



In many respects, partnering resembles a card game. But instead of using cards, we play with concepts and ideas. In addition: there is not always a level playing field between the players: they have different stakes, different resources, different ideas and often one or two tricks upon their sleeves.

That hardly should come as a surprise to the participants. What is most important, however, is that players playing the partnering game only during the game realize that the participants are using different cards. They have a different understanding of the nature and value of seemingly similar cards! That disadvantage can logically only be compensated if the players are able to agree upon the nature of the cards with which they play, in other words: of the ideas and assumptions that are at stake.

Big resource-rich as well as small resource-poor players might be equally misguided by concepts (cards) that superficially look sympathetic, but turn out to be toxic if used unappropriated or at the wrong moment in the game. This is the reality of the partnering game. Players get easily confused with terms like 'trust' or 'win-win' that give the false illusion of playing the same game.

The stakes are huge, so you'd better learn how to play the game!

The game of cards knows many shapes. It can be played as a game of poker that gives an incentive to cheating or bluffing. Poker is a very competitive game in which – in principle – the winner takes all! It can, however, also be played differently. What would happen if we enable and empower each player to redefine the game as a game of collaboration in which – if played well – they all could win?

Enter: the Great Trump Partnering Game (GTPG)! *The stakes: how can we define the cards (concepts) with which we play correctly and determine which card should out-trump another card and when? This game is based on the practice of partnering. It should help you to determine which dimension of the game should prevail over other dimensions.*

This game is played in three rounds

- **Round 1: determine the stakes of the game**
- **Round 2: determine the rules of the game**
- **Round 3: play the game**

➤ **Round 1: determine the stakes of the game**

You start comparing different concepts. You are first asked to determine whether any of the allegedly sympathetic concepts of partnering practice are in themselves a 'necessary' or a 'sufficient' conditions for a partnership to succeed.

- Assign a plus (+) to a card if you think it is necessary or sufficient.
- Assign an asterisk (*) to a card if you think it is necessary and sufficient for success.
- Assign a zero ('0') to a card if you think it is neither necessary nor sufficient.

This exercise in critical thinking defines which card can be considered **your trump card**. Logically, cards that score * should always be considered your trump: a valuable resource that in a competitive game can be used for your own advantage. But, considering circumstances, some lesser scoring cards might be important as well.

➤ **ROUND 1: DETERMINE YOUR TRUMP CARDS**

Key concept	CONDITION?*		TRUMP? + * or 0	Feedback: What do we know from practice?
	Necessary?	Sufficient?		
TRUST	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
RESPECT	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
COLLABORATION	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
COMPETITION	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
ISSUE AWARENESS	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
TRUST-BUILDING	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
WILLINGNESS TO PARTNER	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
DILEMMA SHARING	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
ACKNOWLEDGE OWN FAILURE	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
WILLINGNESS TO CONTRIBUTE	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
BROKERING SKILL	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
MEDIATING SKILL	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
COALITION OF THE WILLING	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
OUT-OF-THE BOX THINKING	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
WIN-WIN AMBITION	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
COALITION OF THE NEEDED	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
GOAL ALIGNMENT	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
IMPACT/RESULT OBLIGATION	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
INPUT OBLIGATION	☒ no ☐ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	0	
CORE ACTIVITY	☐ no ☒ yes	☒ no ☐ yes	+	
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*if you play this game, these scores are first left open. Here the scores are filled in based on general partnering research; in the feedback column this needs further explanation and supportive material; the possibility exists that players will define the condition column differently; they might be right under the conditions of the partnership; so in that case they have different trump cards.

After scoring your 'deck of cards', you now can *have a serious conversation* on whether you all agree on the stakes and the value of the concepts in absolute and relative terms. This will provide a 'common ground' (a playing field) that is levelled in any case for the concepts that you use. Whether you will actually be able to play the game in a constructive manner, now depends on how you implement them in practice.

➤ **Round 2: what out-trumps what?**

A game is never one that is played in an objective manner. There is interaction and comparison. The best way to understand the strength of cards, is by comparing them with each other. The challenge then become which card 'out trumps' another in order to create a value resource not only for yourself but for your partners as well.

When does the game lead to real positive outcomes? Partnerships are complex and context dependent. You will see that there is hardly any card that will always out trump another card. You will see that most (all?) cards that are 'needed' are nevertheless 'not sufficient'. Many cards are neither necessary nor sufficient, but in combination with other cards might nevertheless contribute to a positive outcome.

Context matters a lot. Most cards that seem needed are out-trumped by others that are equally needed. It will probably never be possible to single out one single factor that is both necessary and sufficient under all circumstances and instances. It is much more likely that the game will continue, but – when using the cards correctly - hopefully in the right direction!

In this second round, you should try to define which of the cards out trump each other. The outcome of this second round will then be that you are left with a number of cards that in *any combination* will either out-trump every other cards, or that create a tie of equally important trump cards.

➤ **ROUND 2: CAN TRUMP OUT-TRUMP TRUMP?**

	>	
Necessary condition: Yes Sufficient condition: No	[is more important than....]	Necessary condition: No Sufficient condition: No
Collaboration	>	Competition
Respect	>	Trust
Issue awareness	>	Willingness to partner
Dilemma sharing	>	Goal alignment
Willingness to contribute	>	Willingness to partner

Coalition of the needed	>	Coalition of the willing
Brokering	>	Mediating
Trust-building	>	Trust
Impact/result obligation	>	Input obligation
Out-of-the-box	>	Win-win
We	>	I

➤ **Round 3: play the game and may you all win!**

Now you have a pile of trump cards that should enable you to define what concepts will also provide you with a winning game! Playing the game with these cards provides you with all necessary conditions to play a collaborative game. Combined these cards provide you the necessary and sufficient means to create a virtuous outcome of the game. How to play then in this round? Well, that is largely up to your creativity and the wickedness of the problem you would like to address (1). What you should take into account in this round are a number of critical questions:

- Are all the relevant players in the room?
- How big should the table be on which you play?
- Do they all have the same cards, or are the cards spread over different players?
- When do you consider a particular winning combination of cards a 'deal'?

It is up to this round to start making it real, play the game and reach a collaborative playing field in which you can define the ultimate stakes and the kind of problems you would to address.



- The Game of Trump: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0tE6T-ecmg>
- [1] We have created a 'wicked problems plaza' to help you further in creating a safe space in which you can play this game. See: <http://www.rsm.nl/prc/what-we-offer/wicked-problems-plaza/>