

In search of optimal Partnership Configurations

What determines the success rate of PPP proposals for sustainable development?

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Abstract

Public Private collaborations are booming. For sustainable development objectives, an abundance of innovative public-private-partnerships (PPPs) have been initiated. But type of organizational configuration 'fit' for achieving the intended aims is not well understood. Are there antecedents of an 'optimal configuration' for development PPPs? This paper derives a theoretical model from organizational configuration, strategic alliance and cross-sector partnership literature. Hypotheses are formulated, which are (pre)tested for significance and validity through a quantitative analysis of two recently established Dutch PPP facilities on water and food security. The paper shows why some partnership configurations have been more successful than others.

Keywords: partnership configuration, complementarity, compatibility, relationship capital

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1. Introduction: cross-sector partnership configurations in the development discourse

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are increasingly seen as the new organizational paradigm for effective development cooperation (Austin, 2000; UNDESA, 2014). In the early 21st century the idea of so called ‘cross-sector’ or ‘multi-stakeholder’ partnerships started to become embraced in the development discourse (Glasbergen, 2010, Dowling et al, 2004). We can define public private partnerships as ‘the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors’ – that include at least one ‘public’ and one ‘private’ partner - “to jointly achieve an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately” (Bryson et al 2006). PPPs are increasingly assumed to be a necessary and desirable strategy for addressing many of society’s most difficult public challenges, sometimes also referred to as ‘wicked problems’ (Waddock, 1988). Partnerships were included as the official 8th Millennium Development Goal to be achieved by 2015. Since the start of the millennium, consequently, thousands of development PPPs have been formed in various configurations: public-private, public-nonprofit or private-nonprofit partnerships (Seitanidi & Crane, 2014; Pattberg et al, 2012; Gazley & Brudney, 2007). The Rio+ conference for instance triggered the announcement of 700 concrete multi-stakeholder partnerships (UNDESA, 2014). We are witnessing a multitude of shapes in which numbers of participants can range from two organizations to dozens of partners; they can be simple or complex, focused or unfocused, bi-partite or tripartite, goal oriented or means oriented, opportunity or issue-driven (PrC, 2012; Seitanidi and Crane, 2014; Bäckstrand, 2006). PPPs are initiated by civil society organizations, firms, governments or knowledge institutes and can take the shape of transformational, instrumental or philanthropic relationships (Austin & Seitanidi, 2014; Gray & Stites, 2013). A multitude of partnership initiatives has been the result.

But partnerships are not a panacea for development problems (Kolk, 2014). Configuration clearly seems to matter, not only for the internal dynamics of the partnership, but also for its effectiveness in addressing the problem. In the development discourse it has for instance been suggested that sustainable development requires ‘balanced’ participation of all main societal actors – civil society, governments and firms (Mintzberg, 2001; Van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2006; Mert and Chan, 2010; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011) in which actors can have ‘discursive space’ to work on framing and re framing issues that are of mutual interest (Deetz et al, 2007). The increasing involvement of ‘non-market’ parties like NGOs in PPPs creates interesting question on what type of partnership can actually achieve the highest impact (Babiak, 2009; Sciulli, 2008). Depending on the configuration of the partnership, different dependency and power relations materialize that can have an effect on the ultimate impact of the partnership (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Dahan et al, 2010). Furthermore, cross- sector collaborations are difficult to create and even more difficult to sustain because of their sometimes complex organisational constituencies (Bryson et al, 2006), which can also imply that perhaps the ‘wrong’ partnership configurations are created, due to the fact that ‘coalitions of the willing’ are created that not necessarily can solve the issue or crowd out other actors that are needed to address the issue (IDB, 2010).

The literature on development PPPs is relatively new and evaluations of the antecedents of their success still rather fragmented (Van Tulder et al, 2015). This is in particular due

to the complex nature of the issues addressed, but applies also to an understanding of the organizational nature of the PPP itself. Furthermore, only limited research has focused so far on the nature of partnerships between bilateral donors and the private sector (Baxter, 2012; Pedersen, 2005; Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2007; Kolk et al., 2008; Brinkerhoff, 2002). Do more complex issues require different partnership configurations in order to be successful? In the organizational literature this problem is also addressed as the search for a “configuration fit” (Van Tulder and Pfisterer, 2014; Vurro et al, 2010). The partnership configuration requirements to achieve development objectives, however, still present largely uncharted territory. Can we define an ‘optimal organizational fit’ of PPPs or are they so complex, so diverse and/or context specific that every effort to come up with antecedents of (more) optimal organizational configurations for PPPs would be in vain? This paper sheds more light on this question for which insights of the organizational configuration, strategic alliances and cross-sector partnership literature will be translated to the specific problems of PPP configurations.

In the former stream of studies, it has been suggested for instance that a configuration-performance fit is key to organizational survival and high performance (Summer et al, 1990). Organizational configurations can thereby be defined as groupings of organizations that are classified by a common theme or profile (Miller, 1996). While configuration research aspires to offer an accurate prediction of which sets of organizations will be successful under a particular set of circumstances (Short et al, 2008), many questions remain surrounding this relationship (Dess et al, 1994; Payne, 2006). There seems to be no agreement on what this configuration actually consists of and what the relative importance of the configuration is for partnership success. Scholars do agree, however, that there is a risk of a misfit penalty for organizations that deviate from the preferred configurational design (Gresov and Drazin, 1997). Furthermore, functional demands placed on the organization, structural design options available to the decision maker and associated trade-offs seem to influence the fit- performance relationship (Payne, 2006).

It proves even more complex to define the optimal configuration for hybrid organizations, joint ventures or strategic alliances. When analyzing the configuration of these organizations, studies often focus on aspects of the partner fit, namely the potential partner synergies and how partners synthesize with one another (Thorgren et al, 2013). Heiman et al (2008) investigated three frequently mentioned types of organizational fit in joint ventures: the strategic fit (linked to objective congruence), the organizational fit (the harmony regarding hiring decisions) and the cultural fit (efficacy of management communications). While these seem clear indicators of organizational fit, the direct relationship of these configuration variables to organizational design highly depends on the context, and therefore has small predictive value for organizational performance and success. Studies, however, do show indirect linkages of organizational configuration to performance, such as the influence of organizational learning (Kang et al, 2007), the network (Garcia- Pont and Nohria, 2002), reputation (Ferguson et al, 2000) and governance (Hsieh et al, 2007).

Any level of ‘optimal organizational configuration’ is difficult to assess due to its unclear relation with organizational performance. The theory of *configurational equifinality* assumes that a particular outcome, such as high performance, can be achieved through multiple organizational designs (Gresov & Drazin, 1997), but this approach also suggests

the existence of a general principle for optimal organizational configuration, as the idea that many organizational forms can lead to similar performances assumes some contextual independence. Part of the complexity that surrounds the configuration-performance fit also exists due to the varying definitions of performance and conceptual vagueness in general (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Bendell et al, 2010; Selksy & Parker, 2005). Performance is deemed a complex and multidimensional problem that depends on goals, internal and external factors and the needs of constituencies (Dess & Robinson, 1984). Performance is often accessed via accounting data, realized market share, patenting rate, price cost margin (Short et al, 2008) and various subjective measures such as customer relations, internal business processes and learning and growth (Lipe & Salterio, 2000). These performance measures are often developed for separate organizational units to capture the business strategy of each unit (ibid). Numerous authors argue that organizational performance should include broader societal and community dimensions rather than more narrow, strictly economic criteria (Dess & Robinson, 1984), but also acknowledge that this only increases the measurement challenges. This study partly tackles this issue by turning the argument around: starting from the societal issue (for which a partnership facility was created) and consequently asking whether any specific configuration seems more appropriate for addressing it (White, 2009).

The entrance of a new organizational form makes the search for an optimal organization configuration-fit across societal sectors even more challenging. There is for instance neither a universally accepted definition of cross- sector partnerships nor on what defines their performance or impact (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010, 2014). The diverse issues and constituencies the partnership concept is linked to range from simple management contracts to concessions contracts with significant obligations (Marin, 2009; Bouman, 2013). In line with its ambiguous concept, studies define successful partnerships ambiguously: from a process perspective, emphasizing the partnership relations and long- term sustainability of the partnership, or from an outcome perspective, focused on the project or issue dynamics (Dowling et al, 2004). The direct relation of the partnership configuration to partnership success remainst largely unclear.

Still many cross- sector development studies suggest an observable relationship between partnership configuration and partnership performance (Ketchen et al, 1997; Short et al, 2008). The different forms of cross- sector partnerships make it thereby particularly difficult to determine criteria considering the partnership configuration that influence performance and success. The optimal partnership configuration depends on the wickedness or complexity of the issue it tries to solve (Waddock, 2014). The lack of a common, widely used vehicle that enables organizations to find partners makes the assessment of partnership potential during the formation particularly daunting as information about the suitability of partners is not readily available (Austin 2010). Bouman et al (2013) concluded that there is only very limited research done on partnership effectiveness which feeds into the criticism on this innovative tool. They suggest that the 'decision-making regarding the reliance on PPP's for development could be supported with a clear framework for selecting and designing PPP's' (Bouman et al, 2013: 5). This implies that while partnerships are often used as a tool for development aid (Glasbergen, 2010) the partnership configuration requirements seem to be unknown, whilst the logistics and policy requirements for successful PPP implementation have not yet been systematically explored (Jamali, 2004: 427). This reiterates the importance to

search for more clarity about the constituting elements of an optimal partnership configuration. This question becomes more important now that the United Nations community is moving from eight relatively straightforward Millennium Development Goals to the formulation of seventeen more complex and more inclusive ‘Sustainable Development Goals’, in which the instrument of PPPs has received perhaps even a greater prominence.

This paper continues as follows. Section 2 builds a theoretical model on configurational fit from the management and organizational literature and applies it in the area of cross-sector partnerships (PPPs) for sustainable development. The elaborated model results in a number of hypotheses. The sophistication of this theoretical model is tested through a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of two established PPP facilities initiated by the Dutch government in 2013: the Fund Sustainable Water (FDW) and Fund Sustainable Development and Food Security (FDOV). Section 3 explains the method in more detail. 189 partnership proposals were submitted for these facilities, of which in the end around 42 were approved, following a very detailed and multiple-round selection procedure. Hundreds of NGOs, companies, knowledge institutes participated, thus creating a very diverse landscape of potential partnerships, but with relatively clear ambitions because they had to fit into the aims of the two facilities. The budget that became allocated to these projects amounted to around 250 million euro of which on average 40-50% was publicly funded. This paper looks in particular at the partnership configurations that were composed for the two facilities and asks itself whether this has had any effect on the approval rate of the proposed partnership. The ultimate success rate of these projects can only be determined in the course of five to ten years. To come to a reasonable pre-test of the model, this paper uses a mixed method approach. We use the actual informed and detailed selection procedure of a large group of project officers and embassy staff, controlled by a panel of leading experts (drawn from all relevant areas of expertise needed to judge these proposals) as a layered Delphi method. This is complemented by a representative survey amongst the participants. Follow-up research will have to show what the predictive value of the chosen selection and modeling is. The database that is collected for these projects will be made available for that type of research. Section 4 presents and discusses the results, while section 5 concludes, discusses limitations and specifies further areas of research.

2. A theory of PPP configurations

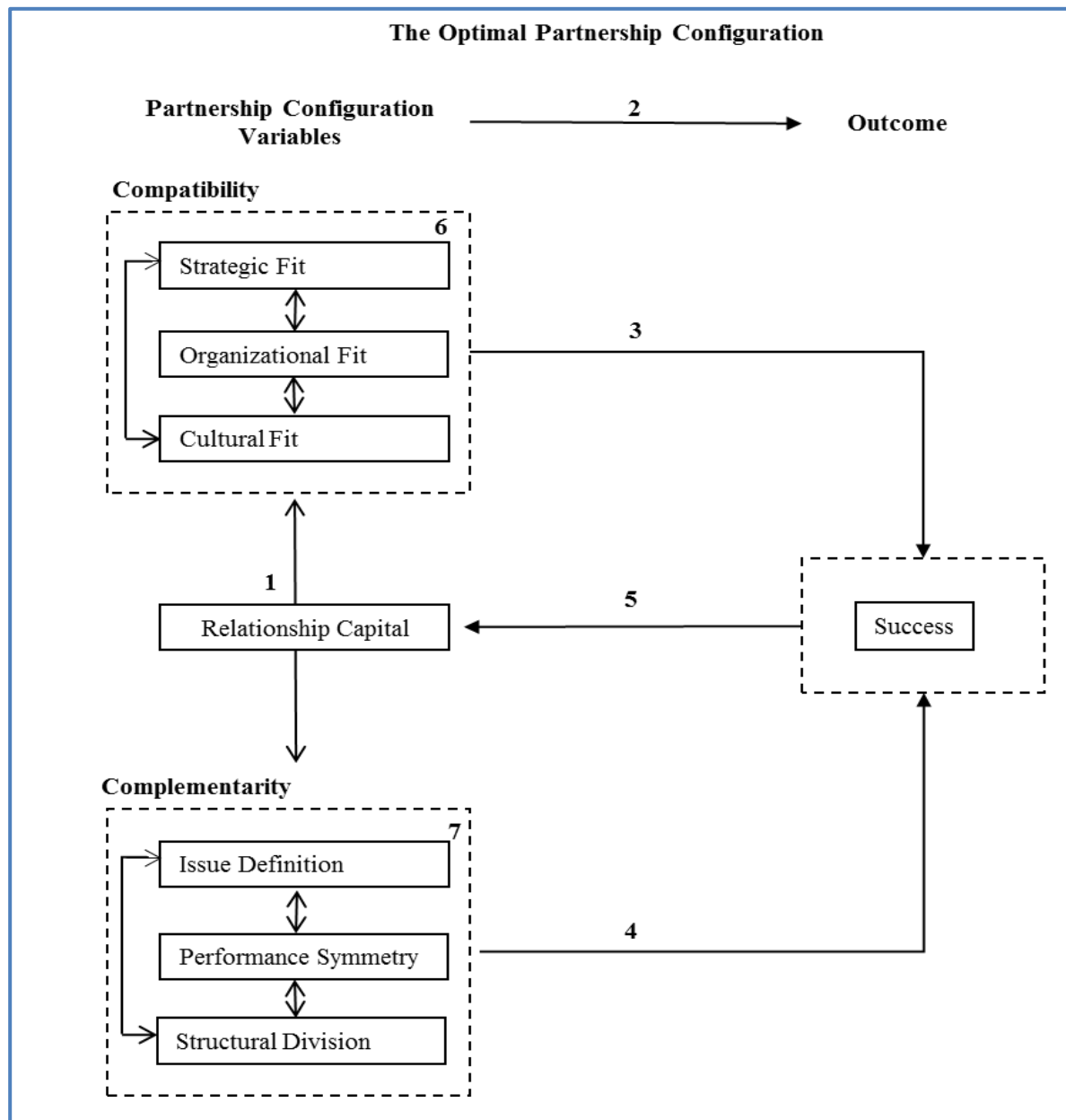
A theory on optimal PPP configurations of PPPs can build on insights from three streams of literature: (1) organizational configuration, (2) strategic alliances and (3) cross-sector partnerships. We performed a systematic reviewⁱ in order to define the most relevant and promising components for a theory of partnership configurations. The organizational configuration literature for inter- sector collaborations reiterates the influence of the environment and partner characteristics on the partnership outcome. The strategic vision, perceived importance of the alliance, mutual dependency, compatibility of strategies, added value and market acceptance are suggested as the relevant aspects defining the (strategic) fit between alliance partners (Douma & Schreuder, 2008). Here, the partnership structure and the associated contingencies and constraints define the partnership configuration and are probably directly related to performance. Structural

aspects include elements such as goals, specialization of tasks and division of labor, rules and standard operating procedures, and designated authority relationships (Bryson et al., 2006). The structure therefore refers to the synergy of organization types (partner goals) and organization roles (specification of tasks and division of labor), but also the position of these partners (authority relationships). It concerns horizontal and vertical components, and is often a balancing act for each partner organization since they have to differentiate and integrate across these components (ibid). The contingencies and constraints influencing this structure are the type of collaboration and the partners' institutional background, as they outline the relative positions, experiences and responsibilities of the partners. The optimal partnership configuration therefore should stress the involvement of the right type of partners in the right position, but should in addition keep several contingencies and constraints related to environmental factors and partner characteristics in mind.

Both the internal alignment of the partners (*compatibility*) and external alignment of the partners with the issue (*complementarity*) are crucial for the achievement of partnership success. This can be defined as the internal and external 'fit' of the partnership (cf. Venkatraman, 1989). This relationship is moderated through the development of so called "relationship capital" and the perception of (anticipated) success by the partners. Complementarity refers to the type and structure of the resources and capabilities of the autonomous partners, and thus the kind of value that can be created by the partnership. Compatibility refers to the interdependence of the partners which can be operationalized by examining whether the organizational working practices, goals and culture facilitate this value creation. Partnership success can then be defined as the creation of *additional* value for a specific issue then can be offered by individual organizations (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012; Maas, 2012).

Figure 1 shows the basic theoretical model that will be used to map possible components and define potential correlations. It defines two independent partnership configuration variables that relate to fit: compatibility and complementarity, one dependent variable (success or performance) and one mediating or intermediary variable Relationship capital. The challenge of our effort is to define the constituting elements of these variables and hypothesize relationships that in the end could make it more feasible to define what configuration of partnership components create a positive (perceived) outcome. We will first define the general characteristics of the model and then zoom in on more specific elements.

Figure 1: components of an optimal partnership configuration



2.1 Basic Model

Independent variables: Internal and external fit

The external and internal component of (optimal) partnership configurations can also be referred to as task and a partner related dimensions (Geringer, 1991). The external dimension refers to the fit of the partnership with the issue-environment. The internal fit refers to the nature of collaboration of the partners. This partner fit is often researched for alliance performance (Thorgren et al, 2012; Sarkar et al, 2001). The external-internal fit differentiation can relate to Parkhe's (1991) conceptualization of inter-organizational diversity in which Type I diversity deals with complementary resources and capability profiles and Type II diversity refers to cultural and process differences between the

societal actors (Parkhe, 1991). Partnerships require high quality of interactions due to the complex integration and transformation of disparate pools of tacit know-how required for value creation (Sarkar et al, 2001). Type II diversity thus analyzes the similarity of the cross-sector partners. Internal and external fit is in the alliance literature referred to as complementarity and compatibility (Thorgren et al, 2012; Sarkar et al, 2001). Complementarity defined as the lack of symmetry or overlap between partners' resources in relation to each firm's capabilities, while compatibility has been defined as the similarity between partners' organizational cultures and management and operating style (Thorgren et al, 2012; Kale et al, 2000). For PPPs the partnership complementarity then relates to the external fit, specifically the degree that the partnership offers a 'synergistic' whole for the specific issue it tries to solve. The partnership compatibility refers to the internal fit of the participating organizations. Complementarity analyzes the partnership configuration at the partnership level (do they form a relevant whole together for the issue); compatibility defines the partnership configuration from a partner level - how do they collaborate. Most partnership studies focus on compatibility questions, the partnership fit per se as an organizational fit or the 'degree to which the collaborating organizations can achieve congruence in their respective perceptions, interests and strategic directions' (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b). Compatibility for cross-sector partnerships does not require exact similarity of organizational objectives and cultures as referred to in the optimal configuration literature. The 'organizational fit' rather focuses on the internal match between 'organizational processes such as culture, resources, policies and administrative systems' (Kim et al, 2012). The by definition different cultural and institutional backgrounds of cross-sector partnerships and the autonomy of partners require organizational commonality instead of congruence (Yan & Duan, 2003). The internal fit therefore indicates whether the focus of the partners is on their interdependence and correspondence, or rather on the autonomy of their own organization. Compatibility is an indicator of the balance between competition and correspondence between the partners.

For cross-sector partners complementarity is vital as well. It implies that partners can offer synergistic value to the issue. While there are many studies analyzing the conditions required for successful partnerships (cf. Bryson et al, 2006; Kendall et al, 2012), these studies do not specifically analyze the required structure needed to form a successful partnership (Bryson et al, 2006). Only a small group of scholars investigated the effects of prevailing institutional logics on the configuration of cross-sector partnerships (Vurro et al, 2010). In order to provide synergistic value, the partnership should encompass partners with a sufficient range of perspectives, resources and skills so that something greater than their individual effort can be created (Lasker et al, 2001). The required complementarity of cross-sector partnerships can be considered logically related to a low degree of compatibility due to the diverse institutional norms and values. So the statement of Sarkar et al (2001) that the value generated from alliances is enhanced 'when partners have different resource and capability profiles yet share similarities on their social institutions', presents an interesting challenge for cross-sector partnerships.

Hypothesis 1a: The complementarity (external fit) and compatibility (internal fit) of PPPs are inversely related. Both require a basic level of alignment and can partly compensate for the others' deficits.

Dependent variable: Partnership successⁱⁱ

Delineating the success or ultimate impact of development PPPs presents arguably the most complex challenge not in the least of the various stakeholders involved (cf Van Tulder et al, 2015; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Consequently, there is very limited robust evidence of either positive or negative effects of partnerships (Bouman et al, 2013). Studies have defined the success of partnerships from two different angles. From a process perspective studies focused on internal processes such as partnership relations, collaborative capacity building and/or internal management (cf. Brinkerhoff, 2002; Kendall et al, 2012; Dowling, 2004; Austin 2001), or analyzed the conditions and requirements needed during the formation phase (cf. Hagedoorn, 2006; Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). For strategic partnerships, success has been viewed as a function of continuation (Harrigan, 1988), which suggests that the continuation of a partnership can be considered a success on itself. From an outcome perspective, partnerships have been characterized in terms of added value, the partners meeting their own objectives and partnership identity (Brinkerhoff, 2002). In addition, this requires a common understanding of the added value or solution that the issue requires (Van Tulder et al, 2015).

While defining partnership success in terms of a process or outcome perspective helps to demarcate the measures of partnerships success, these perspectives are mutually influencing. The partnership composition determines the value that can be offered from an outcome perspective, referred to as the partner complementarity. This value is dependent on the dynamics of this composition from a process perspective, defined as the partner compatibility. As noted by Austin and Seitanidi (2012), the degree of collaboration enables the generation of synergistic value – the better the fit, the greater the value created. This is in line with the analysis of Bryson et al (2006), who in their analysis of partnership research conclude that both the collaboration structure (composition) and task performed (value added) have an impact on partnership effectiveness. The added value is often referred to as collaborative value, but more specifically as social and economic value, which can be mutually reinforcing (Dahan et al, 2010).

A detailed understanding of characteristics associated with partnership success is yet lacking, but strategic management scholars generally agree that a majority of the partnerships do not succeed (Mohr and Spekman, 1994). Context and implementation define the adequacy of the configuration (Bouman et al, 2013). The ‘optimal partnership configuration’ can theoretically thus be defined as the degree to which the partnership provides synergistic value for the specific issue, and offers more value for a specific issue than possibly can be offered by the individual organizations can (Lasker et al, 2001). In this sense the link between the external and internal fit also define the counterfactual of the partnership – i.e. what would have happened without the partnership, and which is one of the biggest attribution problems in partnership research (OECD, 2006; Maas, 2012). According to Lasker et al (2001), the partnership synergy refers to the degree to which a partnerships’ collaborative process successfully combines its participants’ perspectives, knowledge and skills. This synergy then results in (1) thinking in new and better ways about how it can achieve its goals, (2) plan more comprehensive, integrated programs and (3) strengthen its relationship to the broader community. The synergy is thus the degree to which the partners make use of their complementarity and deploy their

collaboration to its full potential (ibid). When the configuration enhances the potential synergy that the partnership can develop, this implies that the configuration directly influences partnership success.

Hypothesis 2: The partnership configuration has a positive relation to partnership success. It defines whether the partnership can facilitate a process that provides collaborative value through the compatibility and complementarity of the partners.

Aligning external and internal fit

Fit can be 'designed into' alliances (Heiman, 2008; Douma & Schreuder, 2008). Partnering defined as an interactive process implies that success depends on the available conditions that provide opportunities for collaborative social action (Glasbergen, 2010). The partner complementarity and compatibility evolves over time, in terms of relations, capital, interdependence and knowledge transfer (Thorgren et al, 2012). Still, it should be possible to define a partnership configuration that enhances (the opportunity to develop) the complementarity and compatibility of the partners, especially when the partnership objective is given (Agranoff and McGuire, 1998). These partnership configuration criteria directly influence the partnership development and success in the long run. Mohr and Spekman (1994) used two indicators of partnership success that can measure the synergistic potential of partnerships: an 'objective' indicator, related to the sales volume flowing between dyadic partners, and an 'affective measure', namely the satisfaction of one party with the other. The objective measure represents the partner complementarity, which for cross- sector partnerships relates to the *in- depth performance*: can the difference in resources and perspectives enable the partners to provide collaborative value?

As the purpose of the partnership affects structure (Agranoff and McGuire, 1998), the issue and the related objective define the ideal composition of the partnership (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012; Bryson et al, 2006). The affective measure compares to the compatibility of the partnership in that it provides insights in the *operational performance*. It measures the way in which the partners' interactions can compensate for the sector differences and competitive threats. The compatibility of the partners defines the decision making potential of the organizations based on strategic, organizational and cultural commonality (Heiman et al, 2008). The complementarity between the partners seems a basic requirement for a partnership – it reflects the way in which the partners can complement each other in terms of resources, capabilities and skills. Without an external fit of the partnership configuration with the issue, it is impossible for the partnership to create value for that issue. The compatibility can be seen as an early indicator of the 'correct partnership' once the right type of organizations are involved in the right position (Weiser et al, 2006). Consequently, while complementarity is a prerequisite for cross- sector partnerships to provide synergistic value, a basic level of compatibility of the partners is required to enable the efficient generation of this synergistic value. In other words: complementarity is a necessary but not sufficient conditions for effective partnerships, whereas compatibility is not necessary nor sufficient beyond a certain minimum threshold.

Hypothesis 2b: Complementarity forms the biggest bottleneck for partnership success. In addition, a basic level of compatibility is required

Hypothesis 3: The compatibility positively influences the partnership success at a strategic level, as it defines whether the partnership can exploit its synergistic potential.

Hypothesis 4: The complementarity positively influences the partnership success at an operational level, as it defines whether the partners have the resources, perspectives and capabilities required for the generation of relevant collaborative value.

Mediating variable: Relationship Capital

The link between internal and external fit is influenced by governance components which over time develop in terms of relations, trust, reputation and process dynamics (Bryson et al, 2006; Jamali, 2004). In the alliance literature on configurations the emphasis thereby lies on so called 'relationship capital' (Cullen et al, 2000; Sambasivan et al, 2011; Robson et al, 2006; Sarkar et al, 2001). A direct effect of relationship- capital on alliance outcomes has been observed (Aulakh et al, 1996). More specific, it has been suggested that the inter-organizational diversity is mediated by relational constructs, as trust and commitment, to achieve collaboration performance (Chen et al, 2009; Sarkar et al, 2001; Gundlach et al, 1995; Anderson and Narus, 1990). Relationship capital therefore mediates the relation of partnership configuration and partnership success (Sambasivan et al, 2011). The partner fit is thus reflected through the relationship capital or the perceived degree of agreement or commonality between the partners (Heiman et al, 2008). Cross-sector partnerships thereby need to 'transcend transaction- based exchange and develop long- term relationships', implying that inter-organizational cooperation is crucial for success (Dyer and Singh, 1998).

Vice versa, the perceived level of trust, commitment and information sharing itself alter the compatibility and complementarity of the partnership. Lasker et al (2001) argue that the relationship capital stimulates the partnership functioning, which in turn enables the partnership synergy and thus partnership effectiveness or success. The compatibility indicates the degree to which the required high- quality interaction between the cross-sector partners can occur (Sarkar et al, 2001). Relationship capital captures the influence of the partnership configuration on these interactions and vice versa. When the partners are very compatible and complementary, this brings the potential that the partnership can fully exploit its synergistic value. The relationship capital reflects the degree of trust, commitment and knowledge transfer between the partners. Due to the different partner attitudes, backgrounds and experiences of cross- sector partnerships, the relationship capital (internal process) has a big influence on the success of partnerships. It reflects the internal dynamics of the optimal partnership configuration. The partner's commitment can be measured by the degree to which they feel that they cannot achieve the partnership objective alone. This can be measured by analyzing the partner interests, the partnership track record and the partnership's vision on continuity.

Hypothesis 1b: A high level of partnership compatibility and complementarity positively influence the development of relationship capital. Vice versa, a high

relationship capital increases the complementarity and compatibility of the partners.

Trust, reciprocal commitment and information exchange are the relational dynamics that display the relationship capital of an alliance (Chen et al, 2009; Cullen et al, 2000). The third element of relationship capital, information exchange or knowledge sharing, has also been referred to as communication (Sambasivan et al, 2011). The sense of perceived opportunities for added values of collaborations requires a basic attitudinal readiness to collaborate (Glasbergen, 2010). The experiences of partnership performance and success also influence the partnership relationship capital and therewith the complementarity (position) and compatibility (social structure) of the PPP. Success is in part determined by how well the partnership achieves the *performance expectations* set by the partners (Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Anderson and Narus, 1990). The perception of the achievement of these expectations affects the partnership configuration through the relationship capital. Partnering is a process with many feedback loops. This implies that all partnerships are given an equal chance of making improvements in a later stage (Glasbergen, 2010) which are influenced by the perceived degree success of the participants, both at the operational level (Brulhart, 2007) as on the perceived outcome.

Hypothesis 5: Perceived partnership success enhances the perception of trust, commitment and information sharing (relationship capital), and therewith increases the complementarity and compatibility.

2.2 Zooming in on the model

The basic model can be further specified by moving into the ‘black boxes’ of compatibility, complementarity and relational dynamics.

Firstly, the partnership compatibility measures the commonality of the attitudes of the partners towards the partnership. Within the joint venture literature, the internal fit is often composed of a (1) strategic, (2) organizational and (3) a cultural component (Heiman et al, 2008; Tey & Quah, 2012). The strategic fit refers to objective congruence, the organizational fit defines the harmony regarding hiring decisions, and the cultural fit indicates the efficacy of management communications. Applied to cross- sector partnerships the strategic fit indicates the congruence of partner vision and approaches (Van Tulder, 2011; Das, 2005; Douma & Schreuder, 2008) which is also referred to as ‘goal symmetry’ or shared vision (Samii et al, 2002) which is particularly hard to achieve for cross-sector partnerships. Nevertheless the increasing support for the SDGs – which are under construction as a multi-stakeholder process itself - from all spheres of society implies that the potential partners in any case are open to work on common goals. One reason is a shared sense of urgency.

The organizational fit analyzes the correspondence in organizational logic (Barkema et al, 1997 and Pothukuchi et al, 2002). For cross- sector and cross- cultural partnerships, requiring similarity of organizational objectives, values and cultures as referred to in the optimal configuration literature (Lister, 2006; Das, 2005) is anathema. Organizations are essentially incompatible in their values, norms and capabilities. Attempts to blend their

organizational cultures results in higher levels of stress (Sakar et al, 2001). There are two dimensions that might positively influence the organizational fit from a cross- sector perspective: the organizational culture fit and the organizational experience fit (Tey & Quah, 2012).

The organizational culture determines the internal environment of the partnership (Dauber et al, 2012). The organizational culture fit for PPPs refers to the commonality in organizational practices between the partners. Differences in working style and culture can partly be leveled out through (the development of) a set of working practices and procedures (Samii et al, 2002), compatible operating cultures, operating philosophies, management styles, teamwork, compatible core values and compatible mechanisms to address incompatibilities (Brinkerhoff, 2002). When referring to the organizational experience in relation to the partner compatibility, a distinction can be made between partner- specific and general partner experience. Partnerships create a new and unique community that has no direct experience with working together (Samii et al, 2002). Partner- specific experience helps the partner to gain information about the organizations and enables the establishment of management skills together (Austin, 2000). While previous conflict or confrontations among partners influence the compatibility of the partners (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Glasbergen, 2010; Reast et al, 2010), the effect of the partnering history decreases over time (Sampson, 2005). Some research even shows that the duration and depth of the partner relationships are negatively related to success for the partnership (Brulhart, 2007). This explains why general partner experience is deemed more relevant than partner- specific experience (Hoang and Rothaermel, 2005). The specific partner experience can say something about the strategic fit and strategic importance of the partnership for the partners, a different aspect of the partner compatibility.

General PPP experience relates to the experience of partnership management, joint work and interpersonal complicity (Brulhart, 2007). Research on cross- sector social partnerships shows that this prior experience enables the partners to learn and develop relationships, skills, and capabilities over time, which then have positive influences on future performance (Reast et al, 2010). The length of these prior partnership experiences should be measured through the length of the prior relationship (in years), but also the frequency and size of prior transactions (Dekker et al, 2010). Institutional and cultural difference can hamper the partnership in general (Barkema et al, 2007); similarities in values create a 'social glue' that for instance increased the level of tolerance for differences in opinion (Sarkar et al, 2001; Madhok, 1995). We don't need to dwell too much on this aspect, but it can be observed that the present stage of globalization and the mixing of institutional spheres is slowly increasing the cultural fit between firms and NGOs in particular. Where firms are more interested in their license to operate to society (also referred as CSR) and NGOs are more interested in increasing their efficiency (which prompts many NGOs to try to become 'social enterprises'). Governments, in the past already were interested in learning from companies, witness the popularity of 'new Public Management' thinking. Impediments to building a common (partnership) culture are different views on social priorities, traditions of hostility, distrust or ignorance between businesses and civil societal organizations (Selsky and Parker, 2005). Cultural differences have the potential for both synergy and disruption (Parkhe, 1991). But measures of this cultural fit often lack a measure of additivity (the potential for synergy) or diversity (Shenkar, 2001). As cross- sector and cross- cultural partnerships necessarily involve

partners from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is therefore more useful to analyze the presence of attributes that can bridge the negative effects of cultural difference for collaboration, and thus enable a cultural fit. For successful partnerships, it is crucial that there is mutual appreciation of each other's culture and 'logic' within the partnership (Samii et al, 2001). Sectoral and cultural differences can complicate the clear communications, which is crucial to developing a common partnership culture (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Poor communications also relate to partners who do not clearly express their intentions (Rondinelli and London, 2003) or underlying concerns (Millar et al, 2004). The (increased) communication and interaction can bridge cultural distance by encouraging the convergence of cultural systems (Shenkar, 2001). The development of a common culture is also stimulated by focusing on the 'meta' goals, realigning partner expectations and giving each partner credit for their experiences and identity (Millar et al, 2004; Selsky & Parker, 2005). These variables express the strategic fit importance (focusing on the meta goals), the influence of perceived success (realigning expectations), but also illustrate variables that directly influence the cultural fit: clear communications, mutual recognition and foreign experience - perhaps through the 'equal' inclusion of a national institution.

Hypothesis 6: All compatibility variables seem to be mutually reinforcing. The cultural fit has a direct positive relation to the other two variables. The organizational fit depends on the strategic and cultural fit. In addition, the strategic fit is enabled by a cultural and organizational fit. The organizational fit is directly related to the degree of partner compatibility.

While hypotheses on compatibility fits of partnerships can largely be based on extant studies in organisation and strategy, there is much less validated knowledge available for the complementarity dimension of PPPs. The impact evaluation literature on partnerships notes that it is crucial that the partnership type 'fits' the issue (Liket et al, 2014, Van Tulder et al, 2015). The issue the partnership is designed for then outlines the ideal partnership configuration. This relates to the involvement of the relevant partners, but also the right balance of responsibilities and roles between these partners. When having the wrong partnership configuration, the danger looms of having a negatively skewed partnership in which the involvement of one party takes away the responsibility of other actors to take their part of the issue. The partnership effectiveness could therefore decline or even have contrary effects (PrC, 2012). The issue defines the required input, namely the required presence and roles of partners. However, the perceived responsibility of, and within, these partners define whether there is an issue- input fit. Eventually, this issue/input fit defines, based on the compatibility of the partners, the outcome of the partnership. Van Tulder and Pfisterer (2014) therefore defined the 'partnering space' in terms of the primary responsibilities and roles played by firms, governments and civil society organizations. Some issues are more linked for instance to specific failures and responsibilities of one of the societal sectors than other issues. In case partnerships substitute for the 'logical participant' they run the risk of crowding out these actors, which in the longer run makes partnership less effective (ibid).

Partnership complementarity, secondly, also relates to the kind of inputs, functionalities and roles partners bring into the partnership. This can be referred to as the 'issue-input fit' and defines the performance symmetry of the partnership and their complementarities. So in principle in well organized partnerships each societal sphere brings in

complementary asserts and competencies. Civil society organization bring in social values and 'club goods', public organisations represent public values and public goods, whereas firms bring in private goods and exclusive values (Wartick & Wood, 1999; World Bank, 1997). Within these organizational forms, one can differentiate between different departments, different functional areas and the like. For civil society organisations it seems relevant to distinguish between self-benefiting organisations (service delivery organizations that produce club goods) and 'other benefiting' organisations, which represent the traditional NGO (Yazji & Doh, 2009). For public organisations it is possible to link their partnering involvement to their internal objective. In accordance with Wettenhal (2003), public sector organizations can be defined as departments, local governments or quasi- autonomous agencies. For companies, there are many classifications possible, but for this study we choose to distinguish the partnering objective of the company as internally orientated, focusing on operational efficiencies, externally oriented, focusing on product innovations, or having a dual emphasis (Wright et al, 1995). Resource and input alignment is supposed to be either supplementary, surplus, complementarity or wasteful (Das & Teng, 2000).

Due to the fact that organizations from different sectors have different resources, competencies and capabilities (Teegen et al, 2004), it is relevant to focus not only on resource complementarity per se, but on the complementarity of resources and skills together. In cases of diversity and non- redundancy in knowledge bases, interactive learning opportunities that help firms add to their capabilities and know- how are likely to be greater (Sarkar et al, 2001). This resource and skills complementarity within partnerships is referred to as performance symmetry, meaning that the contribution of each partner to the partnership should be equally valued (Samii et al, 2002).

As diversity increases the performance symmetry and thus complementarity of the partnership, a partnership requires the participation of a minimum number of partners. But an increased group size significantly reduces performance and productivity for both the quality as the quantity of the output (Stahl et al, 2009). It increases the number of variables a team must manage (ibid), which indicates a relation between the alliance size and the number and variety of issues that need to be considered in the governance task (Albers, 2005). It can be tempting to limit the amount of partners to keep the management process simple and avoid alliance management delays; however, the contribution of all partners needed to achieve the final objective of the initiative is required. The partnership requires a critical, diversified and complementary mass of experience, vision and opinion. The number of partners contributing in varying degrees and at different stages to the objectives is therefore dependent on the objective of the initiative (Samii et al, 2002).

The last dimension of complementarity relates to what can be called the structural division between the partners. The involvement of the various organizational types defines the type of partnership that is formed, either a bipartite or tripartite partnership. The relative positions and roles the organizations adapt to within the partnering space then define the exact location of the partnership within the partnership space, and thus the potential fit of the partnership with the issue. Relatively powerful and legitimate actors have more influence than the poorer actors (Stahl et al, 2009), and less powerful partners may feel their identity or culture threatened (Selsky and Parker, 2005). This power is sustained by the 'socially structured and culturally patterned behavior of the partnership (Lister, 1999), so that it is crucial to understand power for understanding the

structural positions in the partnership (Ellersiek, 2012). Flat and parallel structures are required to enable the partnership to communicate, work and decide across their organizational boundaries (Samii et al, 2002). Depending on their goals and motivations, partners can then decide upon particular roles within their position (Kolk et al, 2008). For example, as leadership is an interactive process that requires mutual agreement (DeRue and Ashfort, 2010), the roles depend on the interactions and interests of the partners within the position they have in. However, governance mechanisms can alter these roles -and to some degree positions- of organizations within the partnership (Van Tulder and Pfisterer, 2014), and therewith influence the partnership fit with the issue.

Defining the interrelation of these variables is more complex than the compatibility. The issue defines the required involvement of the organization types in the right position. The organization types define the relative partner positions based on the power, legitimacy and urgency balance of the organizations. Considering the influence of the issue on the structural division, it is crucial that the right partner types are present with the right attitude (power) and position (representation). For example, the involvement of external consultants in the partnership process could hinder the partner fit. As the external consultant obviously adds value that is not present within the partnership, the required organizational types for the issue are not present or do not occupy the right position and/or role. The more partner-organizations complement one another, the greater the probability that an alliance will be successful (Thorgren et al, 2012; Sarkar et al, 2001). Subsequently, the structural division of the partnership defines the way in which the complementarity of resources and skills of these differently positioned partners will be governed. It has been argued that power may be less important for tri- sector partnerships than the capacity for mobilizing a constituency around the issue (Waddell, 2000), implementing decisions or achieving goals (Selsky & Parker, 2005). This would indicate a highly positive relation of a clear and balanced structural division to performance symmetry.

Hypothesis 7: There is a positive relation of a partnership- issue fit to a clear structural division, and subsequently of this structural division to the performance symmetry. The other way round, the variables are also positively related, but in a less significant manner.

3. Methodology

The PPP configuration model was based on inputs from three types of studies. Table 2 specifies the extent to which each of the 10 main components of the basic framework could be based upon insights from each discipline. We next applied a mixed-methods design in which we tried to quantify each of the variables of the model (Matveev, 2002; Bryman, 2006) in order to do a first validation of the model. We further applied Knowledge Discovery in Database (KDD) methodology (Fayyad et al, 1996) in which we were able to manage a considerable number of indicators/data based on various measurement techniques and classifications (Han et al, 2006). We combined three sources of information: primary information through a representative survey and more secondary information through two types of partnership checks based on Delphi-type procedures. We applied a sequential analysis of different types of data following the two objectives of the KDD process: discovery and verification.

Table 1 Academic origins of the PPP configuration theory

Concept	Organizational configuration literature	Strategic Alliance literature	Cross-sector literature
Compatibility <i>Similarity between partners' organizational cultures and management and operating style</i>		V	V
Strategic Fit <i>The partners should strive for a shared vision. Aligned core activities with the partnership could be a good predictor.</i>	v	V	v
Organizational Fit <i>Need to understand the objectives, values and working practices of different sectors. This makes tripartite partnerships more complicated than bipartite partnerships</i>		V	v
Cultural Fit <i>Need to be able to communicate and cooperate with organizations from different cultures</i>		V	
Complementarity <i>Lack of symmetry or overlap between partners' resources in relation to each firms capabilities</i>	V	V	
Issue Definition <i>A common understanding enables a mutual perception of roles and responsibilities. This shifts the focus on the interdependence of the partners instead of their autonomy</i>			v
Performance Symmetry <i>Resource and skills complementarity, this can be predicted by the diversity and non- redundancy in knowledge bases</i>		V	v
Structural Division <i>A clear governance structure defining the role of each partner based on their power, urgency and legitimacy (position)</i>	V	V	
Relationship Capital <i>Perceived degree of agreement due to trust, commitment and information sharing</i>		V	v
(Perceived) Success <i>Achieve performance expectations, either from a process or outcome perspective.</i>			v

The sample we created was based on a recent PPP initiative in the Netherlands that provided us with the opportunity to collect more or less systematic data on a sufficiently large sample of PPPs. Since 2012, the Dutch government subsidizes two partnership facilities: the Fund Sustainable Water (FDW) and the Fund Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security (FDOV). Both facilities can be seen as frontrunners in the development of PPPs for sustainable development. FDW and FDOV both aim, within their own sub-themes, at fixing bottlenecks or exploiting opportunities that can contribute to structural poverty reduction, sustainable economic growth and economic independence. FDW is

focused on improving water safety and water security in developing countries, and FDOV focuses on food security and private sector development in developing countries. FDOV seeks tripartite partnerships, while FDW can subsidize bipartite or tripartite partnerships as the participation of an NGO or knowledge institute is not obligatory. This difference exists due to the fact that water is perceived as a (semi) public good that requires local partners, while FDOV has a stronger focus on commercial objectives (PrC, 2014). The original budget from the Dutch government for these two facilities was around 120 million euro, which triggered more than 250 million euros in PPP projects. In total 188 PPP proposals represented more than 1 billion euros in PPP proposals in which on average 3 companies, 2 NGOs, 2 knowledge institutes and a varying number of local governments participated.

Each of these facilities had distinct, but comparable, selection procedures in which a so called 'partnership check' was part of the process in which specialized project officers controlled and adjusted by a heavy selection committee composed of specialists that were knowledgeable on the sector (water or food), the country, the Dutch development policies and specific issues like gender, international corporate social responsibility (ICSR) and the like.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, on specific elements of the projects specialized external advice was provided to every project by agencies as the Netherlands Commission for Environment, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and mostly also by the Dutch local embassy. The selection was very thorough. This part of the research method can be interpreted as a layered Delphi method.

The partnership check had two phases: first a "light check" that was applied to all 189 proposals and used to select 80 projects; an 'elaborate check' that contained more detailed questions and enabled the selection committees to come to the ultimate selection of 42 PPPs. These checks were based on dimensions that were asked to applicants to specify themselves. So they partly represent the design of the partnership as portrayed by the partners. The committee consequently assessed whether they considered this to be a correct representation of the proposed project. The committee addressed points to each of these indicators, which enabled us to sometimes apply likert scales. Some of the indicators could only be answered with yes or no. The two partnership checks enabled us to specify indicators for 7 out of the 16 more specific components that are distinguished in the more elaborate model. The representation of partnership projects along these dimensions is 100%.

Table 2 sources for testing the PPP configuration model

Configuration	Sub- variable	Components	Sources	
			Survey	Partnership Checks
Compatibility	Strategic Fit	Goal Commonality:	32 (9), 32 (10), 37(7), 37(5), 37 (18)	Light: 2c, 4 Elaborate: 2fii (11), 4b (13)
	Organizational Fit	Organizational Culture Fit:	53/55(4), 40 (9), 31 (8)	Elaborate: 2d (9), 2fi (11)
		General PPP Experience	19	Light: 1b Elaborate: 1hi (7)
	Culture Fit	Cross- cultural Fit:	53/55 (8), 40.6, 31 (10)	1f
Complementarity	Issue Definition	Shared Issue Analysis	37 (1), 40.11	-
	Performance Symmetry	Resource and skill complementarity	30, 31, 37 (8), 37 (2), 50/52	Light: 1a, 1c, 1d, 1 ^e , 2a, 3a Elaborate: 1hii, 2hiv, 1hiiii, 1hv (7), 3d (14), 3e (15)
		Partnership size	21, 40.2	-
	Structural Division	Relative Positions	37 (9), 40 (1)	Elaborate: 2e (10), 2gii, 2giii (12)
		Role Agreement:	37 (13), 37 (16), 37 (14), 40 (10)	Light: 1g, 2b, 3b Elaborate: 2gi (12)
	Trust	Long term expectations	37 (15), 46 (5)	-
Relationship Capital	Reciprocal Commitment	Aligned interests	37 (6), 40 (9)	-
		Track record partnership	36, 35	-
		Long- term orientation	37 (5), 40 (3)	Light: 3c
	Knowledge Sharing	Collaborative communications	32 (8), 53/55 (3), 25 (4)	-
Perceived Success	Achieve expectations	Experience success (outcome)	37 (12), 47 (4)	-
		Experience collaboration (process)	37 (10), 53/55	-

The partnership checks cover a considerable part of the *compatibility* dimension (organizational fit and strategic fit, less so on the cross-cultural fit). For the cross- cultural fit, it was only analysed whether there is any relevant experience or knowledge with/ of the target country, which can already be covered by the inclusion of at least one local partner - this one of the threshold criteria of the facilities. For the *complementarity* dimension the structural division and performance symmetry are well scrutinized through the partnership check. None of the checks do scrutinize the shared issue analysis of the partnership. The *relationship capital* and *perceived success* were barely judged through the partnership checks.

To fill up the voids left by the partnership checks, we engaged in an additional survey. This survey explores all facets of the theoretical model for the optimal partnership configuration. All questions were derived from previous literature and were – if possible – benchmarked against questions from comparable studies. A systematic approach towards pretesting, refining and validating the questions and scales is followed: through in-depth interviews to ensure that conceptual concepts were grounded in reality, and through a pilot- test of the survey instrument to eliminate ambiguous scale items. Using this feedback, a revised instrument was developed. The survey was thus modified and finalized through an iterative process. The invitation for this questionnaire was sent to two different groups: first of all to lead partners of both facilities, and secondly to other partners whose e-mail address was registered with the handling agency. In total, this implied the invitation of 166 lead partners, and 232 other partners. Of these respondents we received 118 valid responses. This number represents 20,4% of all partners, 42,9% of all PPP projects and a comparable distribution over the two facilities (54% FDOV and 46% FDW). The representation of the projects that were ultimately successful is 85% (FDW) to 100% (FDOV); for those that survived the first check, but were rejected the representativeness is also comparable, whereas the representativeness of those projects that did not pass the first check was 20% (FDW) to 32% (FDOV). So even though the resulting distribution of respondents was somewhat skewed towards initially more successful PPPs, the overall representativeness can still be considered to be good. The survey also had a bias towards so called ‘lead partners’, which implied more representation from firms than NGOs or knowledge institutes and governments. In order to ensure sufficient generalizability, the questions with insufficient representativeness of respondents ($N < 35$) were excluded from the further quantitative analysis. The questionnaire included discrete as well as continuous questions. The resulting data were transformed in several ways to enable a compatible analysis of both methods.^{iv}

Following the discovery phase of the KDD protocols we first analyzed the survey and partnership checks for correlations between the partnership configuration measures and success. As not all partnerships assessed are represented in the survey, and the survey records respondent’s answers from the same partnership, these data sets were firstly kept separate. Second, as a validation, the found correlations were related to the theoretical model. These assumptions were tested through additional multivariate analyses. The discovery part of the analysis is therefore based on descriptive statistics, while the validation tests our hypotheses through inductive and inferential measures. Apart from validating the hypotheses, the combination of these data sets provided additional knowledge due to the different the differences between the partnership configuration measures (objective assessment versus perception respondent). Combined this research method maximizes the possibility of providing insights in variables significant for the optimal partnership configuration, and thus helps to understand what partnerships to prefer when conditions are equal.^v The partnership check proved a good proxy of the literature and empirical evidence, and what adaptations could improve this.

These combined techniques presents us with sufficiently representative information on the independent and the mediating variables of the theoretical model. For the dependent variable in the model (performance or success) we used a relatively simple measure: those projects that were ultimate selected. This presents of course an intermediary measure of success, but because of the very broad composition of the selection committees and the very serious procedure – in which each project site was visited, advice

was drawn from other stakeholders – the selection can be considered to be based on a layered Delphi method. As a minimum, this selection procedure defines the anticipated success rate of PPPs according to experts. For a pretest of a theoretical model we think this suffices. The ultimate measure of success, of course, will be at the end of these projects, which can last until ten years.

4. Results and discussion

Limited space in this article prevents us from presenting all the detailed steps in the further fine-tuning of the KDD protocol and a presentation of all the findings. We summarize the most relevant results in table 3 by concentrating on those relationships that reveal a level of significance that can be considered sufficient. We focus on the partnership checks, the survey and on the whole model.

Table 3 Significant relationships in the PPP configurational model

Configuration	Sub- variable	Components	Relation to partnership success	
Compatibility	Strategic Fit	Goal Commonality:	A2 Common goal A4 Aligned core activities Q37_18 Challenges with motivating the partners	+ + +
	Organizational Fit	Organizational Culture Fit:		
		General PPP Experience		
	Culture Fit	Cross- cultural Fit:		
Complementarity	Issue Definition	Shared Issue Analysis	Q37_7 Challenges with defining what the partnership aims to achieve	+
	Performance Symmetry	Resource and skill complementarity	A3 Complementarity partners	+
			A3b Access to all essential knowledge	+
			A3d (14) Strategic added value partnership	+
			A1hv (7) Availability of sufficient expertise	+
			A1 Org types and experiences	+
	Structural Division	Partnership size		
		Relative Positions	A2e (10) Financial and administrative management system	+
			Q37_10 No challenges with specifying benefits for each partner	+
		Role Agreement:	A1g Relevant and useful role MFA A2a Interests structurally represented and secured	+ +
Relationship Capital	Trust	Long term expectations		
	Reciprocal Commitment	Aligned interests	Q34 # Activities partner during application	+

			Q37_4 No challenge to define a project related to PPP facilities	+
		Track record partnership	Q36 Track record partnership	+
		Long- term orientation		
	Knowledge Sharing	Collaborative communications		
Perceived Success	Achieve expectations	Experience success (outcome)		
		Experience collaboration (process)	Q40 Number of problems with trust, governance and/or structure Q47 Number of helpful requirements	+ +

Note: the letter A refers to indicators based on questions in the partnership check, the letter Q refers to questions in the survey. Significance is measured at the 0.01 or 0.05 level

The separate analysis of the partnership checks provides further insight in the differentiating factors for partnerships in successive phases of the application process. The main criterion for distinguishing a successful partnership among pool of good partnerships that were accepted after the first round proved to be the financial and administrative management system. This may refer to the importance of the structural division as this system lies within the respective position and role agreement of the partners. More explicitly, this result shows that agreements have been made on the responsibilities and sharing of resources (performance symmetry) for the partners. Other factors that are important predictors are the strategic added value of the partnership, aligned core activities and the availability of sufficient expertise.

Referring to the specific indicators based on the survey, four variables emerged as significant indicators of partnership success. These were the number of activities of the partner (1), the state of the partnership (2), the number of requirements perceived as helpful (3) and the number of problems underlying challenges with trust, governance and/or negotiation within the partnership (4). First of all, the number of activities of the partner may be the result of the bias for lead partners of the survey, as it can be assumed that lead partners adopted more activities within the application phase. In the formation phase, the structural division still has to be developed. As there were also non- lead partners represented in the survey and the tasks have often not fully been divided, this result nevertheless provides an indication of the partner commitment.

The state of the partnership is negatively related to the stadium perception of success as the variable measured the partnership experience in opposite order: the higher the score, the smaller the partnership track record. This implies that existing partnerships have more potential to be successful. However, there seems to be barely any effect of the partnership experience in relation to the bilateral perception of success. The explanation of this ambiguous result can be approached from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, it shows that existing partnerships have developed relationship capital due to the experiences of complementarity, compatibility and success. Also, this may be an indicator that initial barriers to formation issues may have been overcome. Literature suggests that this continuation of the partnership and (assumed) issue- based formation are indicators of partnership success. On the other hand, partnership experience also implies the

challenge to adopt a project according to the requirements. Strikingly, a high number of problems underlying challenges with trust, governance and/ or structure is positively related to partnership success.

Finally, the attitude towards the (sometimes quite detailed) requirements imposed in the application procedure by the Ministry proves also significantly and uniquely related to success. The more participants classify these as 'helpful' the greater the change of success. This may be an indicator of the collaborative attitude of the partners, focusing on a common goal instead of autonomy, who thus appreciate a clear framework.

When concentrating on the complete PPP configuration model we find that the complementarity of the partners (A3), the ease of developing a project related to the topics of the facility (Q37_4) and no perceived challenges with specifying benefits for each partners (Q37_10) were positively related to partnership success. The positive relation between the perceived 'ease' of developing a project related to the facilities and success reiterates the importance of issue- motivated formation. When partners already operate in the field of the issue, they do not have to embark in the complex process of understanding and defining the issue and possible projects. Most likely, these partners already had contacts, as the case studies illustrate the importance of good contact with- and a positive advice of the embassy. The relation of 'the ease of defining a topic' to success could further explain the scattered spread of projects over the various sub themes. Most probably no variety of cross- sector actors is active in the themes with few applications due to the complexity of the issue. This provides less incentive for partners to apply for a project as they mainly seem to take on projects that relate to their core activities. This seems to reinforce the importance of the organization type and partnership track record (A1). Furthermore, challenges with defining what the partnership aimed to achieve (Q37_7) and motivating the partners (Q37_18) is related to success. This can be understood by the same principle as Q40 (problems underlying challenges with trust, governance and structure), namely by the fact that these are activities for partnerships in a mature phase of their formation. Struggling with these challenges indicates the commitment of successful partners as these notions are addressed. Furthermore, the relation of the state of the partnership to success was confirmed.

This has the following implications for the hypotheses: the overall hypothesis (H2a+b) can be accepted. There is a significant and unique relation of the partnersip score to partnership success, which gives considerable evidence that the partnership configuration variables in general have succificent predictive value for partnership success. The complementarity dimension of the partnership (H4) thereby proves to be the most important constituent for this correlation, although the internal dynamics of this category showed less consistency (which implies that Hypothesis 7 cannot be accepted in this form). The structural division and resource and skills complementarity positively influences partnership success. A shared issue analysis seems to be significantly related as well, as illustrated by successful partners who are committed to defining the issue objective with the partnership. The acceptance of hypothesis 4 is already an important conclusion, because complementarity is the really novel dimension of PPPs as compared to traditional configurational thinking. Perhaps even interesting is the finding that – based on the present classifications – compatability as a whole has no significant meaning for success (H3). Strategic fit (defined as goal commonality) is positively related to partnership success, but this is less related to organizational and cultural fit than might

have been expected from the general organizational literature (which implies that hypothesis 6 needs to be modified as well). This implies that in particular regarding the compatibility dimension of cross-sector partnerships, it is doubtful whether general insights from alliance literature (focused primarily on intra sector partnerships) remain useful. This is perhaps also one of the main reasons why Hypothesis 1 cannot be accepted. Internal scale correlations seem to indicate that there is indeed a relation between complementarity and compatibility. The positive relation of relationship capital to partnership success, which is a moderating factor of compatibility and complementarity according to our model, strengthens this assumption. Due to the fact that this relation is only analysed through a bivariate analysis, this does not lead to the rejection of our null – hypothesis however. More specifically aligned interests and track records show a significant and positive relationship. Interestingly, this is not observed for ‘trust’, which is arguably one of the most overrated elements of partnership configurations. It supports the general statement in partnership research that partners do not partner because they trust each other, but they trust each other because they partner (Cf. Van Tulder et al, 2014; PrC, 2013). As regards hypothesis 5: there seems to be an ambiguous relation between the perceived success and relationship capital, as the positive attitude of selected partnerships is difficult to align with the high number of procedural challenges experienced by successful partners. Formulated in its present form, hypothesis 5 needs to be rejected, but there still remain important sub-categories related to the actual process that create a positive feedback in terms of expectations and relationship capital.

5. Conclusion

The search for an ‘optimal’ partnership configuration might take a while – it can even be seriously doubted that can ever be achieved. This paper developed a PPP configuration framework to understand the antecedents of *more* optimal partnership configurational fits. We engaged in a first validation and testing effort through a multi-method research design. This has proven very helpful in understanding that there are indeed unique dimensions of PPP partnerships that need to be taken into account separately and for which the existing strategic alliance and organizational configuration literature has insufficient concepts and indicators. The present research set-up shows that there nevertheless strong indications that the partnership configuration significantly influences partnership success also (and maybe particularly so) in the area of cross-sector PPPs for development. The partnership configuration determines whether the partners are complementary in providing synergetic value for the issue, and the degree to which they are willing and able to exploit this potential (reflected by their compatibility). More attention should therefore be given to defining the issue for which the partnership is intended to be formed, and the link of this issue with the right organisation of the partnership (as reflected in the internal fits and compatibility). There is no general or optimal PPP configuration, but there are important common elements that distinguish the successful from the less successful partnerships. This paper has defined the basic framework and logic for that. It also shows that there are still important gaps in the theoretical understanding of partnership configurations that need to be filled.

This research has not been without its limitations. The ambition to not only develop a theoretical model, but also come to a first validation makes the approach perhaps more exploratory than we would have liked. In particular the empirical data gathering can be

improved, whereas the definition of success in this paper presents a relatively artificial construct that ideally should be related to the actual success of the partnership, preferably by looking at the counterfactual as well. The PPP considered in this study have been initiated by the Dutch government, which creates another selection bias. Comparative research between different PPP initiatives in different countries can address this issue. To facilitate the latter, we will make the underlying statistics and information of this project available for those who would like to do replication research or follow up on this project by looking at the ultimate success of these 42 partnerships (and perhaps also look at what happened to those partnerships that were not selected). It is known that some of the rejected partnerships resubmitted their project in a consecutive phase, so it might be worthwhile also to see what they have 'learned' from this rejection. In both cases, follow-up research should establish which indicators of the PPP configuration model present the best predictors of the success of a cross-sector partnership.

This research has also produced new indicators for PPP selection procedures in the Netherlands. Follow-up research can consider the extent to which this has been helpful and the extent to which the PPP configuration model that has been developed for this study has sufficient predictive value for other development PPP projects.

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ⁱ We specified a long list of key words and synonyms related to (1) partnership configurations, (2) compatibility and (3) complementarity. We used ISI Web of Knowledge, Business source Complete for a systematic search of relevant papers in the are of Business-Society Management; Science Direct and Jstor for literature in the are of Strategic Management and ProQuest, Scopus and SAGE for a systematic search to uncover in particular Organizational Behaviour sources.

ⁱⁱ Particularly in the discussion on 'success' we have to abstract slightly from the literature; for instance in strategic alliances success/performance is defined as 'competitive advantage' or 'profitability'. The aims of the PPP are different, but the argument remains more or less the same: what determines the success of the partnership?

ⁱⁱⁱ For reasons of space limitations we abstain in this paper from specify all the detail of the procedures. For a complete overview of the characteristics and other details, see PrC 2014a and b

^{iv} The elaborate transformation technique used for matching the two samples included the calculation of sub-scale Pearson correlations for the applicable scales, which were consequently corrected in the model if too much overlap between variables were observed. The value of multiple choice questions were transformed in bivariate data. A binary logistic regression analysis was performed for the full sample size. A goodness- of- fit chi square was conducted to determine whether the nominal questions would produce a distribution not significantly different from that expected by chance, i.e. equality. In all instances these checks were used to make sure that the indicators show sufficient independence, and that the internal reliability of questions in the survey was sufficient. We used a (repeated) Cronbach Alpha Technique for this and found sufficient consistency of almost all continuous questions. A detailed account of the use of all these techniques is available upon request. Note however that the prime aim of all these tests was a first validation of the model, which succeeded. Through an ANOVA technique we also checked whether the slight bias in the survey for 'succesfull' project influenced other questions. This did not provide significant results.

^v Limited space