

The Art of Partnering

A preparatory research for partnerships between the Eco-Schools programme and businesses



Martine van der Does

Master thesis

5 February 2018

Nijmegen School of Management

Radboud University

MA Environment & Society Studies

The Art of Partnering

A preparatory research for partnerships between the Eco-Schools programme and businesses

Colophon

Author: M.C. van der Does

Student number: 4761507

Internal supervisor: Prof. Dr. Pieter Leroy, Radboud University Nijmegen

External supervisor: Anna van der Veen, Eco-Schools NL

University: Radboud University Nijmegen

Faculty: School of Management

Degree: MA Environment and Society Studies

Course: Master Thesis

Date: 05-02-2018



Summary

The encouragement of multisector partnerships as part of the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 is much needed. Present day problems like climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and more are so complex that active involvement of all social spheres is needed to resolve them. The Dutch Eco-Schools programme acts upon this notion and aspires to start partnerships with businesses. The Eco-Schools programme is created to empower young people to act on sustainability in their classroom and from there on spread change for sustainability throughout the school and their local community. In that manner the Eco-Schools programme contributes to sustainable development and by means of partnerships they intend to expand this contribution. Their quest is about how to best manage effective partnerships with businesses and this study gives an answer to that question.

As a research approach the grounded theory method has been applied. As a result both theoretical and empirical data collection, but also data analysis were conducted simultaneously. Semi-structured interviews with twelve partnership experts were conducted and a substantive theory for the Eco-Schools programme has been established.

Several elements appeared essential for a successful partnership. One of them is the energy investment a partner is willing to make. The effort a partner puts in a partnership may be a better predictor of the partnership success than merely the partner's competences. Investing in the foundation of the partnerships relation appeared vital as well, together with the sharing of partners' expectations for the partnership. Furthermore, the use of a partnership specific agreement and communication plan are recommended, just as appointing a partnership manager. As a preferred way of working together, collaborating on project basis has been advocated. Partners then work on projects initiated by the partnership as a whole alongside operating from their own organization. What's more, is that regular reflection on the partnership is necessary and it was suggested that partners work in short cycles and reflect on these.

Important however, is that the success formula of a partnership is context dependent and therefore partnering organizations should discover each other's needs, assess the context they are working in, and adjust the partnership accordingly. It is worth stressing that the structure of a partnership is not the deciding factor in the success of a partnership but soft-skills are. Partnering is about give and take and continuously doing so gets and keeps the partnership successful.

Preface

The thesis marks the end of my time as a student at the Raboud university and at the same time marks the start of my time as a lifelong learner. Studying has been something I enjoyed as it continuously stimulated me to discover new things and understand the profundity of familiar concepts. It is really true that the more you learn, the more you realize that there is still so much more to learn.

This thesis carries my name as the author but in reality it deserves the names of many more people, because I could never have written it without their support. It is no flattery when I say that Prof. Dr. Pieter Leroy is an inspiration. His support and expertise were indispensable. He helped me to structure my thoughts, gave me room to experiment and always provided constructive feedback. Indispensable as well were the kind people that I could interview. I am aware of their busy calendars so I appreciate it even more that they took the time to speak with me in such length. The Dutch Eco-Schools programme deserves acknowledgement as well because they provided me with the opportunity to do research about this fascinating topic. The Eco-Schools programme does wonderful things and I hope they are able to continue doing so successfully in the future.

As writing a thesis is a demanding process I am very grateful for the people that supported me unconditionally along the way. I may not always have been the best version of myself and I really am very thankful for your support during this time. So thank you Claartje and Tiina for your understanding, appreciation and inspiration. Thank you Floris, for giving me space and for being so loving, you are the best! And finally, thank you Roos for your mental strength, it is contagious in a good way!

Looking back, I am happy with how everything turned out and I look forward to a fulfilling career in the field of sustainability. This research process taught me a lot and I would not have want to miss it. Happy reading!

Martine

Table of Contents

Summary	2
Preface	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
Complex problems	6
Partnerships as a solution for complex problems	7
Partnerships as the organizational modality of the century	8
The rising influence of the market	9
The value of partnerships	9
Eco-Schools and partnering	10
Chapter 2: Theoretical framework	12
Partnerships and their variety	12
Why organizations choose to partner	14
The benefits of partnering	16
General relevant principles for partnerships	17
Partnership management	18
Value creation	21
Partnership outcomes	22
Trust	24
Chapter 3: Methodical account	25
Grounded theory	25
Epistemology and ontology	26
Generalizability	26
Reliability & Validity	27
Subjectivity	27
Sensitizing concepts	28
Theoretical sampling	28
Interviewing	28
Empirical saturation	29
Coding	29
Theory	31
Chapter 4: Results	32
Partnership context	32
Motivations for partnering	33
Added value partnerships	35
Partner selection	36
Way of working together	37
Communication	38
Partnership agreement	40
Relationship management	42

Partnership manager	43
Trust	44
Tips for successful partnering	45
Types of partnerships	47
Monitoring and evaluation	49
Partnership cycle	50
Partnership challenges	51
Chapter 5: Conclusions	53
Empirical conclusions	53
Theoretical conclusions	54
Recommendations	56
Reflection	57
References	59
Appendix 1: List of interviewees	61
Appendix 2: Interview guide	62
Appendix 3: Coding approach	63

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first of January 2016 was an important day for millions of people worldwide as the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into force. The 17 goals together are what the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 is composed of. Among others, they are meant to make an end to poverty, hunger, inequality and deteriorating ecosystems. One of the goals in particular is what triggered the present research: “Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”, meaning that in the next fifteen years partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector are highly encouraged, aiming to provoke intensive global engagement in order to transform the world for the better (United Nations, 2017a).



Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations

An organization that aims to change the world for the better as well is Eco-Schools, a programme which empowers young people to act on sustainability in their classroom and from there on spread change for sustainability throughout the school and their local community (Eco-Schools, 2017). The mission of Eco-Schools is very much in line with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development goals, whereas sustainable development is the core reason of their existence. In addition, the Eco-Schools programme in the Netherlands wishes to form partnerships, making it the perfect case to do research on partnerships for sustainable development.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon captured the essence of partnerships beautifully when he said that “To successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we must swiftly move from commitments to action. To do that, we need strong, inclusive and integrated partnerships at all levels.” (United Nations, 2017c). Moreover, partnering is valuable in itself as collaboration breeds more collaboration. Besides social and financial dividend, partnering brings a learning dividend as well. When non-profit organizations and businesses partner effectively it gives them the skills and confidence to undertake other collaborations in the future (Austin, 2000). The question then arises how one creates these effective partnerships and how they can best be handled. This is the main theme addressed in this thesis. To shed a little brighter light on the question, the context in which the question lies embedded is what follows next.

Complex problems

The push for sustainable development is not without reason, considering the multiple and complex problems the world is facing. Many of them are environmental problems which lay the root of several other societal problems as well. Environmental problems are often described as a tragedy of the commons. The presence of these problems cannot be denied, neither can their complexity. Already in 1968 the tragedy of the commons had been portrayed (Lin & Darnall, 2015) but a solution is yet to be found.

Complex environmental issues such as the tragedy of the commons come in many shapes and forms including the release of toxic chemicals in the environment, the loss of biodiversity, pollution of water bodies but also pollution of the air and soil. These issues are one by one so complicated that they are difficult to mend and hence persist to the present-day. And then there is climate change, last in this list of environmental issues but certainly not the least. Climate change

quite literally places a dark blanket over the earth and is threatening in many ways. Recent destructive climate-related events like hurricanes and extreme flooding sharpened public awareness about climate change and heightened societal expectations organizations role in mitigating climate change (Lin & Darnall, 2015). Not surprisingly sustainable development earned its place on top of the agenda of many organizations.

The complexity of these problems is in part caused by the involvement of multiple stakeholders and resulting power imbalances. In addition, societal problems like poverty, food insecurity, climate change or biodiversity loss are continuously evolving and sometimes affected by scientific uncertainty. 'Wicked problems' is another denomination for these problems which previously have been referred to as unstructured problems. Both terms refer to the innate complexity of these issues. No single organization will be able to understand and solve them single handed. This is why organizations across different levels and sectors need to unite and join efforts to create complementary technological, organizational and institutional innovations (Kourula, 2014).

What makes wicked problems such as the ones mentioned above, hard to solve is that they are unstructured problems which makes it impossible to speak of 'the problem' and 'the solution'. A structured problem has a clear and undisputed cause and a just as clear and undisputed solution. But with unstructured problems several definitions of the problem exist and the same account for its solution. For example, one can see the deterioration of ecosystems caused by the corporate sector but one can also take the stand that the government carries full responsibility. A solution to combat these deteriorating ecosystems could then be expected from either the corporate or public sector in this example. Thereupon the solution to the problem changes according to perspective with which one views the cause of the issue at hand. Adding up to the challenge is the network in which problems occur and have to be solved. It follows that the multiple perceptions of the problem and solution that exist are all legitimate (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008).

The tragedy of the commons is a phenomenon that has to deal with this problem of multiple perspectives on the issue and its solution, hence contributing to its complexity. What makes the tragedy of the commons a true tragedy furthermore is the downward spiralling effect it has. This stems from people and organizations that seek to maximize their individual benefit and as a consequence overuse common-pool resources such as oceans, lakes, forests, irrigation systems, and grazing lands (Lin & Darnall, 2015). The result hereof is that common-pool resources become so damaged, weak or even destroyed that the overall benefits society can abstract from these resources diminishes. Eventually the impact of the individual over-use of common-pool resources comes full circle and causes individual benefits to drastically reduce as well (Lin & Darnall, 2015).

Partnerships as a solution for complex problems

Sustainable development and partnerships are innately connected because everything that the concept of sustainable development contains, relates to the shared responsibility to accomplish environmental health, social equity and economic wealth for all. Moreover, problems stemming from unsustainable practises are so complex that active involvement of all social spheres is needed to resolve them. In this body of thought the definition of a partnership is defined as "a collaborative arrangement in which actors from two or more spheres of society are involved in a non-hierarchical process, and through which these actors strive for a sustainability goal" (Van Huijstee, Fracken & Leroy, 2007, p.77). Multiple roles and functions have been ascribed to such partnerships including: agenda setting, implementation and facilitating a solution (Van Huijstee, Francken & Leroy, 2007). Even though it is said that partnerships alone will not change the world and that they must be viewed

as a piece of a larger puzzle, in combination with other approaches such as government policies, commercial activities or educational efforts, partnerships act as a mechanism to bring about positive improvements in society (Kourula, 2014).

By virtue of the potential of the combined efforts of multi-sector organizations in order to address persistent environmental and social problems, multi-sector partnerships have been credited the “new organizational zeitgeist in dealing with societal issues”(Grey & Stites, 2013, p.11). Others describe the potential of partnerships as the “two plus two equals five” effect, referring to the realization of synergistic gains that sector collaborations can accomplish (Erakovich & Anderson, 2013, p.171).

Partnerships as the organizational modality of the century

The increase in appeal for partnerships as an organization format is influenced by the shift from a government that used traditional top-down steering methods, to the governance of sustainability issues. Whereas in past decades it had been the standard to approach sustainability issues by means of this top-down steering approach, nowadays bottom-up ways of steering society are more common. The traditional top-down style of the government meant that the responsibility for dealing with sustainability issues was expected to be solely with government officials. In contrast, these days the market and civil-society have increasingly taken over a share of this responsibility. Partly this can be seen as a response to the limited problem-solving capacity of governments (Van Huijstee, Franken & Leroy, 2007). Another explanation is that the increasing budgetary needs of the public sector trigger the diffusion of responsibilities of the public sector and hence promote cross-sector collaboration. This way of managing assets by the public sector can help to provide solutions to social problems (Austin & Seitani, 2012b). The increase in multi-sector collaboration also causes more of a two way street in the creation and implementation of sustainability policies and measures (Van Huijstee, Franken & Leroy, 2007). And as a result more and more partnerships between actors from different sectors are apt to originate. Hence, it is for a reason that researchers expect that creation through collaboration which partnerships represent, will continue to increase pace and possibly become the organizational modality of this century (Austin & Seitani, 2012a).

The tendency to create partnerships between public, profit and civil-society organizations is described as the “unprecedented proliferation of accelerated interdependence” (Austin, 2000b, p. 69). Whereas traditionally each sector had implicitly been ascribed a specific function, the shift to governance and the resulting cooperation between different sectors has blurred functions and tasks in the public sector, private sector and civil-society. Originally the state would be responsible for an orderly society, the market for its economic basis and civil society for social and community relations. Accordingly, a previous held belief was that these responsibilities could not be fulfilled by another domain and that boundaries between the domains could and should not be crossed. But the rise of partnerships breaks through this reasoning by exchanging and sharing responsibility between actors from different sectors. They are self-organizing and coordinating alliances up taking their share in resolving sustainability issues. The hierarchy between state, market and civil society that once was so prominently present gradually has been replaced by more horizontal relationships between the domains. Not the autonomy of each domain is stressed these days, but rather the interdependencies that exist between them (Glasbergen, 2010).

The rising influence of the market

Related to the transition from government to governance is the rising rate of importance and influence of the market when dealing with sustainability challenges. This change got influenced by the growing attention in politics for the sustainable development paradigm. Seeing that sustainable development provides an integrated framework to look at economic, ecological and social issues, the paradigm cleared the way for the corporate sector to increase its contribution to solutions which the accomplishment of sustainable development demands. Consequently as sustainable development got higher on the agenda companies and environmental organizations were drawing nearer together (Comi & Zamparini, 2015).

But not only politics moved the corporate sector to seek collaboration with other sectors, corporate social responsibility (CSR) had a part in this as well (Austin & Seitani, 2012a). Just as the sustainable development paradigm was at a rise, also corporate social responsibility received more attention. Which is a sensible consequence as corporate social responsibility can be seen as a part of the realization of sustainable development. Even though corporate social responsibility all of a sudden got emphasised, this does not mean that private firms never looked at social aspects beforehand. In the days of the industrial age businesses took care of the housing of their employees for example. Not to mention that cultural development or other social aspects linked to their employees was on their agenda as well (Jonker & Nijhof, 2006). When we recall that corporate social responsibility entails that businesses take responsibility over the social and ecological effect of their practises, collaborating with other organizations is also more evident. Together with other sectors businesses can combine their knowledge and resources and take action in favour of sustainable development.

The value of partnerships

Businesses, but also non-profit organizations, are searching for additional ways to create value which has given rise to the generation of more robust cross-sector partnerships (Austin & Seitani, 2012a). When referring to value, especially when speaking of businesses, the tendency is to solely think about economic value. The perception of the concept capitalism is directly connected to money and getting ahead in business, no matter the consequences for other people or nature. But some scholars have opposed this idea when they said that “the idea that capitalism implies that one particular group always get priority is deeply flawed. Instead, the very nature of capitalism itself is putting together a deal, or a contract, or a set of relationships among stakeholders so that all can win continuously over a long period of time” (Austin & Seitani, 2012a, p.734). This statement carries multiple interesting thoughts, of which the remark that relationships between stakeholders cause all stakeholders to continuously win over a long period of time, is one. When partnerships are the embodiment of these relationships between stakeholders than this would imply that in the spirit of capitalism partners’ should aim for long terms gains rather than merely on short term wins. A long term gain as the improvement of biodiversity could then be a goal legitimate for a business that operates in the spirit of capitalism. It will even become an indispensable trait of businesses according to some scholars. The ability to collaborate across profit and non-profit boundaries could mean all the difference for the proliferation of private organizations (Austin & Seitani, 2012a). That is why ‘collaborative capitalism’ (Austin & Seitani, 2012a) is the shift needed in order to conquer the sustainability issues that society faces today. The fact that businesses seem to have become the dominant institution in society (Jonker & Nijhof, 2006), could on that account mean that society will

be deeply entrenched with partnerships as they will become the prevailing organizational choice rather than the exception.

To add an interesting critical note is the remark that demonstrating the precise added value of partnerships is difficult. This is a result of the dynamic and evolving nature of cross-sector partnerships (Tulder et al., 2015). It is tough to predict the process, outcome and results of a partnership beforehand or even when the partnership is already functioning. Things change and they can change fast, both within organizations or externally in the context in which it operates. At the same time, evaluating the added value of partnerships is problematic because of methodological and analytical difficulties. Scholars have described this as the attribution problem (Tulder et al., 2015), meaning that it is not easy to isolate the impacts of a specific cross-sector partnership from other confounding and contributing influences in society. This challenge becomes progressively more troublesome as the complexity of the issue one aims to solve, increases (Tulder et al., 2015). Nevertheless, collaborations between multi-sector organizations like NGO's and businesses contain a considerable potential for generating social value and simultaneously giving business and non-profit performance a boost (Austin, 2000). Hence it is worthwhile to investigate the art of partnering in more depth in order to reveal some of the factors that set partnerships between multi-sector organizations up for success. Hence, to prevent the potential of partnerships to only stay potential we must find the right conditions in which the partnership can flourish and manage them well (Van Huijstee, Francken & Leroy, 2007).

Eco-Schools and partnering

To return to the Eco-Schools programme, the quest is to search for what makes partnerships with Eco-Schools flourish and thus effective. In this study the Eco-Schools programme is considered a non-profit organization, hence a civil-society organization. To know what makes partnering with the Eco-Schools programme successful, we must first know what their goals are. On that account we will delve into the concept of a civil society organization, and the Eco-Schools programme in more detail.

Civil society organizations aim to make a positive contribution to the world and as follows the goal of the partnership is to increase this positive contribution. Partnerships can have a share in this as currently civil society organizations are facing a number of challenges. One of them is the retracting of government subsidies. In addition, fundraising by means of donors have turned out to be dissatisfying. Thereupon, alternative methods of fundraising have become more appealing. One of these other methods of fundraising can be collaborating with the market. It is said that civil society cannot survive without the market and that the market requires civil society for its growth (Rath & Schuyt, 2015). This mutual dependency is favourable as it promotes both civil society organizations and the market to make an effort to become near. The Eco-Schools programme sees partnerships as a way to increase their circle of influence and therefore reaches out to market. In doing so, they refine the existing dialogue about possible solutions for sustainability issues, which at itself is one of the ways in which partnerships express their potential to deliver a positive contribution to solutions for sustainability issues (Glasbergen, 2010).

The core of the Eco-Schools programme is to ensure that young people have the power to be the change for sustainability and become sustainably minded, conscious people. Each school that participates in the programme does this through a seven step change process that incorporates fun and action-oriented learning. As a result, the programme produces a generation that carries sustainable behavioural patterns and that is able to set and teach by example (Eco-Schools, 2017).

For this study to support the Eco-Schools programme in setting up partnerships, the following question is the main research question of this research is 'how can partnerships between the Eco-Schools programme and partners be managed effectively?'. To be able to answer this question, it is helpful to first know what the motivations of organizations are to partner. That knowledge can then be used to adjust to capitalize on these motives and create a partnership that is a profitable experience for both partnering organizations. After this first step, one should know how to best manage the partnership, as this is an indispensable competency required to get and keep the partnership flourishing. Finally, it is good to know what possible outcomes there are for a partnership. This knowledge can then be used as inspiration to set up the partnership in such a way that its potential is fully exploited. The main research question is therefore divided into the subsequent three sub-questions: 'Why are partnerships initiated?', 'How are partnerships managed?' and 'What are the outcomes of a partnership?'. The answer to these three questions together will support the answer to the overall question on how to best manage effective partnerships with the Eco-Schools programme. To come to these answers, the experiences of people with much knowledge and background in partnerships are studied, after which they are translated into lessons for the Eco-Schools programme to use. Firstly, a theoretical background of partnering is presented in which the theoretical foundation for the research questions is put forward. This is to be found in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

The present chapter starts with an overview of different kinds of partnerships and continues with an outline of reasons for organizations to partner and the benefits they may acquire from doing so. Successively general relevant principles for partnerships are discussed, after which the managing of partnerships is explained in more detail. The chapter proceeds with an elaboration of value creation by partnerships and the possible outcomes hereof. Lastly, an essential ingredient of successful partnering is discussed, that being trust.

Partnerships and their variety

Types of partnerships

Partnerships come in all shapes and forms. They vary from sector to sector and in size, goal, duration, set-up and of course in the sorts of actions the partners undertake. It is interesting to study partnerships in their extensiveness in order to realize the countless ways in which partnering can be brought about and hence make a positive contribution to the goals of both organizations and the issue they wish to address. To name a few types of partnerships that are categorised under the umbrella of business and non-profit ways of partnering, are corporate foundations, licencing agreements, corporate philanthropy, sponsorships, cause-related marketing, joint-issue promotion or joint-ventures (Sanzo et al., 2015). Important to realize up front is that due to this diversity in partnership forms, success factors for one type of partnership do not have to account for another type of partnership as well (Van Huijstee, Francken & Leroy, 2007).

Partnerships in all their diversity often serve different purposes. There are service provision and implementations partnerships for instance. These collaborations support the implementation of previously made agreements. But also for the purpose of knowledge transfer partnerships are utilized. Organizations then come together to generate, exchange and spread knowledge and expertise. Thirdly, the purpose of a partnerships can be to establish new rules and norms through collaborations. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) for instance contributes to the more sustainable use of forests (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2014).

The variety of partnerships expands when one identifies them on the degree of strategic importance for which the partnerships are to the company. A strategic partnership is a voluntary collaboration between organizations that involves some kind of exchange whether that is in products or services. Also it can accommodate the co-development of technology, projects or products in order to pursue a common set of goals (Lin & Darnall, 2015). The degree of strategicness of a partnership is determined by how much of the organizations' core business is involved in the activities the partners undertake. The opposite of a strategic partnership in this case is set to be a philanthropic partnership. Philanthropic partnerships focus more on advocacy whereas a strategic partnership it more apt to start new commercial activities (Byiers, Guadagno & Karaki, 2015).

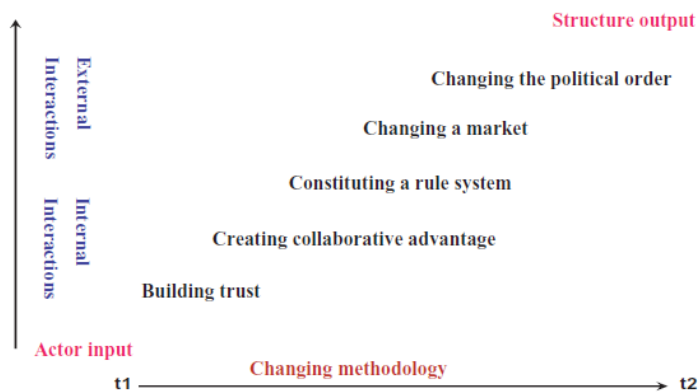
Partnership phases

Another approach to describing and studying partnerships is with help from the Collaborative Continuum as proposed by Austin (2000). Here the partnership is conceived to have three relationships stages, whereas at each stage the relationship becomes more intense. This implies that at each stage partners get more engaged, insert more resources, interact and trust more and co-create and innovate on a deeper level. The first stage is the philanthropic stage in which the partnership is mainly a unilateral transfer of resources from one organization to the other. Typically

this would be a corporate donor giving financial resources to a non-profit organization. Already a little more intense partnership is a transactional one where partners exchange certain resources through specific activities like for instance cause-related marketing. The next level of partnering is by means of an integrative partnership. In such a partnership the missions, strategies, values, personnel and activities are so intertwined that as a result both organizations together co-create new projects, processes or products of value (Austin & Seitani, 2012a).

The original collaborative continuum ends at the integrative stage of partnering but an extension of the initial model has been proposed by the formerly mentioned scholars. They suggested that an extra stage, a transformational stage, could follow the integrative partnership. In this transformational partnership, partners then collaborate even more intensely and merge their organizations even more. The primary focus is then to co-create transformative change at the societal level. Other scholars have described the different partnership types in a similar way whereby the collaboration intensity in the partnership ranges from minimal to very profound. On the left side of the spectrum then lie the more instrumental collaborations and on the other end of the spectrum the more consultative and transformational partnerships are found (Comi & Zamparini 2015).

To zoom in a bit further on the different ways a partnership can operate we include the ladder of partnership activity, as proposed by Glasbergen (2010), in this characterization of partnerships as well. The ladder is grounded in the assumption that partnering is a continuously evolving process in which partners create changing ways of managing the partnership. The ladder of partnership activity starts with an exploratory level whereby partners start to build trust between one another. Beyond this level, the ladder presents the formation level of the partnership in which a new arrangement between both partners is set up. This arrangement typically encapsulates the collaborative advantage that stems from the partnership. This collaborative advantage is something that could not have been achieved if the partners would try to attain it alone. But the synergy of the partnership can make it happen and hence partnering is beneficial. The collaborative advantage makes the mutual benefit of the partnership explicit and may express itself as the acquisition of extra resources, newly mastered skills or valuable connections. After the arrangement has been set up, the third level is entered and a rule system is set up. Here partners determine the preferred way of governing the collaboration. What follows is the implementation of these previously contemplated rules. Instead of only focussing inwards on the partners itself as has been done in the former levels, one now expands its view to the external environment a bit more. What matters now is that the formulated agreement and the rules of the partnership are carried and executed on a broader scale. At a fifth level ideally the effects of the partnership transfer to the political order. This may be a deliberate effect of the partnership or happen as a unintended consequence of the partnering process. Consequently, as time goes on the partnership gradually reaches out more to its external environment.



Ladder of Partnership Activity

Important to note however, is that the former description of the different levels of partnership activity are more theoretical than built upon empirical evidence. In reality the partnering process has many feedback loops and the sequential steps do not always follow each other very neatly (Glasbergen, 2010).

Why organizations choose to partner

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, a wide variety of partnerships are thinkable of which not one partnership has to be set up in the same manner. To better understand how to manage a successful partnership it is relevant to know what the motivations of organizations are to partner. In order to adjust the partnership management practises to fit the specific partnership at hand, revealing the core motivations of partners is a first step. The main focus is on the motivations of businesses, as the Eco-Schools programme is primarily interested in partnering with the business sector. Therefore in the following paragraph the motivations of businesses are discussed in more detail.

Business motivations

Stereotypically businesses are often seen as purely self-serving, only focussing on profit and in this pursuit behaving destructively towards the environment (Gray & Stites, 2013). As a response to this, the partnering of businesses with non-profit organizations (NGOs) may be a reactive response to the negative attention businesses have been receiving. However, currently many businesses are shifting from a reactive attitude towards NGOs, to more of a proactive attitude. To illustrate this movement a global survey of 766 CEOs in 100 countries revealed that seventy-eight percent of them believe that businesses should take part in multi-sector collaborations in order to contribute to development goals (Gray & Stites, 2013). This viewpoint is influenced by different factors including institutional factors. They manifest themselves in at least three ways, through the regulatory system, industry norms and politicians (Lin & Darnall, 2015). The regulatory system sharpens certain rules for corporations, industry norms get stricter and politicians aim to steer society in a more sustainable direction. Partnering can then be a way to deal with such institutional pressures. What influenced the cooperative attitudes of businesses as well is the increasing complexity of the business environment. Nowadays the interdependence of organizations is not something businesses can deny or go without. In addition, the stability of corporations is precarious, making businesses to actively look for collaborations (Berlie, 2014). Moreover, the CEOs wishes to partner may be affected by resource-

based arguments. Some businesses see complex environmental problems as a business opportunity and want to take advantage of the opportunities they perceive to exist. But this attitude is not universally felt within the corporate world. Some businesses experience the complex issues the world faces today as a threat to their businesses rather than a chance. Hence, it depends on the managerial interpretation of the current reality which positive or negative association is coupled to certain events. Businesses that see present day problems as a chance are more keen to form proactive partnerships, whereas businesses that hold the opposite point of view rather see partnering as a reactive response (Lin & Darnall, 2015).

Even when businesses believe that complex environmental issues can present a business opportunity, whether an organization chooses to partner is not the sole choice they have. According to Berlie (2014), one can consciously choose not to partner as well since the potential benefits of a partnership still have to weigh up against the effort it takes to participate in a partnership. Hence, a partnership is the result of an strategic corporate decision rather than a unequivocal demonstration of the partnerships benefits. The long term strategic vision of the organization must thus support a partnership so that the company can make use of it as a strategic tool. To accomplish this the partnership should at the same time support the company's core business and supports its responsible practises. Along these lines, it will never be a strategic choice for a company to solely work on an issue that is relevant to the NGO only. Whether or not the choice to partner for a corporation is strategic has some very direct implications, because a corporation that does not consider partnering as strategic will not maintain a partnership for very long. The investments in human and financial resources that a partnership demands, are then too much to keep up long term. Hence, a company will only make the commitment to the partnership if they believe it to make enough business sense. It does not mean that companies are not concerned about sustainable development or think about their social responsibility; it only means that they care not so much out of a sense of altruism but view their contribution from a business perspective (Berlie, 2014).

Until now we have seen that corporations can choose to partner to safe face, respond to intuitional pressure or to gain competitive advantage. But there is more. Gray & Stites presented four categories of motivations that businesses hold for partnering with non-profit organizations (2013). These are legitimacy-oriented, competency-oriented, resource-oriented and society-oriented motivations. Originating from a legitimacy-oriented motive is the aspiration to build a good reputation and image of the corporation at hand. Similar is the motive to build on their social licence to operate and avoid confrontation. Attracting and retaining employees can be a motive to search for collaboration with another organization as well. Generated from a competency-oriented motivation to partner is the desire to gain more expertise and make use of heterogeneous knowledge one can find at the partner organization. Stemming from the same argument is the corporations wish to timely identify issues and trends of which the other organization might be more aware. This increases the partner organizations' awareness of present-day social problems which they may have to take into account while doing business. The third category of business motivations for partnering are the resource-oriented motivations. Already briefly touched upon in the previous paragraph, these motives can be to gain access to relevant networks, build capacity, create innovations, gain more financial securement and the possibility to share risks. The fourth category of motivations are the society-oriented motives. Arguments from this category have a more idealistic nature as the desire to influence policy development illustrates. But also a motivation to partner in this category can be to respond to stakeholder activism considering local problems (Gray & Stites, 2013).

Not every argument mentioned in the previous paragraph is as important for every organization though, some arguments weigh heavier than others. The corporate barometer for business-NGO partnership motivations (2013) shows that improved reputation and credibility are rated the most important motives to actively look for partnerships. Second place are the innovation argument and the increase access to knowledge. Further down the ranking, access to new networks and markets were listed (Byiers, Guadagno & Karaki, 2015). These results may be time-specific and thus change over time but nevertheless they can support both partners to focus their attention in the right places when creating a partnership in which both partners are able to meet their needs. Important to realize is that the organizations' needs, which are derived from its motivations, are company specific even when some widespread tendencies may exist. All in all, collaboration motivations are often a mix of altruism and utilitarianism. It is important to take note of which motivations are present at the partnering organization since these motivations are a powerful shaper of behaviour (Austin & Seitani, 2012a).

The benefits of partnering

The business perspective

Now that the different motivations for businesses to partner are portrayed, we will get a little more specific on how exactly partnerships can come to terms with the motivations, and hence with the expectations that businesses have of partnering with NGOs.

The wish to improve the business's reputation can be fulfilled through the fact that partnerships cause the partnering organizations to gain visibility, which can ameliorate their reputation (Austin & Seitani, 2012b). In contrast with the widespread image of businesses as being the "root of evil" (Gray & Stites, 2013, p.32), NGOs are often seen as "altruistic, charged with identifying and solving world's problems, and acting as public watchdogs to raise the alarm about the evils of business" (Gray & Stites, 2013, p.32). By partnering with NGOs, businesses can benefit from this image and thus hope that it positively influences the general perception of their organization. The greater public trust attached to NGOs (Byiers, Guadagno & Karaki, 2015), has become a valuable asset of the non-profit organization. This asset can even get economized since a solid reputation diminishes the need for investing in promotion campaigns, hence having a direct effect on the operating costs of the corporation partnering with the non-profit organization.

The desire to partner with a NGO in order to give innovation a boost can be realized through the combination of different views present at the partnering organizations. Considering that corporations and NGOs often hold divergent worldviews, combining them may result in innovative ideas. This cross-fertilisation of ideas is what creates the fertile grounds for innovative solutions to arise. Even after an innovative idea is born, the connection with the non-profit organization is valuable since the NGO can act as a safeguard and insurer to society that the corporate initiative is one to be trusted. In this fashion, the non-profit organization's contribution is to support solutions to be accepted by a large part of society (Berlie, 2014).

Another motivation for businesses to partner with NGOs was because then they are better able to attract and retain employees. The mechanism behind this is that the community involvement that collaborating with a non-profit organization represents, enhances employee motivation and morale which in turn strengthens company loyalty. It also helps to build a company culture where empathy, caring and a service-oriented mentality are desirable. Besides attracting and retaining employees, the enhancement of company loyalty and culture comes in handy in times of crisis as well when it can act as the organizational glue that keeps the company together (Austin, 2000).

The non-profit perspective

In the former paragraphs the complementarity of the corporate world and the non-profit sector from a business perspective has been made apparent, therefore we will now shortly look at it from the perspective of a non-profit organization. Through the eyes of a non-profit, businesses are a “massive economic force” (Austin & Seitani, 2012a, p.735). It follows that building partnerships with businesses increases the NGOs chances to pursue more effectively what it is that they are doing. In addition, businesses provide expertise that might be useful to the NGO. Moreover, businesses often have large networks and sometimes their reach is even global. Seemingly contrary to their global spread, businesses are also embedded across local communities (Austin & Seitani, 2012a), making it possible to have an impact on a large scale. Just as for businesses, for non-profit organizations some motivations for partnering are more influential than others. According to the corporate-NGO partnership barometer (2013) the primary argument to partnering is to gain access to funds, followed by access to people and contacts. In addition, some non-profits see the corporate world as a partner in dialogue or a partner in joint projects. However, by far the most NGOs view businesses mainly as a source of finance (Byiers, Guadagno & Karaki, 2015). Despite the fact that non-profits are committed to ‘doing good’ and their mission to do good flows throughout the whole organization, the ‘economization of non-profits organizations’ (Rath & Schuyt, 2015, p.59) is a trend that has been observed. While in the corporate world bringing about social impact has become more important, in the non-profit sector more of a business oriented attitude seems to take over. This could be due to different factors of which the reserved attitude of governments related to subsidies is one.

General relevant principles for partnerships

Above we have argued that partnerships differ a lot in their shape and form and in the motivations that they are based on. Nevertheless, there are some common denominators noticeable as well. To start off, all business-NGO partnerships are not only intended to be useful for the partners, but have social value in itself as well. Therefore the management of partnership should go further then only the management of the internal projects the partners undertake. Business-NGO partnerships are sources of environmental innovation so partners are encouraged to think about how to use the partnership and its output to support new governance models (Berlie, 2014).

Organizational match

Generally speaking it accounts for all partnerships that the more convergent their values are, the stronger the connection between both partners is (Berlie, 2014). Such values create cognitive maps that in turn influence whatever is seen as acceptable within the organization. As values drive behaviour, one should be aware of the values of the other partner (Erakovich & Anderson, 2013). A shared vision formulated by both partners increases the organizational match as well. This is a prerequisite for attaining synergetic outcomes, plus the individual goals of each of the partnering organizations (Gray & Stites, 2013). Furthermore, what enhances a good organizational match is the compatibility of operational cultures, including the work philosophy, management style and way of working together as a team. The same or similar stakeholders is another reason for both organizations to increase their connection (Berlie, 2014). It can be far-reaching as well to in advance narrow down precisely what both partners aim to get out of the partnership and recognize where these interests overlap. Also good to get a grip on, is in how far the organizations’ mission, vision and values match, what the partners’ needs are and if the other organization can contribute in fulfilling those. Furthermore, it is worth discussing whether or not the collaboration corresponds with the

organizations' strategy and hence where the partnership fits into the organization as a whole. Finally, the costs one expects to make and how to split these is something to talk about beforehand. In sum, it is advised to get explicit about what the partners really want out of the partnership so that the strategic fit of both organizations becomes optimal. Doing such work in advance pays off in the strength and sustainability of the partnership (Austin, 2000).

In so far as the partners try to align their organizations to the best, both organizations do not have to be totally similar in their mission and values. What is essential is the alignment of goals, even if these originate from different values. Asymmetries between organizations are inevitable and thereupon a hallmark of successful partnerships is that the partners do not see these asymmetries as an insurmountable obstacle. Instead, the partners perceive them to be an unavoidable element that appears in all relations and hence needs to be worked upon. Successful partnering organizations are also fully conscious that to surmount such asymmetries, it requires them to engage in an open-minded learning process. Overall one can say that understanding the asymmetries between organizations is more important than the exact alignment of the partner organizations' mission and vision in order to get the most out of the partnership (Berlie, 2014).

Interdependence

Engaging in an open-minded learning process can appear to be fairly challenging. Even though partners wish to observe the other organization as holding unique and valuable contributions, in practice this can be burdensome. Where the partners before the partnership were used to think solely for their own organization, now they have to take the larger partnership vision into account as well (Gray & Stites, 2013). Accordingly, the interdependence that comes from partaking in a partnership is something the partners have to get used to. Vital is that this interdependence is about as large for both organizations. If for one organization the dependence on the other organization is disproportionately larger, then the relationship between both partners will suffer. Hence, to help the relationship between them to flourish, it is wise to create a more or less equal degree of interdependence between the two (Nooteboom, 1994). This is especially important when one realizes that interdependence is the foundation in which successful partnerships are built (Doz & Hamel, 1998). As a result, it is worth the effort to approach this topic with much care.

In addition, the widespread thought that the variety in people and complementary skills a partnership brings, are by definition more valuable than one, appeals to many people. Nonetheless, the subsequent interdependence requires a strong commitment from the partners, they must want to win the same race, even though they may be motivated to run for different reasons (Doz & Hamel, 1998). Furthermore the enthusiasm for the partnership at large has to be felt within the entire organization. Not only the leaders must feel responsible for the partnership, the employees have to share this feeling as well. When that gets accomplished, the impact the partnership can make increases and its continuity is more likely (Austin, 2000).

Partnership management

An important note to keep in mind when setting up a partnership is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to partnerships. It is much more a quest of which functions the partnership should get and how to adapt the partnership around these (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2014). What is more is that decisions made at one point in time might become unsuitable as time goes on. Just like everyone, both partners have to deal with bounded rationality which implies that it is impossible to anticipate on all possible events or information at the time of making a certain decision. Hence, the possibility

to adjust previously made decisions should exist, in case additional relevant information is presented (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Obviously this should be possible only to a certain degree to prevent decisions to completely lose their significance. Even when there is no single best way of managing partnerships, scholars have found certain management practices to be very promising when one aims for a successful partnership. For this reason several of such management practices will be introduced, starting off with how to select a partner to form a partnership with.

Partner selection

When it comes to selecting a partner some scholars argue that often managers invest too little attention in the partner selection process. As a result the fit between partners might not become optimal. Consequently the advice for managers is to invest significantly in the partner selection process since selecting the appropriate partner largely determine how much value the partnership will be able to produce (Austin & Seitani, 2012b). Investing in this process means that once two organizations are interested in starting a partnership, they should first get to know each other to make sure that their suggestion to partner was a good idea. When getting to know each other they should take note of whether or not there is personal chemistry between the initiators in addition to checking if their competencies supplement each other. Furthermore, a five step framework for guiding the partner selection has been proposed. This framework starts with the advice to verify the facts about the prospective partner, meaning that one should note what he knows, what he may know and what he does not know about the partner to be (Austin, 2000). Something to take along in this analysis in particular is the previous experience of the potential partner with other partnerships. This can be good be a good indicator of how good or bad the organization has been in partnering in the past and hence say something about their partnering capabilities (Austin & Seitani, 2012b). After stating these facts one is encouraged to expand the analytic scope to the stakeholders that are involved. These can be influential to the partnership so they should not be forgot. Thirdly, it is recommended to clarify the prospective legal, financial, moral or management issues one can think of to then continue with evaluating all options for action that originate from all of the previously taken steps. And finally one chooses which of these actions is considered the best when taking the viewpoints of all stakeholders into account (Austin, 2000).

Partnership structure

When the partner selection has taken place the time has come to set up a partnership structure along with the setting of objectives, rules and regulations and leadership positions (Austin & Seitani, 2012b). Important to realize, however, is that creating the 'right' structure for the partnership is not by definition guaranteed to be an success. Partnerships cannot be created and then set on autopilot (Doz & Hamel, 1998). Whereas the contractual structure surely is meaningful, the capabilities of both partners to manage the partnership are even more significant. This reasoning comes from the statement that the management of a partnership is more influential when it comes to the potential success of a partnership, than its initial structure. Hence, the ability to sooth differences and encourage a learning frame of mind within the organizations is an indispensable quality for both partners to master. Such soft skills outweigh structural aspects like specific internal organization, tools, techniques, mechanisms and recourses. It is thus the job of the people at the interface of both partnering organizations to focus more on topics like social exchange and relational capital in order to improve the relational quality and thus the partnership (Pfisterer, 2013).

Communication

A returning subject in these theories is communication. Ongoing communication between the partners themselves, between the personnel of both organizations and with stakeholders is a topic that deserves a great deal of attention as well. The partnership will face less difficulties when the interactions between the partners go smooth. Hence, it is advised that both partners together take the time to agree on the way they will communicate (Gray & Stites, 2013).

To attain effective communication one must first know what works for the partner whom you are communicating with. As a general rule though it is advised to first communicate about what you are going to do, before doing so (Austin, 2000). Moreover, a healthy partnership consists of a chain of frequently made micro-bargains (Doz & Hamel, 1998). These micro-bargains operate under the assumption that the only general interest that exist is that everyone agrees with whatever decision that gets made (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Hence, compromising and good communication are what builds the emotional connection which keeps both partners together (Austin, 2000).

To support effective communication the use of framing can be helpful. Framing is defined as the 'accentuating of a certain aspect of a topic in order to make it preeminent' (Ter Haar, Aarts & Verhoeven, 2014, p.124). Communication can be supported by expanding one's personal frames with those of someone else. In so doing the motives of the other person are acknowledged which keeps the relationship between partners unharmed. In addition, it also tempers one's own interpretations and cherishes relationship building in favour of an effective collaboration (Ter Haar, Aarts & Verhoeven, 2014). At the same time, the utilization of framing should not be misused for strategic action. That is when it is used to influence the other partner only, and not to understand him. Such a strategic action is contrasted with the communicative action described and preferred by Habermas. Communicative action then implies that communication is devoted to really understanding each other, rather than to solely attaining a specific outcome (Jonker & Nijhof, 2006).

In the same way that one can use the expanding of frames to support effective communication, the expanding of problem definitions can support effective communication as well. When facing a problem, it is possible that both partners look at it in a different way and hence prefer to solve it differently as well. To reach consensus, broadening of the problem definition may help. Precise problem definitions are not inviting to many parties. In contrast, broadening the problem definition and, possibly coupling it to other problems that are relevant for the other party, increases mutual support and understanding (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008).

Partnership manager

The management of a partnership requires appropriate leadership, and research (Gray & Stites, 2013) has shown that appointing a partnership manager, either internally or externally recruited, is desirable. Some scholars especially press the importance of an external independent third-party partnership manager, as a partnership with such a manager tends to be more successful. These managers then take the role of a facilitator and therefore work on capacity building between both partnering organizations. The role of the external partnership manager can be executed by one or more internal partnership managers as well. If so, it is essential that the partnership manager has the skills required. Among others, these include involving all relevant stakeholders in the partnership, being emphatic and have a sense of cultural sensitivity. All such capabilities will be needed to unite the stakeholders involved as these come from different backgrounds and thus might hold different viewpoints (Gray & Stites, 2013). In addition, managers should expand their focus from only on their

own organization, to the view of the other partner and all relevant stakeholders (Erakovich & Anderson, 2013). Moreover, the pre-partnership champion, as the partnership manager has also been called, needs to be committed for long term to the partnership (Austin & Seitani, 2012b). Such commitment encapsulates more than rational engagement, the manager should be socially involved as well. This is especially important when one considers that a partnership manager is responsible for creating a climate of trust for the employees from both organizations (Sanzo, Álvarez, Rey & García, 2015). However, he or she is not the only one who should feel responsible for the partnership. Shared leadership has been appointed vital to partnership success. This shared leadership means that all partners should feel ownership, and hence responsibility, for the partnership as a whole (Gray & Stites, 2013).

Partnership agreement

Most of the time the partnership members will decide on a partnership agreement. These can vary from a short letter which declares the partners' commitment to collaborate, to a lengthy and detailed contract and everything in between. A Memorandum of Understanding is a common in-between format for instance. It states the goals and vision of the partnership and is signed by both partners. Unfortunately, more often than not the partnership arrangement ends up to be not very supportive to the collaboration (Kourula, 2014). If one wishes this to be differently, then the creation of a partnership agreement is a valuable assignment. The agreement may consist of more general and non-binding statements or consisting of irreversible commitments. It has been said that successful partnerships do make irreversible commitments over time (Doz & Hamel, 1998). In this body of thought, a partnership can be compared with a personal relationship that goes from dating over engagement to marriage. Hence, commitment goes step by step (Nooteboom, 1994). Along these lines, irreversible commitments should not be made up front as they can work counterproductive (Doz & Hamel, 1998). Some scholars even state that it might be good to avoid formal decision making all together. This may not be needed in some cases. Doing so then can even delay actions if one has to wait for formal decision making to continue (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Others state that trust can replace an agreement as it appears that with higher levels of trust the need to for formal decision making, decreases. Nonetheless, partnership agreements are still needed for guidance, to prevent misunderstandings, to cover for unforeseen risks and to commit both partners to the partnership (Glasbergen, 2010). The question then is which potential conflicts to solve up front and cover in the agreement and which to work on later in time (Pfisterer, 2013). Another thing to question is whether or not the partners should decide on a time-limit for their partnership. Some scholars advise to do so, where others do not recommend to agree on a set time limit for the partnership. To support this statement, they link the partnership with the principles of game theory. Here, it is suggested for instance that when the partners know when the partnership ends, they will be less willing to make compromises and go solely for short term wins (Nooteboom, 1994). All in all, the perfect one-size fits all partnership agreement does not exist so the partnering organizations need to ask themselves the right questions to be able to create the most suited agreement for their particular partnership.

Value creation

In essence, value creation is what is all about in a partnership. Mostly, both partners are invested in the partnership to attain the highest amount of collaborative value possible. This collaborative value is defined as "the transitory and enduring benefits relative to the costs that are generated due to the

interaction of the collaborators and that accrue to organizations, individuals, and society” (Austin & Seitani, 2012a, p.728). It is similar to the concept of ‘shared value’ which does not only focus on dividing existing value but instead aims to enlarge the amount of value there is for all stakeholder to attain (Byiers, Guadagno & Karaki, 2015). Therefore value creation in a partnership can be targeted at a wider audience than the two partnering organizations solely. When brainstorming about value creation it is thus advised to think about the value the partnership can bring to society as well. This can be expressed in many different shapes and forms, for instance through the strengthening of the NGO involved (Austin, 2000). One way to communicate the shared value the partnership brings is by incorporating social and environmental value within the calculation of the financial value (Austin & Seitani, 2012b).

In a cross-sector partnerships between an NGO and a corporation it is thinkable that partners hold a different view on value and the means by which to measure it. Whereas usually a corporation thinks a lot in terms of financial value, a NGO usually stresses social and environmental value more. That is why it is required to understand one another’s view on value in order to come together. But understanding each other’s view on value is beneficial for another reason considering that scholars (Austin & Seitani, 2012a) have emphasized that the more the partners link their self-interest to the value they create for each other and society, the larger the potential value creation becomes. To make the potential value even larger is when the partnering organizations look beyond the sole creation of value and move towards the co-creation of value.

There are several different types of value that can be generated from a partnership according to Austin & Seitani (2012a). Firstly there is associational value, which is gained from merely being in a partnership with the other organization. Secondly, there is transferred resource value which implies that one partner gains resources from the other, which can be a financial resource but also a product or the learning of a new skill. Thirdly, interaction value encompasses the intangible benefits derived from the partnership such as an improved reputation, higher relational capital or newly gained knowledge. Lastly, synergistic value refers to the premise that by collaborating partners are able to achieve more than they could have done alone. This additional value is what is called synergistic value. The sort of value created will change over time as value creation is a constantly evolving process that changes when the relationship between partners matures (Austin & Seitani, 2012a). As time goes on, some sorts of value may get outdated because the value retrieved may no longer be useful or the partners priorities change. Therefore it is important to renew the value proposition of the partnership every now and then. Not only is this necessary to keep the value proposition up-to-date, it also stimulates innovation, keeps the organizations competitive and nurtures the partnerships ability to learn (Austin, 2000).

Something to consider before starting the value creation process is the sharing of expectations one has from the partnership. The better the partners are in doing so, the higher the chances of meeting the expectations that were set. Besides opening up about expectations, it is essential that the defining, creating, maintaining and adjusting of value is done by both partners collectively. Also the value for both partners should be more or less equal and measured by means of clear indicators for all relevant stakeholders in order for them to gain and hold support for the partnership (Austin, 2000).

Partnership outcomes

However, valuing the contributions of each partner is not an easy task. This is due to the fact that the partnership produces intangible, and hence hard to value assets. Also the relative value that each

partner brings can change over time. To complicate it even more, some of the value creation happens outside of the partnership which makes it hard to monitor the costs and benefits for the partnering organizations (Doz & Hamel, 1998). One should not get discouraged by the difficulty in measuring value though, in the end gain and loss are always a matter of perception (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Hence, the challenge is to find an additional subjective balance of value contribution rather than solely a strict objective one.

For a more objective measurement of the partnership as a whole scholars have distinguished between outputs, outcomes and impacts. Outputs refer to the sharing of goods and services whereas outcomes are the product hereof, for instance new behaviours from people in a target group. Impacts are another step further and can manifest themselves as improvements in sustainability for example (Gray & Stites, 2013). Especially the last category is difficult to measure. The question then is whether the partners want to measure it or that they leave it open.

Monitoring and evaluation

Nevertheless, it is recommended to measure the topics that are measurable by means of clear indicators. “What gets measured is what gets done” (Austin, 2000), carries some truth for sure. Besides this rather objective way of evaluating, it is recommended that partners regularly ask themselves questions like: ‘Are the partners satisfied?’, ‘Have the goals been accomplished?’, ‘Have partner relations been improved?’, ‘Have problems been solved?’, ‘Have we learned anything?’ (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008; Van Huijstee, Francken & Leroy, 2007). In addition, it is wise to judge the process as well. For instance, one could assess the process in relation to the goals by identifying four categories: good process and good results, good process but bad results, bad process and good results or bad process and bad results (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Interestingly enough, the commonly held proposition that conflict is something to avoid is counterbalanced by the statement that conflict can be a source of co-innovation. When partnerships are utilized to address wicked problems, confrontation can be a vital part of a successful partnership. A lack of confrontation may suggest a lack of change and nurture apathy and stagnation. On the contrary, functional conflict can be the catalyst for positive change (Kourula, 2014). Evaluating by means of the process just described is no exact science but it can help the partners to focus on the right things.

To facilitate the monitoring and evaluating process, partnering organizations are advised to only focus on the goals set by the partners themselves (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2014). And when these goals change over time, tracking moving targets should be incorporated into the evaluation system of the partnership (Doz & Hamel, 1998).

Learning

Closely linked to monitoring and evaluating is learning as a result of the partnership experience. Ideally the partnership is framed as a continuous learning process (Pfisterer, 2013). A partnership then becomes a learning laboratory, where partners learn by doing and are willing to experiment (Austin, 2000). Considering the changing context in which the partnership operates, learning is no luxury skill. Rather it is essential to maintain and ameliorate the partnerships effectiveness and efficiency (Erakovich & Anderson, 2013). To fuel the learning process, partners can gain knowledge outside their walls by means of consultants or network memberships (Berlie, 2014). But internally there is a lot of knowledge to be found as well, even though this is sometimes tacit knowledge (Nooteboom, 1994), which means that it is implicit knowledge gained through experience. To be able to share such knowledge it must first be made explicit. Only then it is available for the partners to

learn from (Nooteboom, 1994). Just as partners are not always aware of the knowledge they possess, they may not be aware of the strategies they use either. It might be good to make those explicit as well in order for them to not lose their power under the influence of the law of diminishing effectiveness. This law implies that the effectiveness of strategies usually does not last very long (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Hence, innovation of strategies is needed and the learning process connected to the partnership can be a good catalyst for it.

Essential for partnership success: trust

An essential asset that separates successful partnership from the non-successful ones is trust. In order to manage an effective partnership, trust is a vital factor. Most often when speaking about trust, it gets labeled as an emotional argument that encompasses the reduction of the feeling of risk and vulnerability (Glasbergen, 2010). But trust has different meanings for different people. Some suggest to replace the notion of trust with enlightened self- and mutual interest (Doz & Hamel, 1998). This leads to believe that trust comprises an aspect of self-interest expanded with the interest of the other partner. For partnerships this definition of trust could be applicable. Other scholars propose a similar explanation of a slightly different term. They then refer to trust as 'encapsulated interest' (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). This implies that that partner A trusts partner B because he believes that it is in the interest of the other partner to consider his interest as important if he wants to continue in the collaboration. Correspondingly, also in this definition the partners' own interest is enlarged with the interest of the other, which then contributes to the development of trust. Again others see trust as comprised of three dimensions. These are, trust in the others' capabilities, trust in the partners' honesty and integrity and thirdly, trust in the partners' benevolence, meaning that he will consider the partnership as a whole and not solely act out of self-interest (Sanzo, Álvarez, Rey & García, 2015).

Trust is not something that one can take for granted though, unless one's reputation is rock solid, trust is something that must be earned (Doz & Hamel, 1998). Also, trust is something to be managed and thus trust building is a cyclic process. Every time an outcome meets the expectations one had about the partner, a little piece of trust is built. If this occurs frequently, trust is built step by step. Such a cyclic trust building process goes hand in hand with the small wins approach, as proposed by Vangen and Huxam (2003). This states that trust is built through the execution of low risk initiatives. Eventually partners will be willing to undertake actions together that involve higher risks because the level of mutual trust has grown larger.

Other success factors for the development of trust are the composition of certain ground rules that provide security (Glasbergen, 2010). In addition, the quality of communication should be nurtured because trust increases when partners have the opportunity to freely express their concerns and that they are respected (Gray & Stites, 2013). Furthermore, trust builds up when time goes on, hence investing in the time dimension of the partnership may be worthwhile (Vangen & Huxam, 2003).

Chapter 3: Methodical account

This elaboration of the methodical account is structured as follows: At first grounded theory as a research method is reviewed, together with its prime characteristics concerning generalizability, reliability, validity and subjectivity. Subsequently, sensitizing concepts and the resulting theoretical sampling are discussed. Then the interviewing process is elaborated upon. The chapter ends with an account of the analytical approach through explaining the coding of data and the realization of a substantive theory.

Grounded theory

The research approach used in this thesis is grounded theory. Grounded theory is defined as “a research approach or method that calls for a continual interplay between data collection and analysis to produce a theory during the research process” (Bowen, 2006, p.2). Data collection, analysis, and theory stand in close relationship with one other meaning that these will be conducted simultaneously (Bowen, 2006). Precisely describing and explaining the grounded theory approach is hard as it is a predominantly intellectual process (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). But the process definitely has some indispensable steps and traits which will be clarified below.

Initially proposed by Glaser and Strauss, grounded theory was meant to present an opposing stance to the more conventional sociological research approaches. These conventional research methods used existing social research as the starting point for new studies. So theory was built on existing theory, informing deductive research endeavours. Grounded theory, on the other hand, does the converse as its goal is to generate theory from new data (Wiener, 2007), therefore following an inductive pathway. Because grounded theory aims at developing or generating new theories instead of verifying existing theories, it implies that the researcher enters the research domain without a fully prepared theoretical template as guidance (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). An effect thereof is that the researcher designs and adjusts the research roadmap while already doing research. It follows that the grounded theory approach, as presented by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, is an inductive method where one continuously thinks about where to find the information that is required next (Wiener, 2007).

Since theory is the outcome of the research instead of the fixed guiding structure, the grounded theory approach is different from a deductive research strategy (Bryman, 2012). In this fashion, the place of theory in the research process is different in a grounded theory research than in a deductive one. Therefore also the place and use of concepts in the research process is different. In a deductive research, concepts are known from the start, but in a the grounded theory research, concepts are also a result of empirical analysis (Locke, 2001). Also, in a deductive research, concepts are often tested as opposed to a grounded theory research where that does not have to be the case.

However, as the deductive research approach is indeed very different from the inductive grounded theory approach, one approach does not totally exclude the other. Just as deduction can contain some aspects of induction, the converse applies too. For example, once the analysis of empirical data has been completed and a theory is constructed, the researcher may want to test this theory (Bryman, 2012). He/she then wishes to clarify under what conditions the theory is valid. This step has a more deductive character which leads to the conclusion that the separation between deductive and inductive is not as large as it may seem to be.

Epistemology and ontology

What characterises the grounded theory even more is that it considers knowledge in the social sciences as something that needs to be interpreted instead of it being something that can be experienced through one of the five senses. This perspective on knowledge is what is called interpretivism. It is the opposite of positivism where knowledge is seen as noticeable rather than interpretable. In positivism one could say that a phenomenon just 'is' and in interpretivism a phenomenon carries a meaning. What is more is that data considered from an interpretivism point of view gets interpreted more than once before it is written down. The first interpretation is that of the person being studied. The second interpretation belongs to the researcher and the third interpretation is about how to frame the empirical data within a larger theoretical framework (Bryman, 2012).

In line with grounded theory, its epistemology is its perspective on whether or not social phenomena are constructed and thus interpreted, or whether these are objectively perceptible. Clearly social phenomena are things that are constructed according to the grounded theory philosophy, rather than perceivable in an objective way. The former line of thinking resonates with that of constructivism. Its counterpart is objectivism where social phenomena are regarded to exist even outside of social situations. Constructivism thus implies that social interactions among actors are necessary to provide meaning to a concept (Bryman, 2012). Also, these meanings change continuously as social actors themselves change their way of thinking regularly. Such an ontology therefore underlines the importance of interaction to create the meaning of a concept.

Generalizability

As expressed before, the inductive grounded theory approach differs from a deductive one in multiple ways. One of these is the way generalizability is handled. When using a deductive approach one's reasoning is such that a theory is tested for it to be potentially generalizable for some particular population. Data collected from a thoughtfully chosen sample of people then serves as the testing grounds for the theory.

Generalizability when using a grounded theory approach is of a different kind. This kind of generalizability is directed at the generalizability of a theory rather than at the applicability of an already existing theory on a population. This means that empirical data is used to say something about the credibility of the theory that is being constructed when operating through the grounded theory approach. The statistical generalizability strived for when employing more deductive methods is replaced here by analytic generalizability. Something, whether that is a category or a series of relations between them, has analytic generalizability when it clarifies a number of empirical observations (Locke, 2001). Generalizability in more inductive approaches such as the grounded theory is thus still a goal, yet the type of generalizability targeted is different.

Statistical or analytical generalizability, the topic remains a difficult one. This is due to the realisation that generalizability is never a sure fact. The concept has even been described as more of a comforting idea rather than a perfectly accurate one. Therefore "the only generalization is, there is no generalization". Nevertheless, generalizability to some degree is indispensable because, as scholars concluded so accurately, "we could not survive in the world without understanding particular events in all their complexity: but nor we could survive without comprehending some generalizations about how and why things work as they do" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p.222).

Reliability & Validity

Evaluating reliability and validity for a grounded theory study is challenging. Qualitative studies like a grounded theory study have their 'contextual uniqueness', which makes measuring reliability and validity complicated. Such criteria are more suited for a quantitative study and therefore scholars have proposed to add new criteria for evaluating the research. A new criterion then is trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of the research increases when the researcher asks feedback from other researchers and keeps good track of all data collected (Bryman, 2012). In this case feedback came from supervision at Eco-Schools and Radboud university.

In addition, the use of data-triangulation, which is when more than one data source is consulted, also increases the trustworthiness of the research (Bryman, 2012). For this study data-triangulation has been applied through the use of information collected from theoretical sources, interviews, attended presentations and workshops, and from exploratory conversations with several competent people in the field of partnerships. The interviews function as the foundation for the analysis, but the foregoing wide investigation of the field helped to create a better understanding of the context in which partnerships manifest themselves and from there on guide the research in the appropriate direction.

Subjectivity

An additional characteristic of the grounded theory method is its largely subjective nature. Considering that data has to be interpreted to get meaning, the researcher's perspective is of much influence on the final result of the research. Through internal considerations the collected data gets analysed and linkages between concepts are made. From these linkages then conclusions are drawn. This is done by means of structuration and categorisation. This means that when something is studied, the manner in which to do so is structuration. At the same time though, the result of the analysis is a structuration as well, but then expressed as the meaning of a concept. The manner in which data is structured can be seen as the lens through which the researcher operates. It results that because the researcher's perspective and interpretation varies from person to person and from time to time, no data analysis will be exactly the same. Looking at this statement from a historical point of view, one could say that the researcher's perspective on the data can act as data itself. Hence, objectivity is a created concept (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

However, this lens is necessary because without researchers would not have a conceptual framework to link any new knowledge to. The philosopher Thomas Kuhn also described this lens as a filter that is used to study data with. Any discipline then has a somewhat different filter which colours the data analysis of the researcher. It follows that from an existing lens, filter or conceptual framework, expectations come into existence. However, when using the grounded theory method as a research strategy, one wants to have as little hypotheses as possible to remain as open minded as possible (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). If one does have some solid pre-existing expectations, chances are high that these expectations will manifest themselves in the research results. The statement: "People create and find what they expect to find" (Ter Haar, 2014) describes perfectly the risk one carries when starting the research with pre-determined ideas. Unfortunately, considering people's conceptual starting point and the expectations and possible biases that come with it, in practise it is quite challenging to enter a research without some assumptions. Hence, as a researcher extra attention has been direct towards staying as open minded as possible. To do so, interviewees from more than one sector were interviewed. This way it was more likely to gather multiple perspectives on the question at hand. What appeared to be a benefit was that as a researcher I had little

experience with partnerships at first, which may help to stay unbiased for longer. Also, drawing conclusions has only been done after all interviews were conducted. This way the interviews that still had to be conducted were not influenced by sub-conclusions from the first interviews.

Sensitizing concepts

Guiding and supporting theoretical sampling is the use of sensitizing concepts. Sensitizing concepts are indicators for the researcher to guide the quest in theory. They are used as interpretive devices and as a starting point for a qualitative study (Bowen, 2006). The idea behind these sensitizing concepts is that they are meant to leave the social world unspecified to a certain degree in order to not have it locked-up by using less flexible definite concepts. Blumer (1954) saw sensitizing concepts as a possibility to discover a variety of aspects surrounding a concept (Bryman, 2012). Sensitizing concepts are therefore the opposite of definite concepts which tell the researcher exactly what information to capture. Hence, sensitizing concepts only direct the researcher where to look but do not tell what to find (Ter Haar, 2014). As a consequence, the sensitising concepts used when starting the research are not the complete list of used concepts yet. Instead, they lead to other concepts which in turn can become sensitizing concepts guiding in another direction. For the researcher this means that at the beginning of a study a wide range of more general concepts are studied after which they are revised and refined during the course of the study (Bryman, 2012). Gradually throughout the research process, the sensitizing concepts start go get meaning within the context in which they are applied (Ter Haar, 2014). Compounded together, the sensitizing concepts shape the theoretical framework of the research.

This thesis has been steered by the following sensitizing concepts: Partnerships, partnership motivations, partnership strategies, partnership manager, partnership agreement and partnership results. These concepts have been chosen because they are essential components of the research's sub-questions and are therefore seen as building blocks for answering the study's central research question.

Theoretical sampling

The aforementioned sensitizing concepts were key players in the process of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling has been the main priority in the beginnings of this grounded theory research process. It is a defining property belonging to grounded theory which entails the quest into theory for relevant concepts to support the research question. It is an ongoing process and concerned with the refinement of theoretical categories that emerge (Bryman, 2012). This in turn can advance the theory that one uses in course of the research (Byrant & Charmaz, 2007). Theoretical sampling is further explained with help of the concept's following definition: "The process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory" (Bryman, 2012, p 419). Throughout the research, when the researcher gets more acquainted with the research field and as the body of empirical data grows, the amount of theoretical data used for the research grows as well.

Interviewing

After and during theoretical sampling semi-structured interviews took place which helped to answer the research question and guide the ongoing process of theoretical sampling. These semi-structured interviews were steered by a list of questions about partnerships. The formulated questions were

abstracted from the theoretical concepts studied thus far. Whenever a theoretical concept frequently returned in the partnership literature and it could help in answering the research question, an interview question about the topic was constructed. However, the questions were not postulated in a fixed order, nor were they the same for every interviewee. Since the interviews were semi-structured, they left space for additional questions that could arise during the interview. In addition, the questions were more general than one would expect from questions in a structured interview (Bryman, 2012). This left the opportunity to specify the questions to each individual interviewee. Furthermore, the semi-structured approach to interviewing, created more space to keep an open mind and to let the data speak for itself. The interview guide is found in the appendix.

The interviewees had been selected on the basis of the following criteria: experience with cross-sector partnerships, relatability with Eco-Schools, availability and proximity. Beforehand there was no decision on a fixed number of interviewees, as it was impossible to know in advance when enough data would have been gathered to be able to answer the research question. On the other hand, due to time considerations, the number of interviewees could not be unlimited. Considering that the sample for a grounded theory study needs to be both wide and prompted by the emerging theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), in the end twelve participants were interviewed. Most interviews were held face-to-face and several via Skype. In order to gain a more complete view of the partnership field, these participants came from different sectors. So people from the private sector, as well as researchers have given their input for this thesis. Important to note is that during the interviews, special attention had to be paid to the understanding of the interviewee frames and to discovering what the interviewee saw as very important when explaining events, patterns or behaviour (Bryman, 2012). This could lead to important pieces of information which are found in the core of an argumentation. For example, when asking about the interviewee's view on a partnership agreement and an ideal format was put forward, an additional question was asked to discover more fundamental beliefs about the way in which partnerships should be arranged according to this person.

Empirical saturation

At a certain moment, the data collection process came to an end because it seemed that further research would not bring new input of such value that it would be indispensable for the research to produce satisfying conclusions. This realisation is referred to as theoretical or empirical saturation. Saturation means that no new or relevant data seems to be emerging when analysing the collected theoretical and empirical data. Therefore the current categories appear to be an accurate representation of the illuminated field of research. Also, the interdependencies between categories are constituted and validated sufficiently. When exactly the point of theoretical saturation had been reached is hard to say since the criteria for recognizing and establishing theoretical saturation are almost never expressed in detail (Bryman, 2012). Therefore the moment of saturation is more a judgement of the researcher, rather than an objective and demonstrable moment in time.

Coding

After delving into the theory, exploring the field, conducting and transcribing interviews and simultaneously gathering and specifying additional theory, it made sense to start coding the collected data. Coding has been defined as "the reviewing of transcripts and/or field notes and giving labels to component parts that seem to be of potential theoretical significance and/or that appear to be particularly salient within the social worlds of those being studied" (Bryman, 2012). When coding

data, one thus analyses the interview transcripts and starts to mark the parts that appear to be the most important in relation to the theoretical framework studied or the context in which the research question is embedded. A hallmark of grounded theory is its iterative character and this also shows itself while coding because the coding process is one in which revision and flexibility are vital (Bryman, 2012).

Grounded theory founders Glaser and Strauss noted that the essential information generally is what sticks in the mind of the researcher the most (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Partly coding thus requires the investigator to tap into his/her intuition in order to retrieve the most relevant pieces of information from the empirical data. After the highlighting the most important pieces of data, these are labelled. This is where the selected pieces of data get their code. These codes function as indicators for a series of events or behaviours (Bryman, 2012). To create the codes the researcher asks himself a set of questions about the selected data. These can be questions like 'Where is this remark a feature of?', or 'what is the main message the interviewee expresses?' – related to the concepts that had been preselected as 'sensitizing' -. When asking such questions the researcher usually employs a particular analytic perspective stemming from the theoretical sampling that has already been done (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). However, how this perspective translates to the codes is not to be predicted, which is what makes the coding process a largely personal and creative process. What often happens is that the researcher 'codes backwards'. This means that the coding process is not something one does once and then it is finished. Instead, data continuously gets re-analysed to check for overlooked information. Coding backwards is recommended to do while researching and is what gives the grounded theory approach its iterative character (Wiener, 2007).

Following the coding of the empirical data, the codes are clustered and directed into categories, also called code families. These categories have a somewhat higher level of abstraction than the codes themselves. Bruner and his colleagues referred to categories as "a range of discriminably different events that are treated "as if" equivalent" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Categories are the result of an analysis based on the interdependencies between codes and their relation to the overall context. They take statements to a higher level of abstraction (Wiener, 2007). The resulting categories are important as they operate as an instrument for analysis (Ter Haar, 2014).

In order to put concepts into categories, an all-embracing term for each and every category must be found. All the concepts within one category together then serve as the explanation of the category. Categories can guide the analysis of the empirical data later on. It is when the relations between concepts are made, that certain categories may appear to be the building blocks of the final theory (Bryman, 2012).

The coding for this thesis was done with the support of the software application 'Atlas Ti'. This is a tool to facilitate the coding process and graphically present the results. It supported the following steps: The marking of important phrases from the interview transcripts – assigning codes to these interview statements - clustering the codes into code families and organising the code family in such a way that the individual codes are sorted according to their relevance and linkages to other codes. Unfortunately, due to a laptop crash, the work done in Atlas Ti is irretrievable. To compensate this hardship, one example of the process from transcription to (sub)conclusion will be stated next. A more elaborate description of the coding process is to be found in the appendix.

Example one: To start, the following quote was marked as an extra important quote: "Partnerships do not always need a legal agreement, they can be informal. It depends on the scale of the partnership though". From this quote the code 'agreement can be informal depending on size partnership' was made. This code was placed in the category 'partnership agreement'. It follows that

the statement endorsed the sub-conclusion that a very formal partnership agreement may not always be best.

Theory

Bryman (2014) considers a theory as a “set of well-developed categories that are systematically related through statements of relationships to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social- or other phenomenon” (p.570). Therefore, a fundamental part of a theory are statements about relationships between categories. In this grounded theory study these relations come to existence in the shape of hypotheses at the end of the study. So in contrast with deductive research methods, hypotheses are not what shaped this study from the beginning, but the result of an inductive data analysis. This means that the end result of a grounded theory study never only is the reporting of facts, but instead the generation of probability statements about the relationships between concepts. Hence, a series of hypotheses are developed out of the empirical data. They should explain the relationships made, as a grounded theory study must explain data rather than merely describing it (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). These hypotheses then function as the steppingstones of a theory.

The theory proposed in this research will be a substantive one, meaning that it is applicable in the specific context for which the research was done, being the partnering between a small NGO and businesses. No formal theory is aimed for, because it would require doing empirical research in multiple setting in order to be able to construct such a theory (Bryman, 2012). The result then would have been a more abstract theory which would be applicable to more areas than only for partnerships between small NGO's and businesses. But as for this thesis, the focus is on partnerships for Eco-Schools and so a purely substantive theory will be the result.

To give a glimpse of the theory, an example of one of the building blocks of the theory will be explained next. The interview analysis showed for instance that a preferred way of working together as partners is through collaboration on a project basis. It was a statement that recurred so frequently in the interviews, that it appeared to be a pattern. This observation then served as part of the answer to the sub question on how partnerships are managed best. Many of these sub-answers together built on a theory. This theory has been presented in a storytelling kind of fashion of which is said that it provides insight and understanding about the topic to be studied. An equally interesting remark comes from the same author who suggested to look at a theory as an in-process accomplishment. It results that theory building is regarded as an ongoing process, of which elements of the theory like relations, explanations, generalizations and idealizations, are all part (Locke, 2001). The theory proposed in this thesis is thus a solid and well considered attempt to answer the main research question but does not guarantee to be the final and only answer.

Chapter 4: Results

Prior to answering the main research question as to how to effectively manage partnerships with the Eco-Schools programme, the three sub-questions will be answered. These were:

- Why are partnerships initiated?
- How are partnerships managed?
- What are the outcomes of a partnership?

The present chapter discusses the answers to these sub-questions, whereas the next chapter answers the main question and formulates recommendations for the ES programme. To answer the sub-questions, the codes and the codes families direct the answers. The codes are depicted in network-like images that are constructed for each code family. These images represent how the codes relate to each other within the code family. To emphasise the extra importance of particular codes over others, the extra important ones are marked green. These green codes often encompass a recurrent theme within the code family, making them more important than other codes. In the following paragraph the answer to the first sub-question is introduced.

Why are partnerships initiated?

The interview analysis showed that there are three themes of prior importance when it comes to the reasons for partnerships to be initiated. These are: the context of partnerships, the motivations of different parties for partnering, and the (anticipated) added value of partnering. Therefore, these three themes are relevant when answering why partnerships are initiated.

Partnership context

One of the main observations from the interviews regarding the partnership context is that there is a general sense of awareness about the need for partnerships to solve certain issues. Sustainable development - and the search for it - was one of the core themes frequently mentioned when speaking about the reasons for partnering. Also, people spoke of partnerships in such a way that partnering can be seen as a conscious decision rather than a random one. Hence, partnering is perceived as one of the steps to reach the goals of an organisation. Further awareness was about partnering as part of the development to a more market based approach when dealing with issues that before were more a governmental responsibility and/or undertaking. Partnering was by many interviewees also experienced as a business opportunity. To zoom in on these observations a bit more, first a sketch of the partnership context.

The context that partnerships manifest themselves in influences the likelihood that organizations choose to partner. This context is created by the interplay between state, market and civil society. Naturally, partnerships have a higher probability to arise when the environment in which they operate is an inviting one. The state is responsible for this environment as far as its policies increasingly steer organizations towards more sustainable practises. And for the market futureproof entrepreneurship increasingly implies actively pursuing sustainable development of which partnering is a part. Hence, partnering becomes a compelling step for businesses.

Also throughout civil society there is a greater awareness of the need for sustainable development, part of which can be realised through partnerships. Civil society influences the partnership context through creating societal pressure for organizations to act more sustainable. One way in which they do so is through setting up rankings about sustainable and less sustainable

organizations. These rankings can be seen as an expression of the naming and shaming concept whereby organizations are pushed to act more sustainable because they want to avoid negative publicity. On the other hand, positive publicity can stimulate organizations to act more sustainable as well, which is another reason why scoring high in rankings of sustainable organizations is desired. Partnering relates to this because organizations that partner in order to contribute to sustainable development, generally score higher in these rankings.

A shared notion between the interviewees is also that partnerships are perceived to be a means to an end rather than a goal in itself. The goal for which a partnership is used does differ per person and per organization though. But for many businesses one could say that they value partnerships more due to their pragmatic nature and the opportunities they create to do business.

The core message of the aforementioned findings is expressed through the green codes in image below. The green codes play a defining role in the partnership context and can all be linked to the individual blue codes. The image below, therefore, visually represents the context surrounding partnerships. These empirical findings are in line with the notion in chapter one about partnerships being self-organizing and coordinating alliances that take up their share in resolving sustainability issues. Hence, the findings endorse the observation that multi-stakeholder partnerships are crucial to achieve sustainable development and highlight the fact that partnerships have never before been more important for that matter (United Nations, 2017b/c). Also, as changes in the context around partnerships affect the identity of organisations (Ter Haar, 2014), organisations could be more apt to partner if the context around them stimulates partnerships.

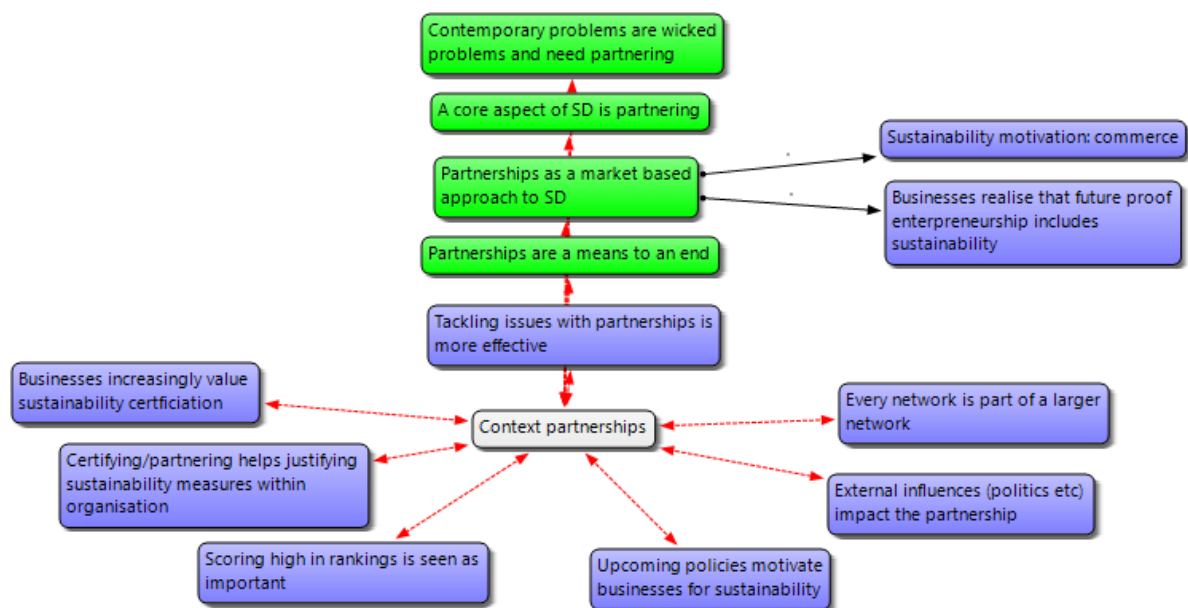


Figure 1: partnership context

Motivations for partnering

Organizations partner because of various reasons, but a fundamental reason is that organizations realize that they need each other. One of the findings is that such organizational needs originate from commercial, practical, or idealistic grounds or because they wish to learn from each other. collect knowledge. All of the individual codes in the figure below can be related to (at least) one of

these categories. The codes on the left of the image encompass the more practical motives to partner. The codes on the upper right capture the commercial motives, whereas the motives on the bottom right are rather idealistic motives for partnering. Lastly, the codes at bottom centre refer to the motivations for partnering that stem from the wish to learn from each other. In addition, these motives can be externally or internally driven. This means that for some organizations, external developments are highly influential on their choice to partner, while for other organizations internal developments are most influential. The next paragraphs elaborate these observations in more detail.

As proposed before, the motivations for organizations to partner can be divided within four categories, but are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes motives can belong to multiple categories. But to support the presentation of this study's findings, the four distinct classifications are used. First of all, the commercial motivations.

Partnering can help organizations commercially as customers increasingly value businesses that are actively pursuing societal goals. Partnering as a part of corporate social responsibility can thus be initiated because organizations want to do good, but also because organizations wish to increase their profit. Engaging in partnerships that help to solve a specific societal issue can therefore be commercially relevant and hence represent Austin and Seitani their notion on collaborative capitalism (2012a).

Partnering because it is of some practical convenience for an organization can be expressed in multiple ways. Outsourcing for instance is often done by means of a partnership. But also an organization's chances to be eligible for a subsidies increases when teaming up with another organization. Furthermore, partnerships can help to accomplish projects when the organization itself lacks capacity. These three examples give a short, yet not all-encompassing overview of practical motives for partnering. In reality, many more reasons are thinkable.

More idealistic motives can be the reason for organizations to partner as well. As an organization's outreach increases when partnering with another organization, their (potential) social impact may also get larger which makes partnering more appealing.

A fourth category of motivations is the motivation to learn from each other through the partnership. The partnering organization can provide the initiating organization with knowledge about certain skills, processes or developments. In addition, the partnership can serve as a source of inspiration, providing the partnering organization with extra incentives to be proactive in contributing to sustainable development.

As specified in the previous paragraphs, organizations partner because they need each other for different reasons. This may be brought about because of external factors, for example customer wishes. Or partnerships are created due to internal developments, e.g. the wish to pay more attention onto corporate social responsibility. Moreover, one has to realise that the reasons why organizations choose to partner are not static and may change over time. For example, if an organization aims to expand they may choose to partner, but if later on they need to become smaller again, they may also choose to partner. At either moment, partnering is an answer to a challenge the organization is facing.

In chapter two we have seen that organizations can choose to partner to safe face, respond to institutional pressure or to gain competitive advantage. Also the distinction between legitimacy-oriented, competency-oriented, resource-oriented and society-oriented motivations (Gray & Stites, 2013) was made. The empirical observations as described above do not dispute these earlier theoretical findings. However, there is an additional motive to be added to the list that had not been mentioned in the theoretical framework yet. This is the notion that organizations may choose to

partner because a partnership can serve as an inspiration. The inspiration may come from the activities that the partnering organization undertakes, or from their level of knowledge about societal developments and the impact thereof. But also the partners level of academic knowledge can serve as an inspiration in the case one partners with an researching organization. Finally, inspiration may come from the partnering organization as a whole if they are seen as a role model for the organization with which they partner.

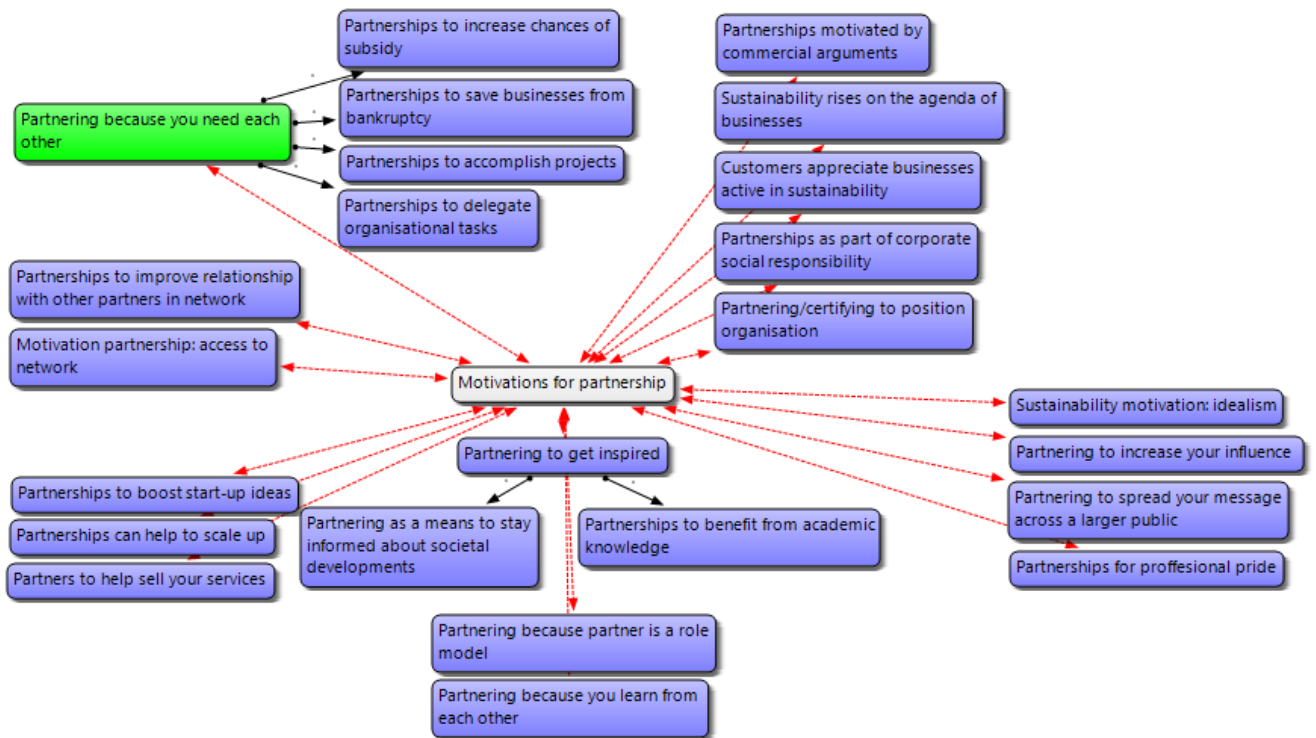


Figure 2: motivations for partnering

Added value partnerships

When discussing the added value of partnerships, what is meant is the anticipated added value as well as the experienced added value expressed by the interviewees. Usually, money is at the cutting edge when speaking about partnerships, but partnering is valuable in many ways. The specific way in which this added value expresses itself varies from organization to organization. However, what is important is that partnering benefits both organizations. A short elaboration of the potential benefits of a partnership is presented below in text and visually. In the visual, the green code portrays the main lesson to be learned from the empirical data regarding the added value of partnerships. The blue codes are the expression thereof. A selection of these are elaborated on in the present paragraph.

Besides only financial value, partnering is valuable because of the network opportunities that come along with it. Expanding one's network by means of a partnership may provide an organization more chances to do business than it would have had without the extra network. Furthermore, partnerships are valuable because partners can complement each other. As a result partners may engage in new projects, which would otherwise have been much more difficult. Also partnering can be a way to stay sensitive to internal or external developments that may impact the organization, which they may otherwise miss.

In addition to the benefits of partnering as mentioned in the theoretical outline, and those deduced from the interviews, partnerships also carry intrinsic value. One of this study's findings is that partnering is seen as a growth experience in which partners learn from each other. This implies that that by virtue of collaborating in a partnership, you learn to see things differently. These new perspectives can function as an antidote to organizational blindness. The former notions are good examples of what Austin & Seitani refer to as synergistic value. They hereby suggest that the partnering organizations achieve something by means of partnering, that they could not have achieved alone (2012a). All things considered, partnerships carry much more value than only financial value. As proposed by the formerly mentioned scholars, it can therefore be wise to incorporate the different types of value that the partnership brings, within the calculation of its financial value (2012b).

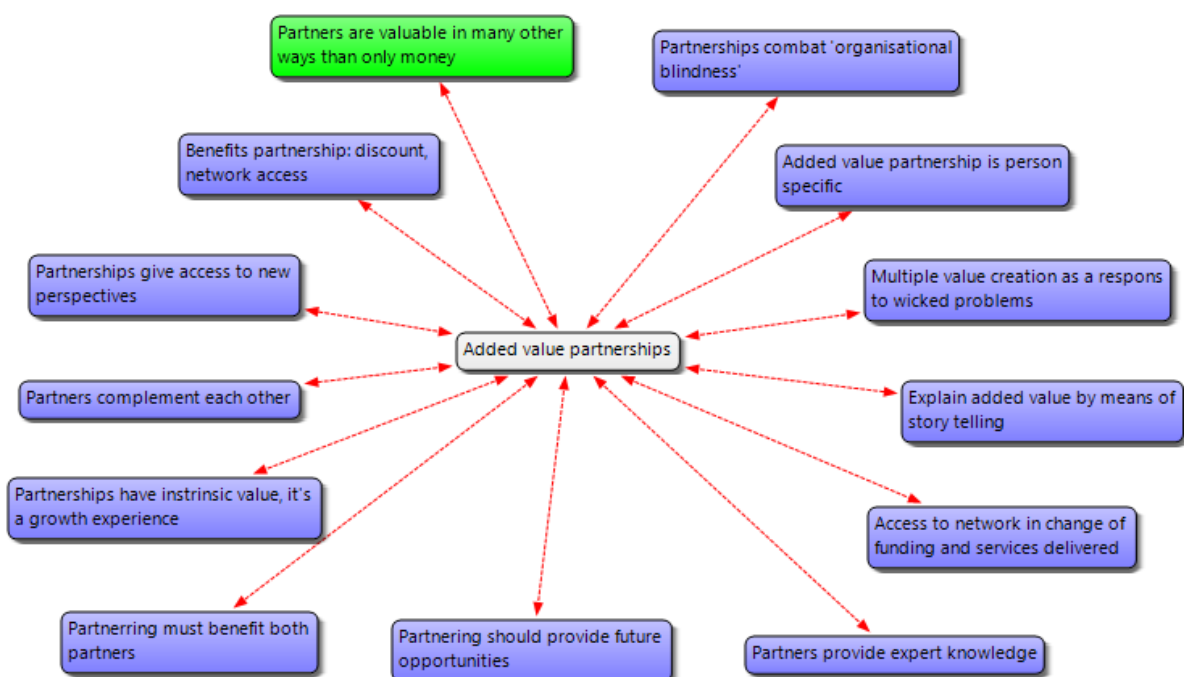


Figure 3: added value partnerships

How are partnerships managed?

As the question about how to manage partnerships is a broad question, the empirical data are categorised around a series of families: partner selection, way of working together, communication, partnership agreement, relationship management, partnership manager, trust and finally tips for successful partnering. Below each of these themes is explored in more detail.

Partner selection

One of the very first steps when deciding to start a partnership is the selection of the right partner. Many interviewees stated that it is crucial that both partners are satisfied with their answer to the question 'what is in it for me?' regarding the partnership. In addition, the energy investment the partner is willing to make must be satisfactory. Both these fundamental observations are captured by the green codes in the image below. They appeared to be essential elements because they contain

an overarching message concerning the right partner selection. Also, these messages returned frequently in the interviews, albeit in different forms.

Which organisation is the most appropriate to partner with might vary over time and may depend on specific and varying circumstances. As partners should complement each other, the right partner may change as the organization's needs change. In addition to verifying the two central elements as depicted in the green codes, every organisation looking for a preferred partner should ask itself what the potential partner may contribute to its projects and what the potential partner's reputation withholds. To increase the chance on a good match with a partner it is also worthwhile to check whether the potential partner is really committed to the larger goal that the partnership attains to. A yes to these questions raises the likelihood that both organizations hold sufficiently convergent values. That in turn increases the connection between partners (Berlie, 2014).

To conclude, the previous notions appeared useful to take into consideration when selecting a partnering organization. They are in line with the theoretical findings as proposed in chapter two, as there it was already mentioned that partners should get explicit about what it is they want out of the partnership (Austin, 2000). Hence, answering the 'what is in it for me?' question follows this line of thinking. What the present research may add to the notions proposed in chapter two, is that besides holding sufficient convergent values, aligning goals and more, also the energy investment that the partners are willing to make also is a determining factor for the success of the partnership.

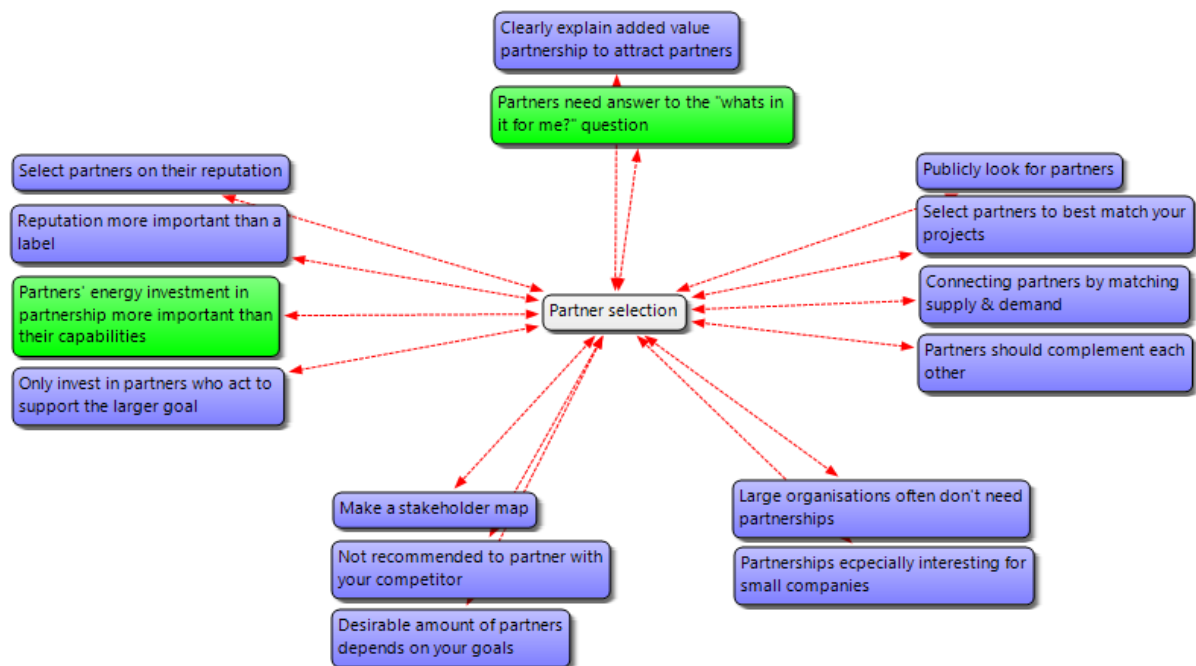


Figure 4: partner selection

Way of working together

Partnerships are no goal in themselves but a way to combat complex problems. As these problems are so large, it is unattainable to come with one solution that will solve the entire problem. Simple solutions will work for simple problems, but complex problems require a different approach.

Another important statement resulting from the empirical data, was that collaborating on project basis was a frequently used and appreciated way of working together. It is therefore suggested that partners work together on projects. Also, it was recommended to continuously take small steps in the partnership and reflect on these. This corresponds with Vangen and Huxam their

small wins approach in which they advocate taking small risks initiatives (2003). Perhaps superfluous but not less important to note is that naturally the frequent reflection on the steps taken should serve a purpose. This could be to renew the value proposition for instance, which can give the partnership a boost through the stimulation of innovation (Austin, 2000).

The aforementioned findings form the core of the preferred way of working together in partnerships, according to many of the interviewees. In the image below they are therefore reflected by the green codes, marking them as the most significant observations. The blue codes are additional observations and suggestions that exist alongside the core messages in green.

An additional suggestion for instance, is to keep partnering simple and convenient. This remark is in line with the suggestion to agree on the basic principles of the partnership and then get to work quickly. Hence, partnering should not be made too complex nor does partnering have to be very expensive. Organizations could exchange services for instance to keep costs low.

The suggestion to keep partnering simple and convenient corresponds with Pfisterer's notion that the structure of a partnership is not the deciding factor in the success of a partnership (2013). Instead the foundation for a worthwhile partnership is to work on projects together, learn from them and build the partnership from there on.

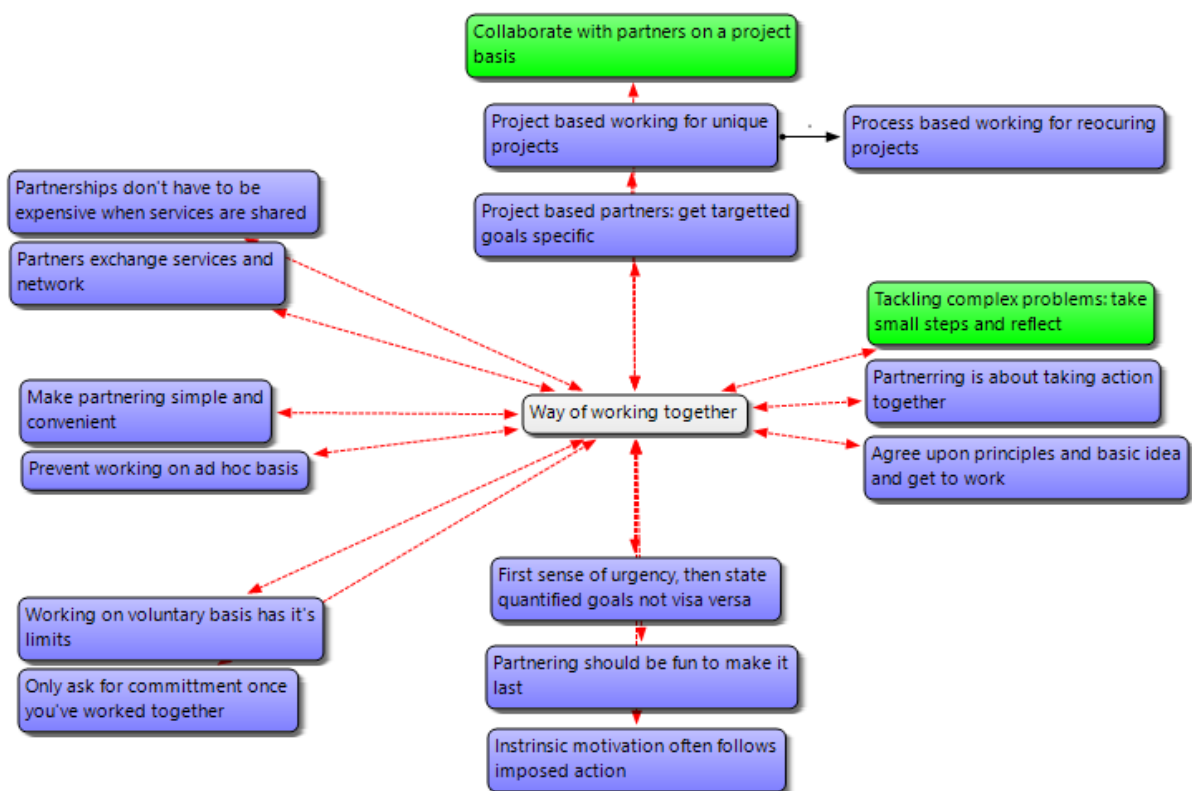


Figure 5: way of working together

Communication

Successfully managing the partnership is for a large part determined by effective communication. One communicates effectively when the message one wants to bring across is interpreted in the same way as it was meant. When it comes to communication, the distinction between mutual, external and internal communication can be made. For the first two, it is recommended that partners create a communication plan adjusted to the wishes of both organizations. The communication plan should at least contain the manner, means and frequency in which partners communicate. Any

additional promises they make to each other can be formulated in this plan as well. But just as partnerships are a means to an end, the communication plan is also only a means to good communication. The execution of the plan is much more important and requires that both partners understand each other's viewpoint and consider each other's needs when communicating. Correspondingly, scholars already stated that in the end, everything works as long as it is negotiated (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Hence, the communication itself may be more important than its content. It results that partnering is mediating and thus communication is an indispensable part in this regard. Therefore, it is important to continuously stay communicating with each other and to check assumptions one might hold about the other partner. In this way misunderstanding can be prevented. Other topics to definitely talk about are the expectations one holds for the partnership so that these can be equalized between both partners.

Just as communication between partners is critical, external communication should also not be forgotten. Coherent messages that both partners agree on should be broadcasted for the partnership as a whole. When constructing these messages partners should consider the way in which these messages are framed. They should ask themselves how they wish to come across.

The same accounts for internal communication, meaning the communication within each single organization that is involved in the partnership. As communication is an important ingredient for a successful partnership, it deserves deliberate attention.

This deliberate attention can be directed towards the constructing of a communication plan in which the formerly mentioned focal points are incorporated. Gray and Stites already advised to take the time to agree on the way partners will communicate with each other (2013) and the making of a communication plan supports this notion. Important however, is that after such a plan is made, one does not leave it with that but continuously keeps putting effort in understanding each other and keep communicating throughout the partnership.

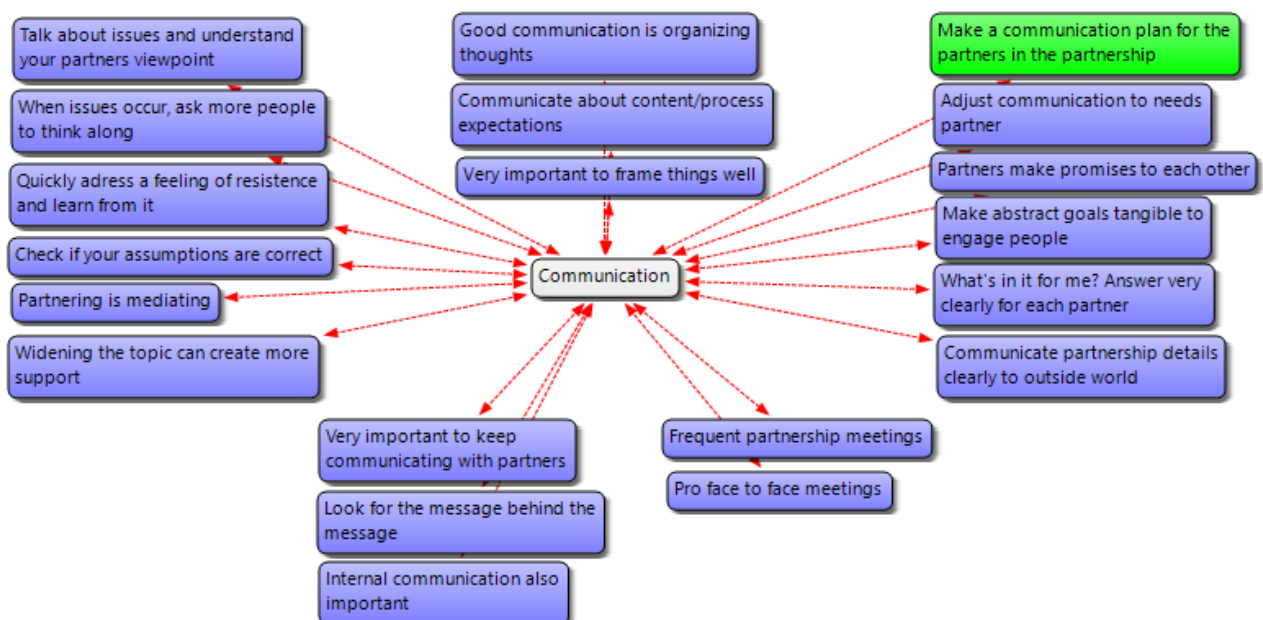


Figure 6: communication

Partnership agreement

The partnership agreement to some is an indispensable document, while others regard it as a document that can easily be missed. However, even though opinions about the size, content and formality of the agreement differed, all interviewees saw the need for a partnership agreement to be constructed at some point. This reflects Glasbergen's notion that partnership agreements are necessary to prevent misunderstandings, cover for unforeseen risks and to commit both partners to the partnership (2010).

Nonetheless, there is no one size fits all regarding such an agreement, but fundamental is to communicate about each other's wishes concerning the agreement and to construct one specifically for the partnership at hand. It turned out that most partners do not need a lot of formalities in which case the agreement could be minimal. However, there is a group that does value formal agreements very much, so key is to adjust to fit the situation. More importantly, it is vital that the agreement is set up by both partners together. This provides an excellent opportunity to communicate about the fundamental ingredients for the partnership and by doing so, setting the partnership up for success.

The former notions are most important regarding the partnership agreement according to the interviewees, therefore in the image below they are marked green. The blue codes highlight other essential elements to consider when designing a partnership agreement. The arrows illustrate the links between the codes and taken all together the codes can serve as a checklist about topics to consider before constructing a partnership agreement. A short elaboration on these topics follows next.

When establishing a partnership agreement it is all about balance, in particular about balance between commitment and flexibility. The right balance is situation dependent but relative to the size of the partnership and the amount of money involved, the agreement can be progressively binding. For rather small, creative or intellectual partnerships an agreement can be less formal. Also the agreement does not have to be formulated directly at the beginning of the partnership in these cases. This may even scare partners away and hinder a smooth collaboration. These findings follow the line of thinking of Nooteboom when he argued that commitment in a partnership is like commitment in a personal relationship and goes step by step (1994). In addition, the findings also support Doz and Hamel in their statement about making irreversible commitments upfront may work counterproductive (1998).

Whether or not the agreement is very detailed and binding or rather short and loose, there are certain key elements that should definitely be included. Both partners' interests and roles are one of those essential elements to include in the partnership agreement. What the partners expect from the partnership is another essential element. Whenever partners are satisfied with the partnership is closely related to this and should be included as well, possibly expressed as potential outcomes. Besides these crucial elements, the agreement should not be too detailed. In the end, the success of the partnership mostly depends on the way it is managed rather than on what is put on paper. "When you need contracts, you're too late" is another way of saying that successful partnering depends on what happens before or after the partnership agreement is signed.

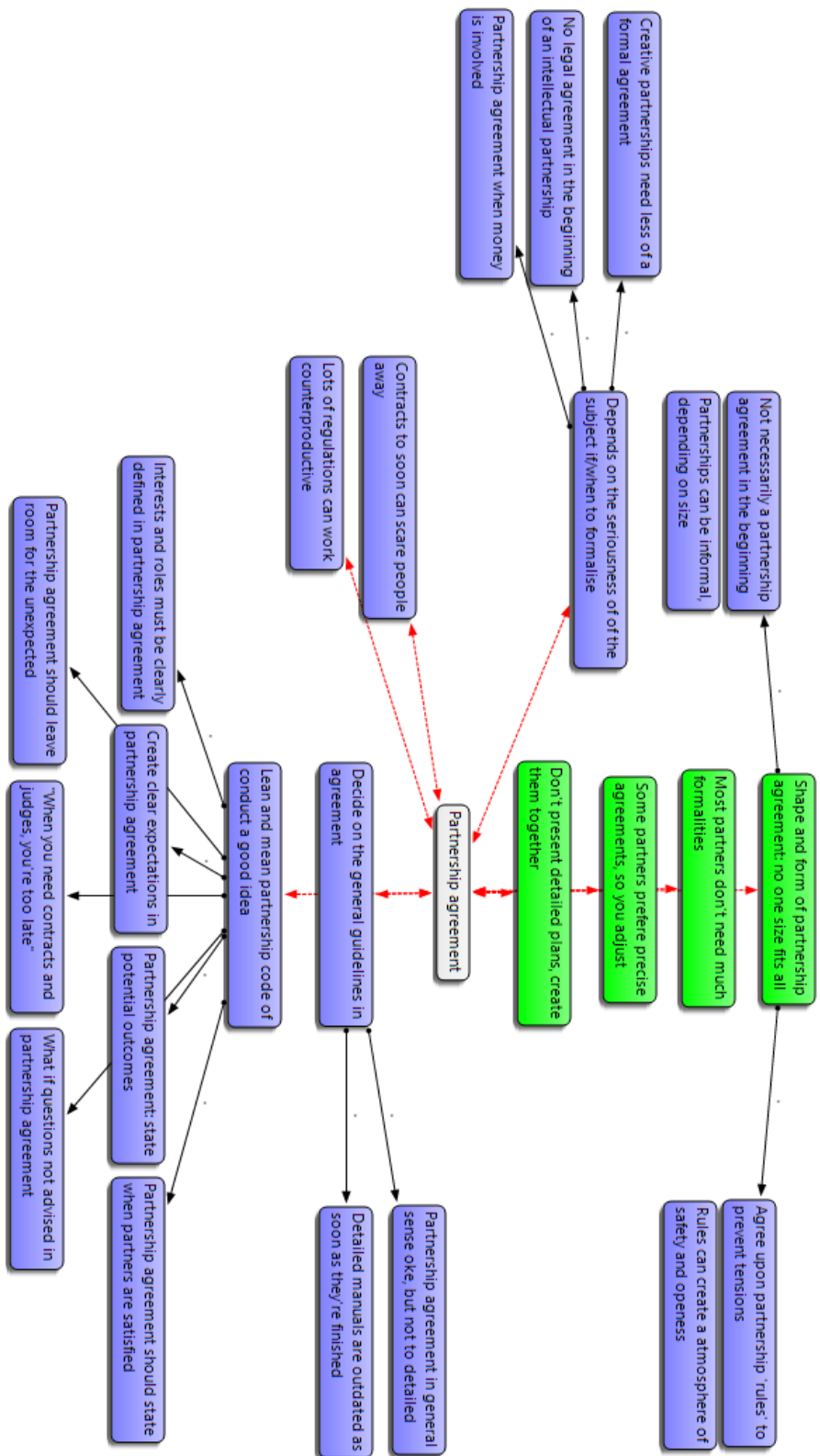


Figure 7: partnership agreement

Relationship management

As the previous paragraphs already briefly stated, relationship management outweighs partnership structure as a determining factor for partnership success. Partnering is a people's thing, hence relationship management is a skill to be nurtured. It is a common notion supported by many scholars including Doz & Hamel who argued that partnerships cannot be set on autopilot (1998), and thus need thoughtful management. It results, that soft skills outweigh tools and techniques when it comes to creating and maintaining successful partnerships (Pfisterer, 2013).

In addition to good relationship management, compelling goals and inspiring people are also important success factors. These stimulate the desire to put effort into the partnership, which in turn has a positive effect on relationship management. Vital to successful partnership is also the extra investment at the very start: even though it might sound counterintuitive, this extra investment actually contributes to a lean and mean partnership management, as it prevents future problems. If the initial investment is done well, it leaves the partnership with a solid foundation from which to work from. With that as a starting point, intensive further management may not always be necessary.

How to invest in the beginning of the relation is to first get to know your partner organization very well and look for commonalities as binding elements. Austin already suggested that personal chemistry is key for successful partnering (2000), and not surprisingly the empirical findings support this notion. Getting to know your partner also helps to time request well, meaning that one can estimate better when a proposition, for instance for a new project, may suit the partnering organization best. An additional benefit of knowing your partner very well is that one understands the professional language and culture within the organization. Therefore, misunderstandings and hurdles in the partnership are less likely to occur as partners become to know each other better.

The same accounts for the relationship with stakeholders related to the partnership: it is important to include them in the beginning of the partnership, as this increases the likelihood of them supporting the partnership. These stakeholders may be outside the partnership, but stakeholders can also be found within the partnership e.g. in the form of employees of the organisations involved.

Also for relationship management there is no one size fits all approach. Adaptability is key. Some partners may appreciate frequent face-to-face meetings while others do not. Partnering is about give and take and doing so continuously keeps the partnership relation in good condition.

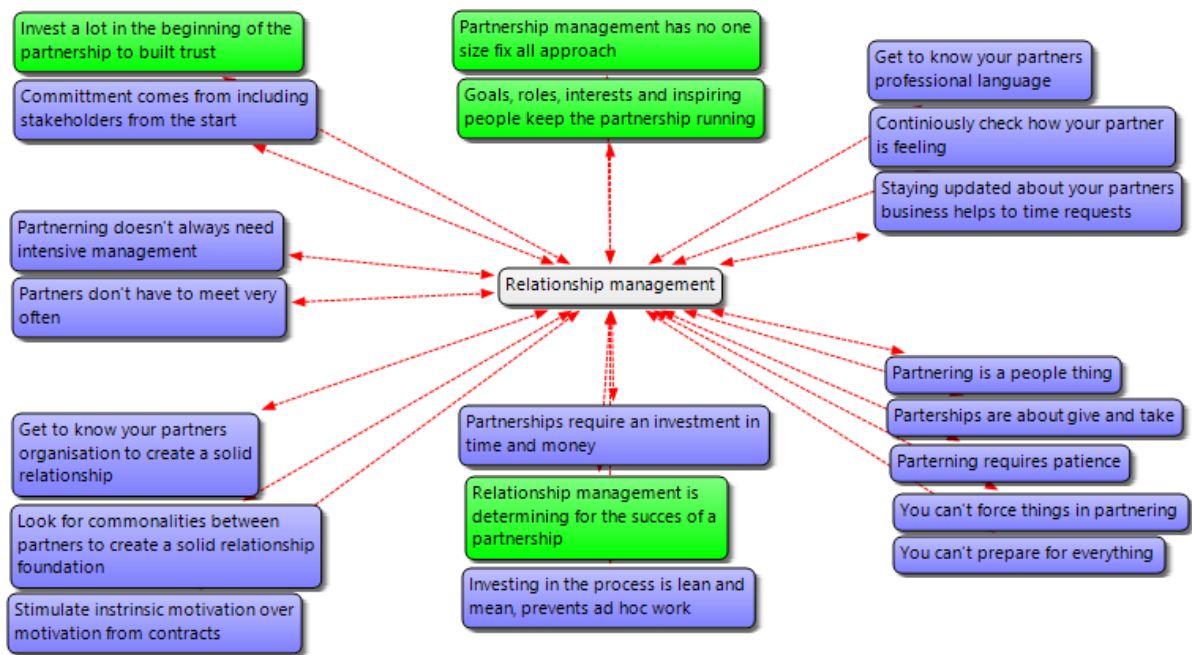


Figure 8: relationship management

Partnership manager

Just as previous studies have demonstrated (Gray & Stites, 2013), the present research also found that appointing a partnership manager for the partnership is optional but recommended. The partnership manager can be either someone from the partnering organizations or someone recruited externally in which case he/she is called a broker. Some interviewees were keen on having a broker involved in the partnership, while others did not. A potential benefit is that a broker may help in keeping the overview of the partnership in addition to fulfilling a mediating role. On the other hand, a broker may decrease the feeling of ownership and responsibility from the partners themselves. Foregoing research already noticed this risk and emphasized the fact that responsibility for the partnership must be felt by both partners (Gray & Stites, 2013), and not only by the upper management, but ideally also by the employees of both organizations partaking in the partnership (Austin, 2000). Hence, partially due to this risk of a decreased feeling of ownership that a broker may bring, the empirical data did not lead to a general answer to the question whether or not to appoint a broker.

About appointing a partnership manager, someone who is internally recruited to manage the partnership, the interviewees were more single minded. A partnership manager was definitely seen as an asset and should be chosen with care. The partnering organizations may decide to appoint one partnership manager, but one manager from each organization is possible as well. Ideally the partnership manager(s) is/are capable to hold a more distanced and more objective point of view on the partnership. This conclusion underlines previous research in which was already concluded that a partnership manager should expand his focus from only their own organization to the partnership as a whole (Erakovich & Anderson, 2013).

Important also is that the partnership manager likes maintaining relationships, because managing the partnership requires continuous efforts. Furthermore, if the manager has a large network this is advantageous as well because then the manager is more inclined to make connections and spot opportunities. This leads directly to another essential characteristic of a good partnership manager, he should be sensitive in identifying opportunities.

In chapter two it was already noted that preferably the partnership manager holds, amongst others, characteristics like being emphatic and having a sense of cultural sensitivity (Gray & Stites, 2013). This study's findings do not dispute these earlier findings, it only adds several other traits that a good partnership manager may hold. By embodying these characteristics, the partnership manager can be the one to keep the partnership in balance and bring it forward.

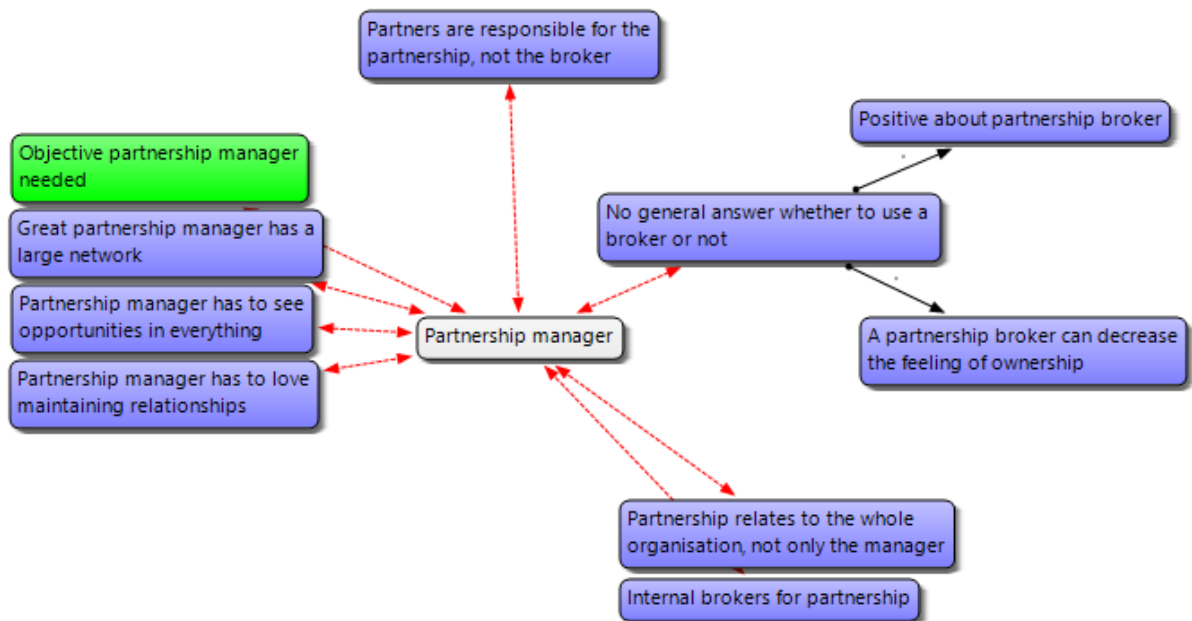


Figure 9: partnership manager

Trust

For a successful partnership a solid level of trust is essential. What this means more precisely has been revealed from the interviews as three key aspects of trust indispensable for successful partnering: capable trust, intentional trust and trust in the process. Previously, trust in the partners' capabilities, their integrity and benevolence were already proposed as dimensions of trust (Sanzo, Álvarez, Rey & García, 2015). The present research may add trust in the process to this list of dimensions. Below, an elaboration of three dimensions of trust that resulted from the empirical findings is continued.

Capable trust means that both partners need to trust their counterpart's organization plus its ability to execute whatever it is that the partnership is set out to do. Intentional trust means that one trusts the partners' intention to be pure and in support of the partnership as a whole. It is related to Doz & Hamel's concept of trust as enlightened self- and mutual interest (1998), where partners must have faith that their counterpart values the partnership as a whole just as much as their individual part in it. A third dimension of trust that presented itself was trust in the partnering process. This means that even though there are uncertainties about what exactly the partnership will bring, you trust you will find a way to make it work.

It has been said that trust is something that must be earned (Doz & Hamel, 1998). The empirical data illustrated several ways to do so. A common denominator in these approaches was that trust comes from investing in one another. This means keeping in touch and getting to know the other organization really well. While getting to know the other organization, using appropriate communication is crucial. More so, what also builds trust is, if the partnering organization has a good

reputation. If so, then this organization is already one step ahead in the process of building trust. And finally, in line with previous research (Vangen & Huxam, 2003), trust is also gained by working together over longer periods of time.

Unlike what has been said before, a provoking thought against the statement that trust is desired at all times, was the notion that a little distrust may stimulate creativity. This does not necessarily refers to distrust the partner, yet a little distrust in future external developments may stimulate the partners to stay attentive to relevant developments within or outside the partnership. It may trigger them not to settle for what is, but to keep looking for possibilities to bring the partnership to the next level.

However, the dominating thought was that trust is very much desired and that trust in the partnering organization is the best preparation to set the partnership up for success. It even has been said that starting the partnership off based on a solid level of trust between partners, is better than to start collaborating after only having agreed on specific rules and regulations. Having faith in the partnership may then be a better predictor for a successful partnership than extensive contacts. Correspondingly, neither a lot of paper, nor long contracts are needed when trust is at the basis of the partnership. In that sense, one does not have to write down all the answers to the many 'what if?' questions that can be thought of. If both partners trust each other, that is the best motivation and guarantee that, whatever happens, both partners will do their best to make things work.

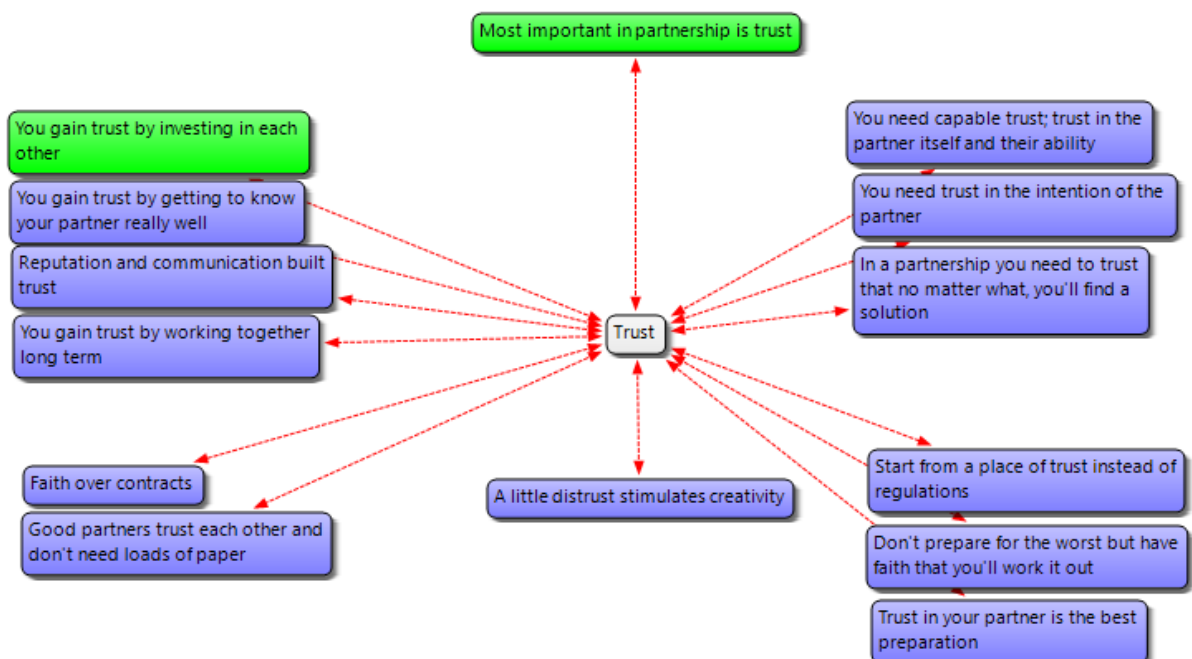


Figure 10: trust

Tips for partnership success

To wrap up the answer to the question about how partnerships are managed, several tips for a successful partnership as derived from the empirical data, are shared. First of all, it stays important to realize that the success formula of a partnership is context dependant. Partnering organizations should therefore discover each other's needs and adjust the partnership accordingly. However, adaptability does not always come natural to organizations as they tend to copy successes from earlier experiences onto new situations. This results from what scholars call self-referential reality, meaning that organizations tend to judge truth according to their own list of priorities, which in turn

can limit their adaptability (Ter Haar, 2014). It is therefore worth stressing that partners get used to adapting their approach when the situation changes and the old approach appears ineffective. This conclusion is shared amongst other scholars, as they already gave similar advice when they stated that partners should embrace their adaptive responsibilities (Austin & Seitani, 2012b).

A second important tip was that it was advised to be as clear as possible about the expectations one holds for the partnership. This definitely included the sharing of expectations about one's goals, roles and expected benefits from the partnership. Thirdly, one should always keep in mind that a partnering is a people thing and therefore soft-skills are of utmost importance. The former three previous tips reoccurred mostly in the empirical data. But there is more, and therefore below various additional tips are further elaborated on.

As partnering is a people thing, the success of the partnership depends on the people involved. Before it was already said that the energy investment partners are willing to make is more important than the structure of the partnership. Hence, motivated individuals are needed and one way to stimulate this is try to make the goals for the partnership as a whole personal for the individuals that have a large role in the partnership. Moreover, it was stated that shared goals are what keeps partners together, so drafting these is recommended. In addition, the sharing of knowledge is constructive as well, as this can increase the effectiveness of the partnership. What these tips have in common is that they advise that partners think in terms of the partnership as a whole, rather than only about their individual gain from it. Hence, keeping the big goal in mind is favoured. In this line of thinking, Austin and Seitani already concluded that the more partners link their self-interest to that of the other partner, the larger the potential value creation of the partnership as a whole becomes (2012a). What can increase the partnerships' created value as well is its ability to innovate. To do so it is important to stay aware of external developments. This knowledge can then be used to stimulate innovation and help the partnership capitalize on societal developments.

In addition, the making or breaking of a partnership depends on the support it receives both internally and externally. In the previous paragraphs the bringing about of internal support was discussed, but external support is not less important. Ways to develop this could be to involve society with the activities that the partnership undertakes. Also, one should give sufficient thought to the wishes of stakeholders and take these into account. And finally, what makes partnerships really successful is that both partners share a high sense of urgency about the topic they wish to partner about.

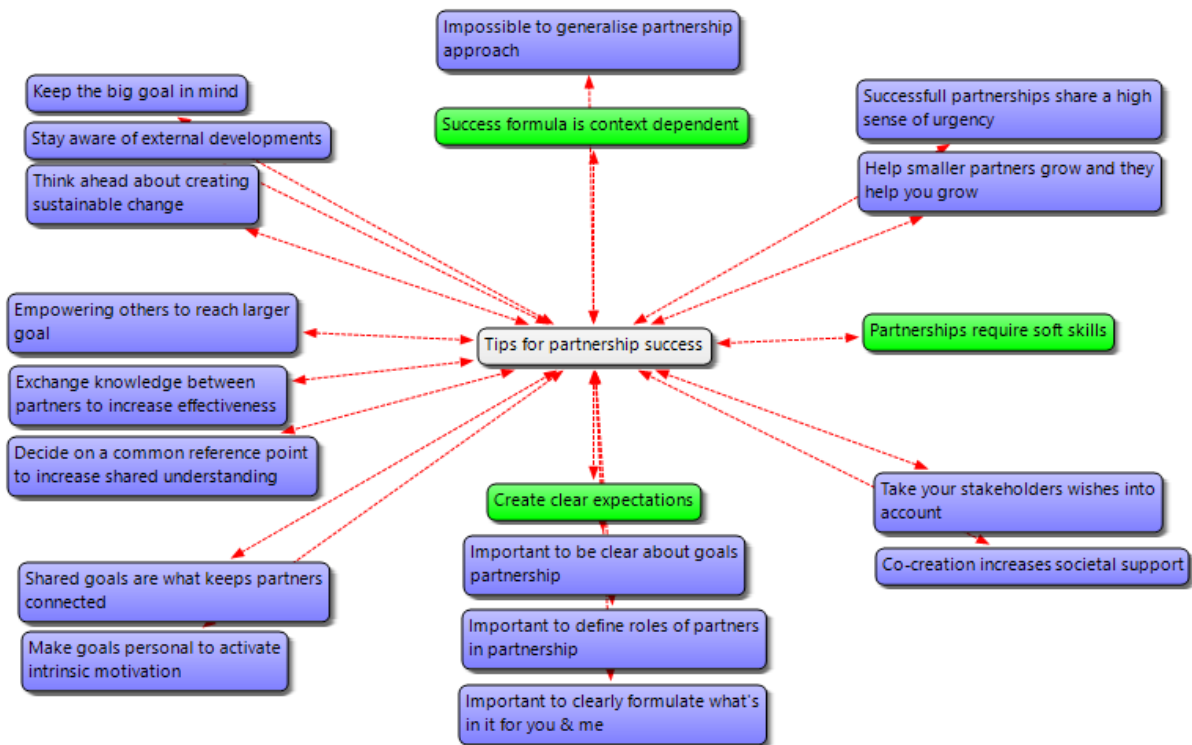


Figure 11: tips for partnership success

What are the outcomes of a partnership?

After having invested in the start of the partnership and its maintenance, the question is what the outcome of this partnering work may be. This is the question answered in the next four paragraphs: the types of partnerships; the ways to monitor and evaluate the partnership; the partnership cycle and finally, the possible challenges a partnership can face.

Types of partnerships

Many types of partnerships are thinkable, yet the empirical results pointed towards one type of partnership to be advocated most: the project partnership in which both partners join forces and work together on a project in the name of the partnership. Besides such a project partnership, however, more types of partnerships were mentioned that may be worth considering. For example, an outsourcing partnership whereby one of the partners supports the other organization with the expectation to receive some kind of interest for doing so in the future. But also an ambassador partnership is a possibility in which one organization is ambassador of the other organization, with the expectation for this to have a positive impact on the image of their organization. Another option is a sponsoring relation between partners.

When considering a type of partnership one can incorporate aspects of the aforementioned partnership types in a project partnership. In this manner, partners could also come together to bring about an innovation of some kind. Likewise, they may work together on a research question, pointing at a more intellectual partnership within the project partnership format.

Important when thinking about a type of partnership is that the partnership type or format is not the most important. For whichever type of partnership one eventually chooses, the most important is that both partners equally invest in the partnership. Mutual investment is what connects partners and keeps them together. However, this mutual investment should not go so far

that both organizations merge. Advised was to keep functioning as two separate organizations that collaborate, as the intention of the collaboration usually is that the partnership is beneficial for the individual organization. If projected on a continuum, a fusion would then be on the outer end whereas a sponsorship be on the other end of the continuum. For working together on project basis, the partnership should be somewhere in the middle.

To recapitulate, the empirical findings thus suggest that a project partnership, in which both organizations hold on to their organizational identity, may be optimal. When locating the partnership on a continuum of collaboration intensity, it would be halfway. Other scholars also already composed continuums of partnerships which range from the organizations partnering on a philanthropic basis to partnering on a strategic level (Lin & Darnall, 2015; Byiers, Guadagno & Karaki, 2015). A project partnership would then trend more towards a strategic partnership rather than to a philanthropic one. Another way to look place a project partnership on such a continuum is to consider it an integrative partnership as proposed by Austin his Collaborative Continuum (2000). In such a partnership, partners co-create new products or processes (Austin & Setani, 2012a). However, Austin's definition of an integrative partnership comprises the intertwining of missions, personnel and activities. The present study disputes this because there this level of intertwining is not preferred.

All in all, the name one gives to the partnership is not the most important. Moreover, partnering is a continuously evolving process (Glasbergen, 2010), so the partnership type may change over time. Correspondingly, organizational identity is fluid and can ask for a different kind of partnership at different points in time. What is essential however, is that working on projects together appeared to be a rewarding way of collaborating and would therefore be recommended.

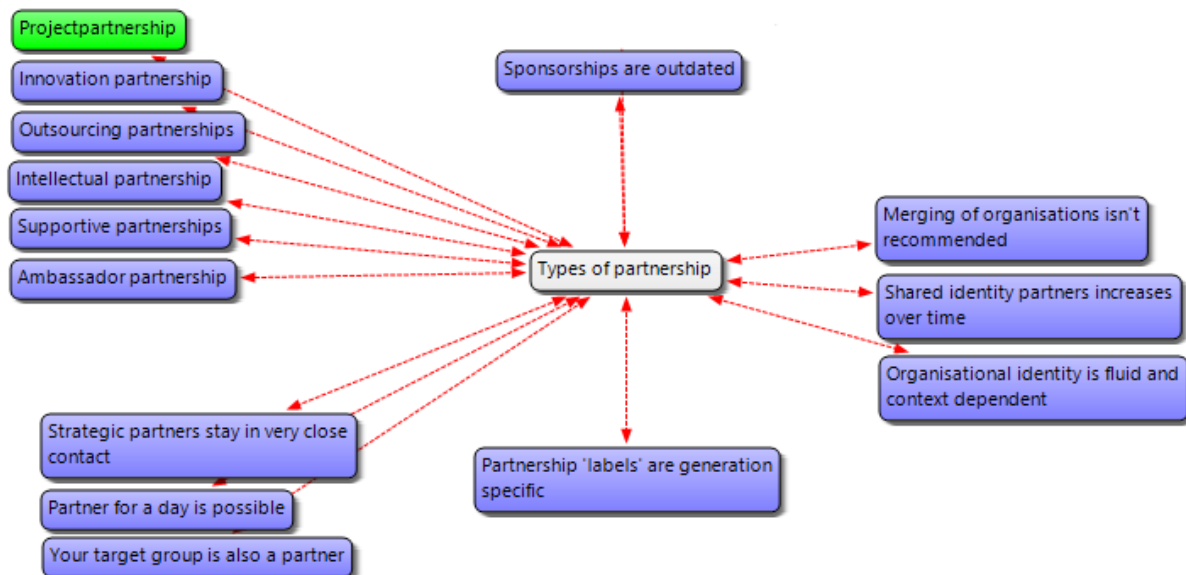


Figure 12: types of partnerships

Monitoring & evaluation

For creating and keeping a successful partnership, reflection on the partnership is crucial. The learning effect that this generates is of great importance for the growth potential of the partnership. As stated in chapter two, ideally the partnership should be a continuous learning process (Pfisterer, 2013) where partners learn by doing (Austin, 2000). An advantage of this can be that partners find suitable solutions for issues they may otherwise experience as a large obstacle. Hence, learning can fuel cooperation.

However, evaluations may also lead to the conclusion that the partnership does not meet the expectations of both partners and that therefore they wish to end it. If the partnership costs more energy than it brings, then it may be better to quit. To come to such a conclusion, or another well-grounded conclusion about how to progress with the partnership, several aspects are worthwhile taking into account.

First of all it is good to note that also for monitoring and evaluating there is no universal approach suited for every partnership. Both partnering organizations can decide for themselves how they wish to structure the process of monitoring and evaluating the partnership. Advised is to get specific about what it is that partners aim for in the beginning of the collaboration. From there, they can discuss the best way to measure progress on these goals.

What may turn up as something to discuss is what indicators to use for monitoring. Both quantitative as well as qualitative indicators can be used. But whereas quantitative methods of monitoring and evaluating the partnership are common, a qualitative approach deserves special attention. Suggested was that one could evaluate better by means of asking people questions about how they experience the partnership, rather than solely counting numbers. This qualitative method can be a satisfying way to measure certain subjective aspects of the partnership which are inherently harder to measure. This empirical finding conforms to the finding in chapter two where it was already suggested that partners regularly ask each other qualitative questions concerning mutual satisfaction about the partnership or about the things they learned (De Bruin & Ten Heuvelhof, 2008; Van Huijstee, Francken & Leroy, 2007).

Just as qualitative results are inherently harder to measure, this account for the outcome of the partnership instead of its outputs as well. Outputs are defined as the immediate effects on the partnering organizations whereas outcomes refer to the intermediate direct effect on the target group for who the partnership aims to make a difference (Tulder et al., 2015). It is good to take in consideration whether partners want to measure outputs or outcomes or both.

Another aspect to take into account when designing a monitoring and evaluation practise is the time frequency by which to do so. Again, this is determined by the preferences of both partnering organizations, but two to four times a year was suggested to be a good frequency. Also the intensity of the monitoring and evaluating is context is context dependant. However, the more serious the topic of the collaboration is, the more intense the level of monitoring should be.

If the previous notions are given sufficient thought, the effect of monitoring and evaluating the partnership goes further than only the learning effect it creates and the cooperation it enables. Evaluating the partnership also activates internal processes in the organizations. The rise in awareness that reflecting on the partnership causes, makes that some needed changes are made sooner just because one becomes aware of the need to change things.

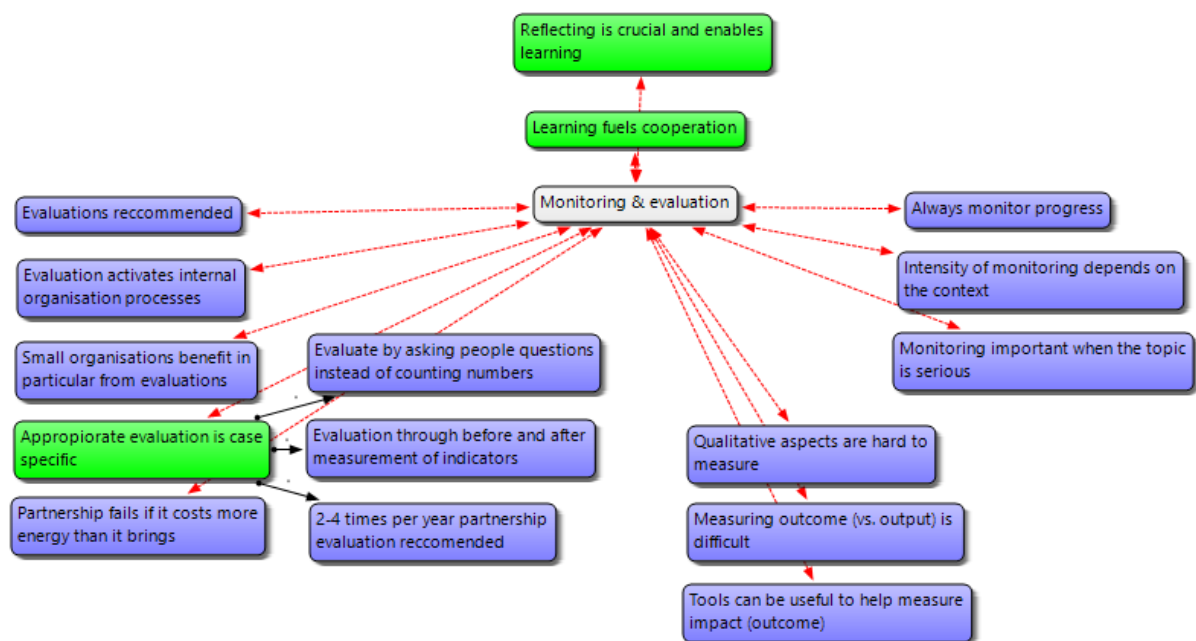


Figure 13: monitoring & evaluation

Partnership cycle

In line with the previous notions about the benefits of reflection, it is recommended that the partners in the partnership work in short cycles and reflect on these. The advantage of evaluating after shorter periods of time is that then it is still more convenient to adjust facets of the partnership. Furthermore, partnerships rarely go according to plan, so planning the course of the collaboration in much detail may be wasted effort. Moreover, if one wishes to create a partnership to last, then collaborating, or co-creating, on multiple projects is what strongly connects partners together. Something else to consider for a long lasting partnership is what to do when the partnership is dependent on subsidies which may stop someday. In that case it is wise to think about how to construct a business model for the partnership that is non-reliant on subsidies.

However, a long-term partnership does not have to be an ideal format. Some argue that long-term partnerships are outdated, but naturally it depends on the wishes of both partnering organizations what they consider an appropriate time frame for the partnership. Three or four years to start with has been suggested as manageable and even though this number may give an impression, this choice is always context dependant. More importantly, the empirical results demonstrated, that in order to plan activities and to set up clear regulations, the partnering organizations should agree upon a timeframe, for however long this may be.

This finding contradicts Nooteboom his statement that when partners know when the partnership will end, they are less willing to make compromises and will focus on short term wins (1994). Not all scholars agree with this statement, so it may or may not be applicable, but it does give food for thought. Hence, when one wishes to avoid a less optimal investment from the partnering organization, then even though working project based, it may be good to keep the door open for possible continuous collaboration in the future. Likewise, a project based way of working, which has a more temporally character, can be combined with a more process based way of working of which the end time is less defined. An additional benefit is that when collaborating this way, it is likely that partners collaborate over a longer period of time which has a positive effect on the level of trust between the partnering organizations (Vangen & Huxam, 2003).

At the same time, partnerships are rarely forever so one should think about what to do when the partnership comes to an end. Accordingly, it has been said that partnerships often are ended too late. For example, if a partner does not invest a lot of energy in the partnership, then instead of frenetically pulling the other partner back in the partnership, it may be better to end the collaboration. Hence, it is worthwhile to think about when partners need to go their own ways and how they will approach such a separation.

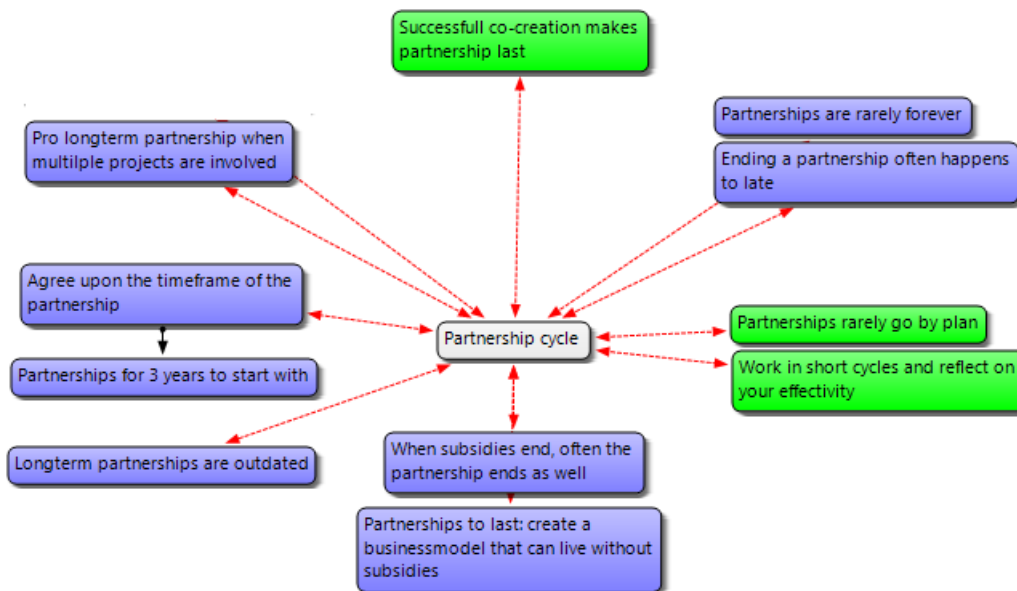


Figure 14: partnership cycle

Partnership challenges

Partnering has a lot of potential benefits, yet also a lot of challenges. Therefore, when engaging in a partnership one should not be surprised to encounter obstacles along the way. Becoming aware of the things that may go wrong can help prevent them from happening. What follows next is an description of the challenges that emerged out of the empirical data. It is these challenges that appeared the most relevant for Eco-Schools now that they are in the midst of starting partnerships.

Several potential challenges were derived which all carry aspects of one recurring theme, that being inequality between partners. For example, inequality in levels of commitment, goals, interests or priorities were mentioned as potential challenges. The literature embraces this conclusion as Doz & Hamel already stressed that the commitment from both partners must be strong (1998) and Nooteboom testified that the partnership may suffer if unequal levels of dependence exists (1994). For Eco-Schools this is something to be extra aware of since they are aiming for a cross-sectoral partnership with businesses. The innate inequality between Eco-Schools as a NGO and businesses may therefore be troublesome.

What may be an obstacle and restrain partners from fully committing to the partnership as well, is the fact that the precise output of the partnership is often insecure and difficult to determine in advance. Similarly, it is difficult to accurately present the partnership to the outside world, especially when working project-based. The challenge is to promote the partnership in such a way that both partners get equal recognition. Another challenge rises as soon as money gets involved in the partnership. Paying a partnership fee may be an obstacle for organizations just as committing to strict accountability regulations in the partnership agreement can be. Furthermore, a reason for organizations to behave reluctant is that when the partnership goes wrong, this may damage their

reputation, which they want to avoid at all cost. In addition, having only a small network to consult, can be a challenge when the partnership needs to reach out for support for instance. Finally, the division of tasks and roles between partners can be challenging.

For all these potential challenges it accounts that they may become a challenge, but that they are not unpreventable. Since Eco-Schools stands at the beginning of their partnership journey, it is imaginable that some of the former challenges will present themselves in the future. Knowing so beforehand may give Eco-Schools the means to inhibit this. The question as proposed by Pfisterer (2013), to ask oneself which potential conflicts to solve up front by arranging them in a partnership agreement and which to deal with later, may then be answered with help of the previously mentioned challenges. Hence, measures to prevent some of them from happening, can be incorporated in the partnership agreement to hamper them from becoming a reality.

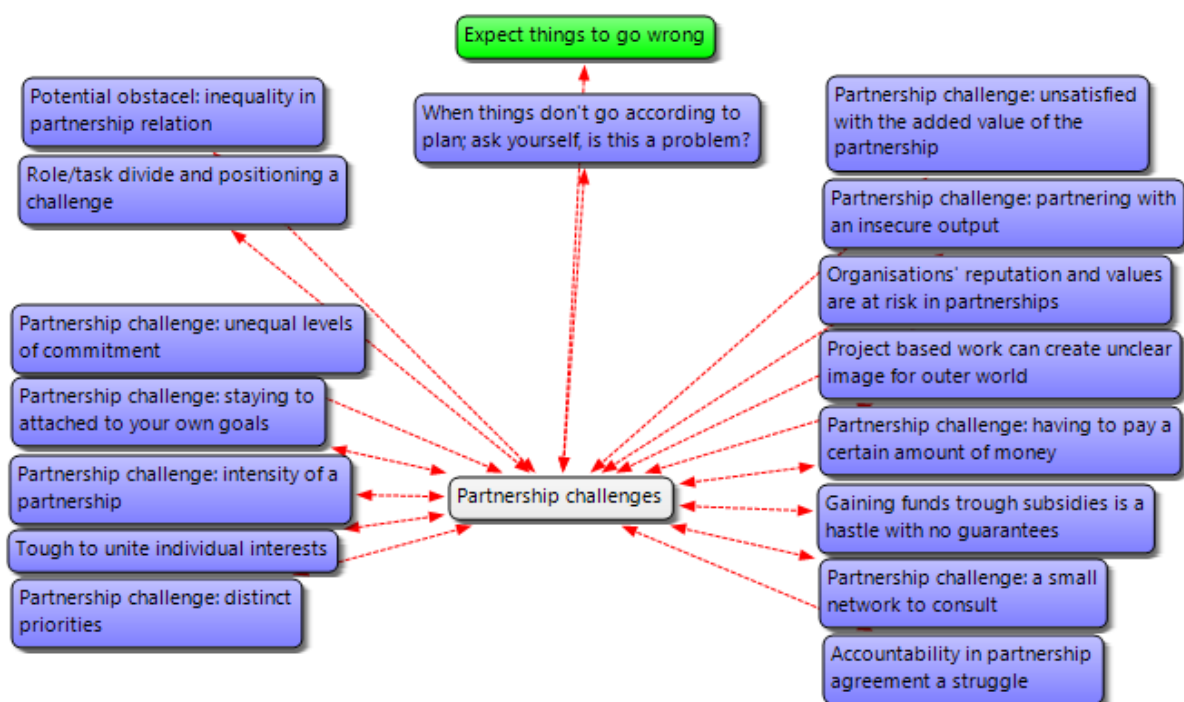


Figure 15: partnership challenges

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The goal of the present study was to investigate how the Eco-Schools programme could effectively manage the partnerships with businesses that they wish to set up. This has been studied with the help of a literature study and the interviewing of twelve knowledgeable people who carried much expertise about partnering. This chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly the most important empirical and theoretical conclusions of the study are presented. Secondly recommendations for the Eco-Schools programme are given together with a format for a partnership agreement for them and their partners to use. The chapter finishes with a reflection on the entire study.

Empirical conclusions

To the question on how to effectively manage partnerships no universal answer can be given but several elements appeared essential for a successful partnership. The next paragraphs will review the subsequent elements: partner selection, partnership foundation, partnership agreement, communication plan, partnership manager, way of working together, partnership evaluation and finally several indispensable tips for success.

The first step to a successful partnership is the selection of the right partner. To find this partner, one should not only select on their capabilities but also very much on the energy investment they are willing to make for the partnership. This is due to the fact that the effort one puts in a partnership may be a better predictor of the partnership success than merely an organizations' competences. Subsequently, after a suitable partner has been chosen, one should really invest in the foundation of the relationship. How to do so is through getting to know the partnering organization very well. Knowing them, leads to understanding and understanding nurtures trust, which is indispensable to the success of a partnership.

Then, when partners want to engage in activities together, it is recommended to keep things simple by purely agreeing on basic partnering principles and then just take action. To agree on these principles, a partnership agreement can serve as a great tool. Important is that the partners jointly construct this agreement to fit their needs and wishes. The topics that are definitely worth including in the agreement are the partners' interests, roles and expectations of the partnership. In addition, or as an element of the partnership agreement, partners may set up a communication plan. Such a plan should then at least contain the manner, means and frequency in which partners communicate. However, vital to remember is that the success of the partnership depends more on the way it is managed than what is put on paper.

The managing of the partnership can be supported by one or more partnership managers recruited from one or both of the partnering organizations. To be able to contribute to a successful partnership the most, it would be best if the manager is able to value and cherish the partnership as a whole, as opposed to only his individual organization's interest. This is important considering the fact that the partnership can bring more value than the individual organization could have created alone, therefore a shared interest becomes an individual interest as well.

When it comes to a preferred way of working together, collaborating on a project basis was suggested to be a constructive way of collaborating. Partners then work on projects initiated by the partnership as a whole. What matters is that both organizations partake in the partnership alongside operating from their own organization. On that account, the merging of organizations was not recommended. In addition, partners should agree upon a time-frame for the partnership and reflect regularly on the partnership whilst it is operational. Regular reflection is vital and it was suggested

that partners work in short cycles and reflect on these. Favourable in the reflection process is the use of qualitative questions as a means to evaluate the partnership. But before doing so, it is essential that one knows what qualities, processes and outcomes of the partnership one wishes to evaluate. In the early stages of the partnership, partners must thus get specific about what it is they want from the partnership and how they are going to evaluate those goals.

Nonetheless, when thinking about what goals one wishes to achieve, one should not get tempted to plan the partnership in too much detail. Partnerships rarely go according to plan, so planning the course of the collaboration in much detail may be a wasted effort. Also the success formula of a partnership is context dependent. Partnering organizations should therefore discover each other's needs, assess the context they are working in, and adjust the partnership accordingly. Furthermore, it is worth stressing that the structure of a partnership is not the deciding factor in the success of a partnership. Instead the foundation for a rewarding partnership is to work on projects together, learn from them and build the partnership from there. But most importantly, partnering is a people's thing and therefore soft-skills are determining for the success of the partnership. As a consequence, partnering is about give and take. Continuously doing so gets and keeps the partnership successful.

Theoretical conclusions

The theoretical framework as presented in chapter two was helpful in many ways, one of them being the wide overview it gave on the aspects to take into account when partnering. The empirical results did not contradict the framework very much, yet occasionally additions to the theoretical framework can be supportive. In the following paragraphs these are discussed in more detail.

The theoretical findings in chapter two did not mention the significance of a potential partner's energy investment as a crucial element to consider whilst selecting the right organization to partner with. As opposed to this observation, the framework primarily covered important factual characteristics of an appropriate future partner but underexposed the importance of the effort that the proper partner must be willing to make. Hence, the focus in the theoretical framework was on what a potential partner could give, rather on how the partner should act. The latter observation could be a valuable addition to the previously proposed theory.

Chapter two also presented an extensive lineup of possible motives of businesses to start partnerships and stated that research had shown that businesses mostly partner with NGOs for the sake of improved reputation and credibility. For the specific case of potential business partners of Eco-Schools this could be different as the Eco-Schools programme wishes to partner with businesses that share their mentality on sustainability. It results that the motivations of these businesses will likely have a more idealistic nature. The more prominent reason for such a business to start a partnership could then be to increase their potential social impact by means of a partnership. In practice this can imply that their values and vision are more similar to those of the Eco-Schools programme, thereby increasing the chances on a good organizational match and a successful partnership. In addition, the empirical results show an additional potential motive of organizations to form partnerships. This motive is that partnerships can serve as an inspiration. Inspiration can thus be a part of the value proposition of a partnership as well.

Both the theoretical and empirical findings illustrate that partnerships contain much more than financial value solely. The empirical findings can add various kinds of value to the listing that was proposed in chapter two. One of these additional types of value is that partnerships can serve as an antidote to organizational blindness. This corresponds with the conclusion that partnerships can

serve as an inspiration, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The partnership may thus inspire an organization to take actions to prevent organizational blindness. In addition, the multiple types of value a partnership brings, can have consequences for its value proposition. It was already suggested in chapter two to incorporate the partnership's diverse range of values within the calculation of its financial value. This may be useful when approaching potential partners' who want an answer to the 'what's in it for me?' question. The value proposition including the multiple types of value can then be presented. Ideally one presents these by means of storytelling, as the empirical results suggested this to be an effective way of communicating value.

Regarding communication the present research could build on the theoretical insights from chapter two. There it was stated that partners should agree on the way they will communicate with each other but it did not mention how. The present study specifies this suggestion and proposed that partners make a communication plan together. Also the distinction between mutual, internal and external communication has been made to help the Eco-Schools programme and its partners to target their communication to all relevant areas. Concerning the literature about the partnership agreement the present study presents an extension thereof as well. It adds the notion that partners should constitute the agreement together. Also the literature did not demonstrate essential ingredients of such an agreement whereas the present study does.

Concerning relationship management and trust the empirical findings could refine the notions in the theoretical framework. On that account it was emphasized that partners must make an above-average investment in the beginnings of the partnership. Well begun is half done, is therefore a sound advice. In regards to trust, the empirical findings add an extra dimension to the concept, that being trust in the partnership process. This appeared to be a prerequisite for a successful partnership. How to bring about trust has been explored in more detail with help of the empirical data as well. The common denominator was that trust comes from investing in each other. One way to do so could be to join each other at work for some period of time.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework helped to gather an overview of the various kinds of partnerships that are possible but did not present an analysis about the pros and cons of these partnership types, therefore making it hard for Eco-Schools to make a deliberate decision about a type of partnership. However, the empiric demonstrates that a preferred way of collaborating in a partnership according to the interviewees, was by means of a project partnership. Naturally this is an adaptable format but recommended was to collaborate on projects together and possibly build a more long-lasting partner relationship from thereon.

All things considered, the findings stemming from the theoretical framework and the empirical findings complement each other nicely and can present Eco-Schools with the steppingstones they need to start their partnership journey. Eco-Schools asked for a draft of a partnership agreement that takes the lessons from this study into account. Therefore what follows is an outline of such an agreement accompanied by explanatory notes to support both partners when completing the agreement.

Recommendations

Partnership agreement format

The partnership agreement format introduced here is a draft that is to be further elaborated upon by both partners together. The agreement consists of essential elements that are advised to include in the agreement. Naturally, the addition of other elements to include in the agreement is imaginable. The present format is designed as a starting point for an agreement that is to be adjusted to the needs and wishes of both partners.

Goals

Shared goals strengthen the partnership relation, it is therefore recommended to not only state the goals of each individual organization, but to also describe the goals for the partnership as a whole.

Expectations

Sharing one's expectations about the partnership creates the opportunity to design the partnership in such a way that it is most likely that expectations are met. Therefore it is constructive to be open about the expectations one holds for both the process of the partnership and its desired outcomes.

Contribution to the partnership

In this section partners can present the value(s) they are able to offer. Different types of value are possible and suggested is to mention those in this section. In addition, here it would be worthwhile if one describes the effort one is willing to make for the partnership and commits oneself to this.

Communication

Effective partnerships depend on effective communication. It is therefore important to think about how, when and with whom partners will to communicate. Partners are encouraged to define the preferred tools of communication and explore each other's definition of effective communication. Then they can determine how often interaction is desired and who is the main contact person is. This can be the partnership manager but different contact persons for different topics are thinkable as well. Lastly, partners can jointly construct the communication strategy they are going to use for external stakeholders. It is advantageous to think in advance about how the partnership should come across and what their individual organizations' part is therein.

Project(s)

Project based working obliges partners to get specific about what it is they wishes to accomplish and how to accomplish this. Accordingly, partners can describe the project(s) they will be working on in such a way that it is clear what is the first step to take is. The goal of the project is worthy to mention as well, just as the expected timeframe. Also, it is good to define each partners' roles and tasks in the project to prevent confusion later on.

Length of the partnership

Partners are advised to contemplate with each other what a good initial time-frame for the partnership could be. Thereafter they can agree upon this time-frame and discuss what to do when this period comes to an end.

Monitoring & Evaluation

An essential prerequisite for learning is a solid monitoring and evaluation process. Important is to think about what topics must be monitored and evaluated and the means with which to do so. Both the attainment of goals as the partnering process are topics to reflect on. While doing so, partners can use indicators so that progress can be tracked. These indicators may be quantitative and/or qualitative. The latter type can be of extra importance as the answers to a series of qualitative questions may serve as useful qualitative indicators and help to reflect on the partnership process. Moreover, the frequency in which to reflect is something to determine as well. Also partners are advised to make one or more people responsible for guarding the monitoring and evaluation process. Finally, it would be good if partners already make an appointment for after each monitoring and evaluating cycle so they can discuss the results and learn from them.

Reflection

Just as any study also the present one has its strengths and limitations. Subsequently the strengths and limitations of the applied theoretical framework, method and empirical results are discussed.

The theoretical framework served as a solid foundation for the study on how to best manage effective partnerships. It covered a wide variety of topics relevant for partnering and proposed enough leads to study in more detail. Because of its extensiveness the framework provided an overview of the context around partnerships which contributed to my understanding about partnerships and how they can contribute to sustainable development. An additional plus about the scope of the theoretical search was that it kept room to shift focus from one aspect of partnering to another, if the empirical data pointed into that direction. A more narrow theoretical framework would have limited this adaptive power and thus downgraded one of the essential attributes of the grounded theory method. What would add to the strength of the framework would have been the consultation of more detailed theory's about different aspects of partnerships. As sometimes the devil can be in the details, the emphasize of certain details over others could have led to insights that may have benefitted Eco-Schools even more.

Methodologically the grounded theory approach appeared to be an effective approach for the relatively broad question that the Eco-Schools programme had about how to manage partnerships. The Eco-Schools programme did not have any partnerships yet at the time when this study was conducted. As a consequence, the extensive scope the study was needed in order to give Eco-Schools a good foundation from where to start partnering. On the other hand, the selection of interviewees was a very deliberate one, specified to its pertinence for Eco-Schools. As the Eco-Schools programme has characteristics of different kinds of organizations, being a certification body and a NGO looking to partner with sustainably minded businesses only, the selection of interviewees has been adapted to those features. This means that people from other certification bodies were interviewed as well as people from organizations that share other characteristics with Eco-Schools. The mix of general information and partnerships experts on the one hand, and an Eco-Schools targeted selection of interviewees on the other, provided an adequate mix between general and more specific data to use when answering this study's research question. An additional benefit of interviewing people that had practical experience in partnering as opposed to only interviewing scholars, was that the former group could present best-practices that provided the practical know-how that Eco-Schools is looking for. On a more general note, the restricted amount of empirical knowledge about partnerships that I began this study with turned out to be an unexpected advantage when using the grounded theory approach. It made it easier to let go of any preconceived

ideas about the best way to manage partnerships, simply because I had none of these preconceived ideas. Therefore I was able to look for emerging patterns in the data as unbiased as possible.

However, a critical remark concerns the memo writing during the research process. It would have been better if I had been more consistent in doing so. As it was my first time conducting a grounded theory research, I learned much along the way but the usefulness of memo writing was something that I realised too late. As memo's help to capture peculiarities, keep track of thoughts, note emerging questions or connect observations (Wiener, 2007) it would have supported my research process and contributed to the traceability of the study.

For a future study it could be worthy to formulate more specific research questions on Eco-Schools and partnerships, in order to advance the partnerships which they then would just have started. In that case a case-study would be a valuable addition to the research. Such a case-study would explore partnerships in more detail and provide enough data to answer more specific questions that the Eco-Schools programme by then may have.

The empirical results proved to be a practical addition to the theory as proposed in chapter two. The findings did not dispute these earlier theoretical findings which made the whole a coherent outline of how to best manage effective partnerships with the Eco-Schools programme. By means of semi-structured interviewing unexpected but relevant topics about partnering showed up in the empirical data. This opened the door for insights that supplemented the previously proposed theory. However, looking back it may have been advantageous if I had asked more questions about potential obstacles to encounter while partnering. As for now this topic has received some attention but delving deeper into it could have led to more practicable tips to support Eco-Schools with their first steps in partnering. All in all, even though the study could have been improved it does provide valuable input for Eco-Schools and can serve as a satisfying stepping stone from where to start partnerships.

References

- Austin, J. E. (2000). *The collaboration challenge. How nonprofits and businesses succeed through strategic alliances.*
- Austin, J. E., & Seitanidi, M. M. (2012b). Collaborative Value Creation. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(5), 726-758. doi:10.1177/0899764012450777
- Austin, J. E., & Seitanidi, M. M. (2012a). Collaborative value creation: A review of partnering between nonprofits and businesses. Part 2: Partnership processes and outcomes. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(6), 929-968.
- Bachtler, J., & Taylor, S. (2003). The added value of the Structural Funds: A regional perspective. *IQ-Net Report on the Reform of Structural Funds. Glasgow.*
- Berlie, L. (2014). *Alliances for sustainable development: business and ngo partnerships.* Place of publication not identified: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), 12-23. doi:10.1177/160940690600500304
- Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2002). Assessing and improving partnership relationships and outcomes: a proposed framework. *Evaluation and program planning*, 25(3), 215-231.
- De Bruin, H. D., & Ten Heuvelhof, E. T. (2008). *Management in networks. On multi-actor decision making.* Routledge.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods 4e.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Byiers, B., Guadagno, F., & Karaki, K. (2015). From looking good to doing good: Mapping CSO-business partnerships. *European Centre for Development Policy Management.* Retrieved Spring, 2017.
- Comi, A., & Zamparini, A. (2015). Green Alliances: How Does Ecophilosophy Shape the Strategies of Environmental Organizations? *Voluntas*. doi:10.1007/s11266-014-9478-6
- Doz, Y. L., & Hamel, G. (1998). *Alliance advantage: the art of creating value through partnering.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Eco-Schools. (2017). About us. Retrieved August, 2017, from <http://www.ecoschools.global/how-does-it-work/>
- Erakovich, R. & Anderson, T., (2013) "Cross-sector collaboration: management decision and change model", *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 26 Issue: 2, pp.163-173, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513551311318031>
- Glasbergen, P. (2010). Understanding partnerships for sustainable development analytically: the ladder of partnership activity as a methodological tool. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 21(1), 1-13. doi:10.1002/eet.545
- Gray, B., & Stites, J. (2013). Sustainability through partnerships: Capitalizing on collaboration. *Network for Business Sustainability.* Retrieved July, 27, 2015.
- Van Huijstee, Francken & Leroy (2007) 'Partnerships for sustainable development: a review of current literature', *Environmental Sciences*, 4:2, 75 – 89.
- Jonker, J., & Nijhof, A. (2006). Looking Through the Eyes of Others: assessing mutual expectations and experiences in order to shape dialogue and collaboration between business and NGOs with respect to CSR. *Corporate Governance*, 14(5), 456-466.
- Kourula, A. 2014. Perspectives, reviews and the path forward. *Annual Review of Social Partnerships*, Publication Section, Issue 9. Pp.13-14
- Lin, H., & Darnall, N. (2015). Strategic Alliance Formation and Structural Configuration. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 549-564. DOI 10.1007/s10551-014-2053-7

- Locke, K. (2011). Distinguishing Characteristics of Grounded Theories. *Grounded Theory in Management Research*, 34-43. doi:10.4135/9780857024428.d6
- Nooteboom, B. (1994). *Management van partnerships: in toeleveren en uitbesteden*. Schoonhoven: Academic Service, economie en bedrijfskunde.
- Pattberg & Widerberg (2014): *Transnational Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Building Blocks for Success*. IVM Report, R-14/31. Amsterdam: Institute for Environmental Studies.
- Pfisterer, S. (2013). *Partnering with the Private Sector. Navigator. Handbook for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands*. Partnerships Resource Centre and The Partnering Initiative: Rotterdam and London.
- Rath, J. & Schuyt, T. (2015). Entrepreneurial Philanthropy Meet with Non-profits. *International Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*. Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 55-64. doi: 10.11648/j.ijebo.20150304.11
- Sanzo, M. J., Álvarez, L. I., Rey, M., & García, N. (2015). Business–non-profit partnerships: a new form of collaboration in a corporate responsibility and social innovation context. *Service Business*, 9(4), 611-636. doi:10.1007/s11628-014-0242-1
- Ter Haar, W. M. A. (2014). Communiceren en improviseren: Omgaan met dynamiek en complexiteit bij de ontwikkeling en implementatie van een gezondheidsinterventie
- Ter Haar, M., Aarts, N., & Verhoeven, P. (2014). Communicatiestrategieën bij complexe samenwerking: een casestudy naar innovatie in zorgpreventie. *Tijdschrift voor communicatiewetenschap*, 42(2), 121-144.
- Tulder, R.V., Seitanidi, M.M., Crane, A., & Brammer, S. (2015). Enhancing the Impact of Cross-Sector Partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 135 (1), 1-17. doi:10.1007/s10551-015-2756-4
- United Nations. (2017a). Sustainable development goals. Retrieved August, 2017, from <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- United Nations. (2017b). Multi-stakeholder partnerships & voluntary commitments .:. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Retrieved August, 2017, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdinaction>
- United Nations. (2017c). Partnerships: Why they matter. Retrieved August, 2017, from http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ENGLISH_Why_it_Matters_Goal_17_Partnerships.pdf
- United Nations. (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals kick off with start of new year [Sustainable Development Goals]. Retrieved February 5, 2018, from <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/12/sustainable-development-goals-kick-off-with-start-of-new-year/>
- Vangen, S., & Huxam, C. (2003). Nurturing Collaborative Relations. Building Trust in Interorganizational Collaboration. *The journal of applied behavioural science*, 39(1), 5-31. doi:10.1177/0021886303253179
- Wiener, C. (n.d.). Making Teams Work in Conducting Grounded Theory. *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, 292-310. doi:10.4135/9781848607941.n14

Appendix 1: List of interviewees

- Alex-Baker Shelley: Researcher at Maastricht university
- Ceren Pekdemir: Researcher at Maastricht university
- Esther Slinkman: Manager at the certifying body of 'Gezonde School'
- Fokke Brouwer: Consultant at Hobéon
- Geert van der Linden: Community manager at Nudge
- Greetje Schouten: Researcher at the Rotterdam School of Management
- Hans Freriks: Projectmanager at IPMA
- Helga van Kampen: Partnership broker
- Henk Klein: Active for the foundation 'NL Schoon'
- Jan Oosting: Network manager at the school network of 'Sustainable Chain Gang'
- Jan Jonker: Researcher at Radboud university
- Marian ter Haar: Expert in strategic collaboration

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Main research question

- How can partnerships between the Eco-Schools programme and partners be managed effectively?

Why are partnerships initiated?

- Why does one wish to start a partnership?
- Why would one not start a partnership?
- What expectations does one hold for the partnership?
- What is the goal of the partnership?
- In how far does sustainability influence the decision to partake in a partnership?
- In how far have external developments influenced the decision to partner?
- Does one partner voluntarily or does one feel obliged?

How are partnerships managed?

- Have mutual goals for the partnership been set up?
- How is the partnership typified?
- In how far have existing tools or formats been used for the partnership?
- In how far is there a 'shared identity' or are the organizations functioning strictly separate?
- Has a mutual policy been set up?
- How has the structure of the partnering organizations been adapted for the partnership?
- Has there been external assistance to guide the partnership?
- What has been put on paper?
- How is the division of roles in the partnership?
- Has extra capacity for the partnership been arranged?
- How are the finances handled?
- Does one use funds or subsidies?
- How is the communication between partners?
- Do external developments impact the partnership?
- In how far do governmental choices influence the partnership?
- What does one perceive to be the most important focus areas in the partnership?

What are the outcomes of a partnership?

- What are the most important benefits of the partnership?
- How is the partnership monitored?
- How is the partnership evaluated?
- What is one's perspective on the timeframe of the partnership?
- How is the quality of the partnership safeguarded?
- How would the added value of the partnership be described?

Appendix 3: Coding approach

Code families

- Partnership context
- Motivations to partner
- Added value partnership
- Partner selection
- Way of working together
- Communication
- Partnership agreement
- Relationship management
- Partnership manager
- Trust
- Tips for partnership success
- Types of partnerships
- Monitoring & evaluation
- Partnership cycle
- Partnership challenges

Coding examples

1. *"Private organisations want to partner with universities to benefit from the academic knowledge."*
Code → partnership to acquire knowledge
Code family → motivations to partner
2. *"Leden van IPMA krijgen korting op certificering, korting op publicaties, korting op toegang van clubdagen, en toegang tot netwerk bijeenkomsten andere leden van IPMA."*
Code → partnering to get discount / partnering to get access to network
Code family → motivations to partner
3. *"Samenwerkingsconvenanten zijn er. Maar nog niet definitief. Is moeizaam om getekend te krijgen vanwege gedoe met afrekenbaarheid dat mensen niet fijn vinden."*
Code → partners are cautious regarding accountability
Code family → partnership agreement
4. *"Duurzaamheid staat in toenemende mate op de agenda van bedrijven."*
Code → sustainability gets more important for businesses
Code family → partnership context
5. *"Formal documenting should definitely involve expectations, potential outcomes, when parties are satisfied."*
Code → partnership agreement should encompass expectations, potential outcomes and when the partnership is a success
Code family → partnership agreement

6. "Een belangrijke les is: **gewoon beginnen**. Je kan ook heel lang praten maar beter kun je bepalen wat de eerste stap is en die gewoon uitvoeren. De beste manier om uit te vinden om iets gaat werken is om het gewoon te proberen."
 Code → start working together as soon as possible
 Code family → way of working together
7. "Elk partnerschap is uniek. **Algemeen geldende regels voor partnerschap zijn heel moeilijk**. Dat kan niet."
 Code → no one-size-fits all for a partnership
 Code family → way of working together
8. "Groot verschil met partnership theorie en praktijk. Partneren vergt heel ander soort vaardigheden (**met elkaar meedenken, samen een visie kunnen vormen**) dan dat wij geleerd hebben in het industriële tijdperk (competitie etc.) A fool with a tool is still a fool. **Je moet écht begrijpen wat er nodig is, niet enkel een tool toepassen**."
 Code → partnering requires soft skills
 Code family → relationship management
9. "Echte partnerschap spelregels worden zelden op papier gezet. **Er wordt wel aan het begin overlegd van wat beide partners (ongeveer) willen** maar het stappenplan wordt nog niet exact bepaald. Stel ik vraag jou iets te doen en ik kom meteen met een contract, dan haak je eerder af dan wanneer je denkt 'goh dat project/idee was best wel leuk' Laat ik volgend jaar weer meedoen. Persoonlijke filosofie van Henk: **'zodra je contracten en rechters nodig hebt, ben je te laat'**."
 Code → lean partnership agreement
 Code → contract may scare partners away
 Code → contracts as a last resort
 Code family → partnership agreement
10. "Echte goede partners gaan met elkaar in zee omdat **je elkaar vertrouwt en bepaalde waarde deelt**. Omdat **je nut hebt van elkaar**. Je kan daar pakken papier aan besteden maar dat heeft geen zin. Het werkt of het werkt niet en er kunnen altijd dingen mis gaan. Maar daar moet je je niet op voorbereiden. Je weet dat het mis gaat en je moet het vertrouwen hebben in elkaar dat je dat kunt uitleggen, managen, en dat je aan damage control kunt doen. Maar dingen gaan mis, dat hoort erbij."
 Code → trust is key
 Code → partnering because you need each other and share values
 Code → no need for long agreements
 Code family → trust, partnership motivation & partnership agreement
11. "CEASE heeft geen vaste vergaderstructuur, organisatiestructuur, er is alleen maar 1x per 2 weken op dinsdagochtend koffie drinken met elkaar. Super losjes gekoppeld netwerk. Maar het werkt. **Heel intensief managen van het netwerk is dus niet nodig**. Komt deels door de **kracht van de gedeelde doelen**. Iedere keer opnieuw op zoek naar de gemeenschappelijkheid

naar de gedeelde urgentie en doelen. Maar als je die eenmaal hebt, nadat je geïnvesteerd hebt in het begin dan ga je als een speer. Dat is net zo als bijvoorbeeld met teamontwikkeling.”

Code → shared goals connect partners

Code → invest a lot in the beginning of a partnership

Code family → relationship management

12. *“Voorafgaand aan een partnerschap zijn er een paar essentiële zaken die je moet bespreken. O.a. je verwachtingen over de resultaten en het proces. En als het over de financiën gaat, moet je uitspraken doen over wat je kunt bijdragen.”*

Code → discuss expectations prior to partnering

Code family → way of working together