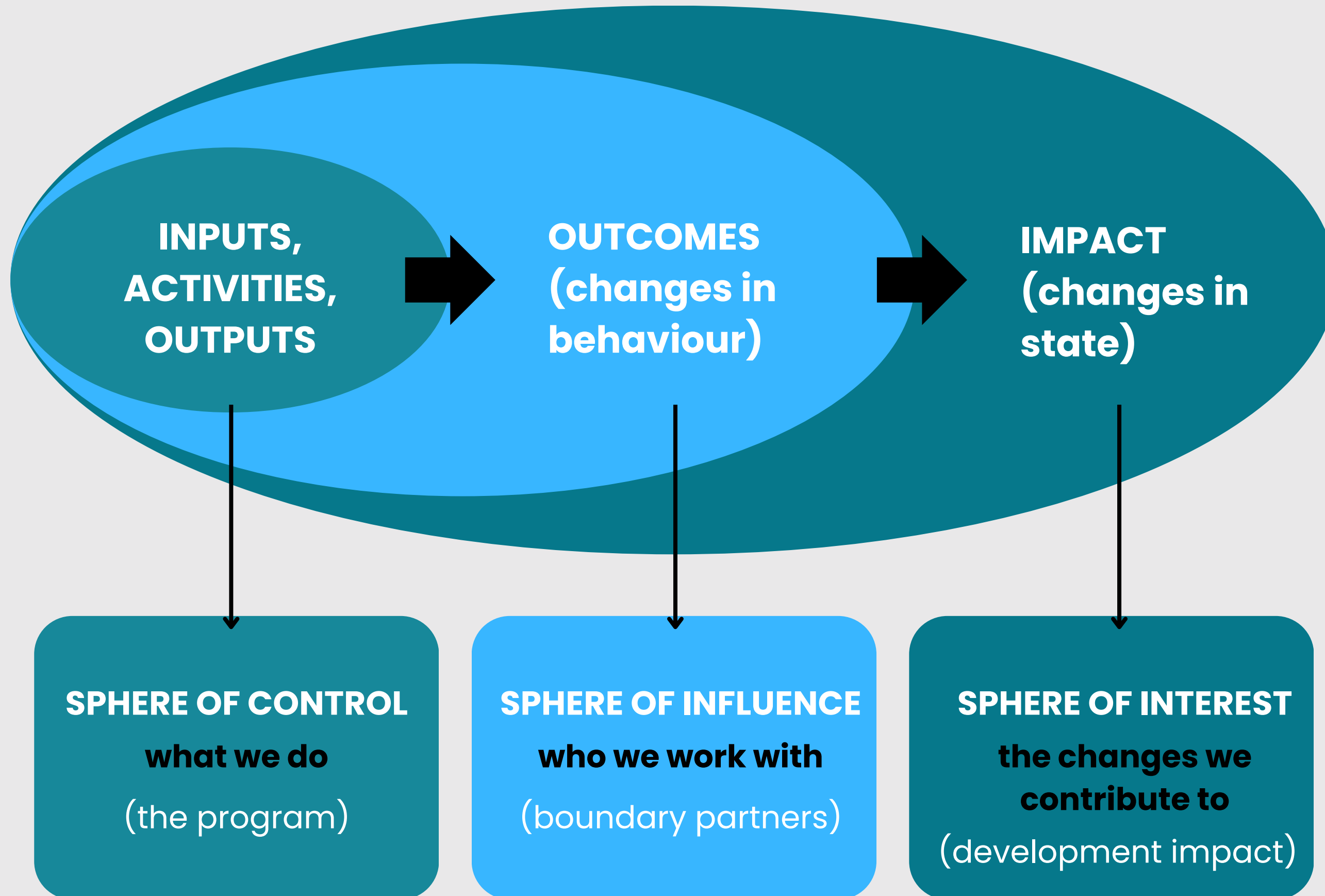
The Ripple Model

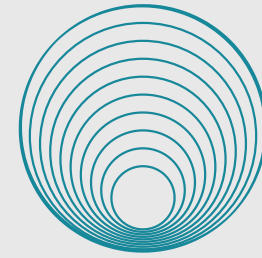


Another useful tool would be Outcome Mapping, in which the evaluation focus is upon behavioural and attitudinal changes among the people involved in a development intervention as opposed to a direct impact assessment.

It would look like this –

Outcome Mapping





To Conclude

Given the importance placed on partnership constructs to deliver on sustainable development goals and the time, energy and funding put into them, practitioners are encouraged to articulate the effectiveness of their partnerships more concisely.

Such assessments need to provide clear evidence that a partnership is a more appropriate and worthwhile choice than alternative means like a contract or transaction, which might present more straightforward ways of achieving the same outputs.

An assessment of this nature may reveal that over time more partners are needed in the partnership, that partners need to consult more regularly with the risk bearers, and facilitators need to find ways to counter-balance the power of those that have "too much" influence

Non-participation or low participation could suggest that partners are:

- ▶ **Indifferent** – if so, need to review incentives
- ▶ **Intimidated** – review partnership culture
- ▶ **Disenfranchised** – review governance structures
- ▶ **Incapable** – review implicit criteria for participating (time commitments, etc.)
- ▶ **Waiting** – need to anticipate triggers for participation

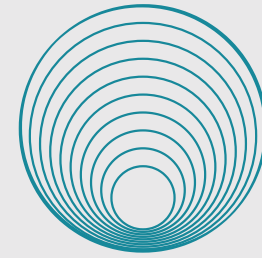
This helps us understand why certain partners may not be performing as well as others

We believe that the partnership assessment process should be treated as a learning journey with an emphasis on constantly improving the ability of partners to work together effectively.

Giving consideration to partnership drivers is central to this.

Without a clear understanding of the incentives and obligations for partners to meet their commitments and contribute to decision-making, it is highly unlikely that a partnership will perform effectively and fulfil the potential that collaborative working offers.

Be bespoke, be contextual, be valuable, be direct, be timely and your partnership journey will be effectual for all.



Thank You