How do Partnership Brokers actually broker?
From Subjective engagement to Issue-based Scoping

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Abstract

Partnership Brokers – also known as partnership intermediaries - play an increasingly important role in supporting cross sector partnerships (CSPs) for sustainable development. By 2015, there operate around 300 accredited partnership brokers in the world. They can perform various functions throughout the entire partnering cycle, from an initial situational analysis, over matchmaking, management guidance into the dissolution of partnerships. So far however, the actual way these brokers enact these supportive functions has only received limited systematic scientific attention. This paper presents an overview of current academic and practitioner's research on partnership brokers along four questions: (1) who are CSP brokers, (2) why are they needed, (3) what are they doing, (4) and how are they doing it. In particular the last question around how partnership brokers operate - what skills and techniques they use – has been particularly poorly addressed in extant research. How do partnership brokers actually broker the very diverse interests that are involved in cross sector partnerships? Answering the latter question precedes the ultimate question of the performance (impact) of brokers. One brokering skill that prevails in practice and in broker training is singled-out: scoping. Based on process theory and interviews with leading practitioners, their practical application is identified and explained. This results in a first identification of areas of activities, but also of areas for improvement. The importance of scoping is reiterated, albeit with serious moderations from the actual practice. The paper presents areas for improvement

Key-words: brokers, scoping, screening, logic framework, cross sector partnerships (CSPs)

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1. The Rise of Cross Sector Partnership Brokers

Cross sector partnerships for social and development purposes present a phenomenon of the past twenty years. The plethora of problems that can arise before, during and after the formation of CSPs (Kolk et al., 2008; Stoteler et al, 2012) provides a logical call for partnership experts who can convene potential partners and support them during the partnering process (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Stadtler & Probst, 2012; Crane and Seitanidi, 2014). For many centuries, brokers and brokerage firms have functioned as acknowledged intermediaries in buying and selling transactions within the same sector or supply chain. But in cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) they present a relatively recent phenomenon. Nevertheless they are generally considered of great importance for successful partnerships by practitioners and academics alike (Manning & Roessler, 2013; Stadtler & Probst, 2012). Gray (1989) and Wood were arguably the first scholars to identify mediators in inter-organizational collaboration efforts and to analyze their authority to convene (Wood & Gray, 1991). The Partnership Brokers Association (PBA) dates the first training of 'partnership intermediaries' to 1996 (Partnershipbrokers.org, 2013), while Tennyson, as founding member of the association, first devoted a chapter to the criticality of these intermediaries in 1998, followed by a book on partnership brokers in 2000, and by a series of practitioner's oriented publications in particular the 'Brokering Guidebook' (Tennyson, 2005).

The Guidebook provides the most-quoted and often used source of concepts, theories and practical tips (Partnershipbrokers.org, 2013). It constitutes a widely copied definition of partnership brokers as actors "that facilitate negotiation on and the development of PPP arrangements and help research, maintain, monitor, review, and evaluate PPPs over time" (Stadtler & Probst, 2012: 32). These efforts also herald the increased professionalization and recognition of the broker function by international governmental organizations such as the World Bank or the UN in "catalyzing the formation of cross-sector partnerships" (Googins & Rochlin, 2000: 132). Since 2003, the Partnership Brokers Association (PBA) or one of its predecessors has accredited the official title of partnership broker more than 800 times (Pyres, 2013).

A typical example of the increasing importance of partnership brokers and brokering training for private companies provides Microsoft. Until 2013, the company invested around $1 million into partnering capacity building, leading to the adoption of business processes that incorporate partnering more centrally, facilitated by 80 key staff that has become proficient in partnering skills. According to an evaluation by the PBA, partnership brokering by these staff members has not only had demonstrable effects on business performance, but has arguably also effects on the creation of shared value with other organizations: 'Partnership brokering skills will become a 'must have' not a 'nice to have' (Pyres, 2013). Some of the certified brokers in the meantime have also started their own partnership brokering companies, e.g. 'Dixon Partnering Solutions' and 'Collaborative Impact', under a license of PBA. Next to certified brokers, many individuals and organizations fulfill brokering or mediation roles and tasks, but do not call themselves brokers (Sanyal, 2006).

Despite the increasing importance of partnership brokers, a systematic search on publications on CSP brokers[2] resulted in relatively few academic papers on the topic, combined with only

[2] This research was based on targeted searches through journal databases, with specific keywords (like brokers, intermediaries, facilitator, consultant, third party) combined with explanatory adjectives like 'development', 'social' and 'sustainable'. These searches were complemented by publications from organizations active in

slightly more practitioner's oriented publications. The majority of academic publications merely recognize the potential of brokers (Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006; Googins & Rochlin, 2000), e.g. "as a key factor facilitating collective action" (Selsky & Parker, 2005: 856) or as 'change agents' (Waddock, 2010). Following the early considerations of Gray and Wood, authors emphasize their importance as conveners of partnerships (Sharma & Kearins, 2011), of intergovernmental collaboration (Lackey et al., 2002), of networks (Brass et al., 2004) or as mediators in conflicts (e.g. Bardach, 1998). But researching these roles has been challenging. For instance the involvement of conveners proved difficult to test in surveys, as the respondents either did not know who the original convener was or were unable to identify one particular person who was primarily responsible for convening the partnership (Legler & Reischl, 2003: 62). The broker often seems to be an unknown entity, maybe in the same vein as a referee in a football match that – provided he/she functions well – remains largely unnoticed (Serafin, 2006).

The fragmented academic research on the general functioning of brokers is either sector specific or generic. In the first category we see studies on the brokering activity of Toyota while building their knowledge-sharing network in the USA (Dyer&Noboeka, 2000) or on bridging functions and framing circumstances in the gaming or music industry (Sasped et al., 2007; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010). In the second category research on brokers was conducted on the positioning of brokers in transaction networks (Gould and Fernandez, 1989), the brokering of knowledge between different domains (Meyer, 2010) or the effect of brokers in geographical networks to create trust, shared interests and expectations (McEvivly and Zaheer, 2004).

Targeted academic research on the specifics of CSP brokers remains more limited, mostly focusing on specific functions and organisation, such as foundations and their use of social capital and weak and strong ties (von Schnurbein, 2010). Others applied the structural hole theory and the connection of weak international ties to explain how brokers facilitate the internationalization speed of social ventures (Kiss and Danis, 2010) or act as 'infomediaries' (Deephouse and Heugens, 2009). Sanyal (2006) emphasizes the importance of brokers in the linking of grassroots local NGO efforts "to larger sociopolitical systems and global institutions" and researches the governance structures best suited for such task. As of yet, the studies by Stadtler and Probst (2012) and Manning and Roessler (2013) have been the most elaborate in explaining the functioning of CSP brokers. Stadtler and Probst (2012) used interviews and two case studies, to research the different roles that broker organisations fulfill along the partnering cycle. They emphasize their ongoing importance after the convening of the different partners (2012). They argue that the convening function of brokers is important at later stages of the partnership in order to connect it to important stakeholders and other partnerships, but that brokers also fulfill roles of mediator and knowledge catalyst for the CSP throughout the entire partnering cycle (2012). Manning & Roessler (2013) did not only focus their study on brokers who are external to the partnering organizations, but deliberately researched the different effects external and internal brokers have on the CSP depending on the role they fulfill. They emphasize the importance of brokering individuals (instead of organizations) and the interplay between these brokers. Each of the studies call for further research to be conducted on the topic, as "future reflections on and evaluation of broker organizations are fundamental for developing and improving PPPs" (Stadtler & Probst, 2012:44).

Most insights about the actual practice of CSP brokers can be found in publications by partnering or brokering initiatives themselves and their research centers. Hardly any of these

cross sector partnering such as the UN, World Economic Forum and national development agencies. In both areas of research a snowball technique was furthermore used to spot additional publications.

publications is based on validated research, largely anecdotal, although often containing compendia of research in adjourning areas that can indeed be considered 'established'. There exists also a considerable degree of auto-quotation in which guides refer to the same source (sometimes without mentioning). The most renowned of these sources is the Partnering Toolbook (2003) and Brokering Guidebook by Tennyson (2005). Most consecutive publications by the Partnership Brokers Association build further on the approaches and concepts from The Brokering Guidebook, and explain further 'what partnership brokers do' (Wood, 2012), their profile (Tennyson, 2011), or give examples on how the concepts helped in practice (Pyres, 2013 and Tennyson, 2013). Since 2013 the PBA publishes its own bi-annual magazine in which short articles document the personal experience of the brokers in widely varying fields. The Overseas Development Institute, a founding organization of the early PBA, similarly publishes regularly papers for brokering practitioners and experts and books containing e.g. fictional stories on the work of partnership brokers (Warner 2003a, 2003b and 2007). Finally, one recent whitepaper takes up to challenge to define key factors in establishing successful CSPs (Dixon, 2013).

The present state-of-knowledge in CSP brokers thus presents an interesting clash between fragmented practical insights, established training practices and modest scientific research. This makes a systematic discussion on enhancing the function of CSP brokers particularly challenging. Brokers moreover present a moving target. They can be engaged in a large number of activities for many different stakeholders under very diverse circumstances. To deal with these analytical challenges, this paper will therefore be foremost descriptive. In section 2 a first delineation of the topic of research will be provided: what do we know of who they are and what partnership brokers actually do? The most important gaps in our understanding of the actual role played by brokers will be identified. The practice of what brokers actually do is partly shaped by how they are trained and partly by what practical demands they face. Section 3 specifies the method we have adopted, to document the actual activities of brokers. This boils down to a specification of the key skills trained and practiced by brokers and – in the consecutive sections – an analysis of the way these skills are actually used. One key skill will be discussed in detail in this paper: scoping (including screening, resource mapping and problem definition). How is this activity actually executed in practice and what dimensions have been distinguished in the literature will be elaborated in section 4. Integrating the information derived from the interviews in this section will help define the practical challenges of brokering in these two areas and identify where improvements in the CS brokering function can be achieved (section 5). The conclusion (section 6) shortly considers how to deal with the weaknesses found.

2. **Confronting scholarly and practical insights: a first classification**

Drawing from both academic and practitioner's literature, we can address four basic classification questions on CSP brokers: (1) who are they, (2) why are they needed, (3) what do they do, and (4) how do they do it. By looking at both academic and practitioner's contributions, we hope to establish a measure of triangulation that enables us to consider what areas of research require most attention from either perspective.

Who?

In this area relative consensus between academics and practitioners exists. They define brokers as 'boundary-spanning leaders with credibility' (Bryson et al, 2006: 46), 'social agents' (Serafin, 2006) or 'change makers who span cross-sector boundaries' (Waddock, 2010;

Tennyson, 2011). It is acknowledged that developing agencies are becoming more like brokers (Gombra, 2013), that brokers can be more than one person at a time, can come within or outside of the organization (Tennyson, 2005), can come from any sector (Wood, 2012), while taking different positions (Gould&Fernandez, 1989) inside and outside organisations. Brokers, in short, are intermediary change agents, that can come from anywhere and operate inside or outside collaborating organisations.

Why?
Here the overlap between academics and practitioners is also clear. There is the general idea that brokers are vital as a 'neutral organizer' (Goldmann, 2012), a 'key factor' or an 'enabling structure' (Selsky&Parker, 2005: 857) for successful partnerships. This is due to the many practical challenges that CSPs face (cf. Tennyson, 2005; Wood, 2012) in particular at the initial formation stage (Bryson et al, 2006) for instance because of fundamentally different ideological foundations (Shara&Kearins, 2011), the wickedness of the problem and divergent interests of parties (Van Tulder, 2013; Austin & Seitanidi, 2013). CSP brokers have a function in creating trust, shared interests and shared expectations (McEvily & Zaheer, 2004). Next to these bridging functions, brokers also can perform broadening functions. Brokers "may promote neglected areas of creativity" (Sasped et al., 2007:1) and push for alternatives (Serafin, 2006). Practitioners claim that "using a brokering approach lead to better partnership solutions either in quality, scale/reach, satisfaction or technological relevance." and emphasize their importance to change the mind-set towards a partnering culture within the organization (Pyres, 2013:7). Some practitioners, thereby, also stress the complementary importance of internal brokers (ibid), but without much empirical substantiation of this claim.

What?
The 'partnering cycle' as developed by Tennyson (2003) is habitually applied to document and understand phases in the broker's involvement and tasks in CSPs. This is done by practitioners (e.g. Wood, 2012; Dixon, 2013, Tennyson, 2005) as well as by academic researchers (e.g. Stadtler & Probst, 2012). The cycle defines four phases: (a) scoping and building, (b) managing and maintaining, (c) reviewing and revising, (d) closing. Brokers do not only help to connect partners, but also help in the establishment, maintenance and possible dissolution of the partnership. The convening function is emphasized by Bryson, Crosby & Stone (2006), as well as by Googins and Rochlin (2000:142) who allocate a core role to brokers who "catalyze partnership formation". One key task in that process is the framing of opportunities to the partners from the different sectors (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010) and facilitate in negotiations (Bardach, 1998). Stadtler & Probst (2012:7) explain how the role as a convener is important throughout the whole partnership lifecycle, for example by connecting the partnership with important stakeholders, or other partnerships to "reduce the fragmentation of activities" when tackling wicked problems. Additionally they identify that brokers also act as mediators and learning catalysts for the CSP along the complete partnering cycle. As mediators, brokers facilitate the interaction in between the partners, but also with other external organizations. As learning catalyst, brokers help partnerships with their knowledge and experience in cross-sector partnerships, in order to catalyze their functioning and increase their impact (ibid). Some practitioners also mention the possibility of brokers to engage in a role as a 'partnership manager' (e.g. Serafin, 2006: 47), but this is much less usual. The notion of this potential fourth role has not yet been covered in academic publications. In practice partnership brokers therefore function primarily in the first stages of the partnering cycle. An own evaluation of the PBA on the question what 'partnership brokers do' on the basis of the logbooks of 250+ partnership brokers reveals a wide diversity of activities, but a concentration of activities at the earlier

phases in the partnering cycle, on ‘’getting things started and with a focus on building productive relationships’ (Wood, 2012:12).

How?

On the question how partnership broker actual work, there is considerable more discrepancy between academics and practitioners. The academic literature states that CSP brokers “draw attention to an important public problem and accord it legitimacy within a stakeholder group” (Bryson et al., 2006: 46) and, as larger organizations, often use authority to convene the partners (Wood & Gray, 1991). Furthermore the translation ability of brokers is recognized, in order to enable a mutual understanding on all sides and frame conditions as opportunities (Manning & Roessler, 2013). This translation can be characterized by the usage of ‘collaborative vocabulary’ (Sharma & Kearnis, 2011: 195-96). By practitioners this translating skill is also recognized and emphasized (e.g. p.32 & p.43, Tennyson, 2005; p.30, Wood, 2012). The skill to filter, synthesize and yet again communicate large amounts of information effectively and efficiently is recognized by practitioners (e.g. Tennyson, 2011) and academics alike (Deephouse & Heugens, 2009). While the concept of using social capital to bridge structural holes (von Schurbein, 2010) and weak international ties (Kiss & Danis, 2010) has solely been discussed in academic publications, the facilitation of negotiations can be regarded as the use of social capital and has been discussed for brokers by both academics (e.g. Bardach, 1998) and practicing experts. Tennyson for example names and explains facilitation as one of the four key skills for CSP brokers (2005). Related to facilitation and social capital is the creation of trust among partners and further stakeholders, which is explained through the identification of shared interests, upon which common expectations can be built and managed (McEvily & Zaheer, 2004). The discussion by practicing brokers and experts on the creation of trust covers these points and proposes techniques such as interest-based negotiation (IBN) (e.g. Tennyson, 2005; Donnely, 2006; Warner 2003b; Wood, 2012), ‘shuttle diplomacy’, or the creation of ‘safe spaces’ by choosing the time and location for meetings (Wood, 2012). Apart from regular management 101’s such as ‘time keeping’, there is not much more discussion about how brokers facilitate the establishment and functioning of CSPs.

Publications by practicing or coaching experts, furthermore, cover a plethora of other key skills and techniques, which they describe as *essential* for CSP brokers. The brokering guidebook by Tennyson (2005) and the publication ‘What do partnership brokers do’ (Wood, 2012) give the most complete reviews. The convening function by CSP brokers starts with the scoping of the complete situation and an analysis of the need of a partnership (Tennyson, 2005), after which a thorough screening of potential partners including the identification and mapping of resources and cultures follows (Tennyson, 2005; Wood, 2012). Furthermore good brokers are supposed to have a clear problem statement in mind and help protect a vision for the partnership to address this problem, upon which a management of the partnership can be build, including the early assignment of roles and responsibilities (Wood, 2012). The management and maintenance phase of the partnership then includes openly addressing all kinds of problems (Tennyson, 2005: 31; Wood, 2012: 12) and consequently a lot of negotiating, which Tennyson names the second key skill for CSP brokers (2005). While negotiating and dealing with conflicts naturally inherits ample communication, another important skill for brokers is the ability to empower the partnering sides (Wood, 2012:23). This highlights the recognition that brokers can only facilitate partnerships, but not substitute action of partners and or partnerships altogether. Therefore Tennyson (2005:25) calls the leadership style of brokers ‘servant leadership’ (p.9, 2005) and stresses the role to coach partners so that they build the capacity to run the partnership on their own as the third key skill for brokers. The fourth and last key skill according to Tennyson is ‘reviewing’, which is important to regularly reflect on the fit of action and vision and recalibrate the partnership if necessary. In case of a successful partnership which generates impact, brokers can help by sustaining the outcome either through institution building measures, such as insights into feasible governance models (Tennyson, 2011), or by dissolving the partnership after transferring responsibilities to already established institutions (Tennyson, 2005).

Partnering training courses include a selection of the above tools. Wood lists ground rules, the partnering cycle, guidelines for [cross-sector] conversations, a planning tool, interest-based negotiation, a review tool, drafted collaboration agreements and a moving-on checklist as some of these (Wood 2012:16-18). Other practicing authors furthermore mention transaction analysis (Ward, 2006), café methodology (Hall, 2006), internal assessment (Nwankpo, 2006) and risk management tools (Mundy, 2006), as practical for CSP brokers. Overall, it is important to point out that a broker "has to continually adapt their operational style to fit a changing brokering role during the life of the partnership" (Tennyson, 2005: 35). As such, brokering is described as a mix of an art and a science, which requires many soft people skills and intuition, as well as knowledge, analytical capabilities and certain degree of professional detachment (p.35, Tennyson, 2005).

So, there is at least an initial understanding of the what, why, and who of CSP brokers – although arguably considerable research still has to be done here. But the question on how brokers operate, how they can improve their operations is much less covered by practical and especially academic research. There exists a spagetti bowl of techniques, insights and visions on what CSP brokering could entail. This is based on a very limited number of validated ideas of which techniques actually work best, who should do it under what circumstances, for which problem and in which phase of the partnering cycle. Most insights that guide the actual practice of brokers are prescriptive and practitioner oriented while rarely based on systematic scientific research. Practitioners are engaging in prescription, how to do it approaches, often based on case studies, story-telling and alleged best-practice experiences. Some fragmented evidence exist on the roles of brokers (Stadtler & Probst, 2012), on the way they create trust, discover shared interests and expectations (McEvily & Zaheer, 2004), use social capital and bridge structural holes through "weak ties" (von Schnurbein, 2010). The techniques and skills used in order to do so are so far merely presented in descriptive publications by practitioners and experts and not really tested in empirical research, nor described on the basis of what brokers actually do when they broker. If we don't know what brokers are really doing, it becomes difficult to assess their impact on effective partnerships, let alone their role in addressing the actual problem the partnership is supposed to address.
The remainder of this paper therefore explores three related questions:

1: *What are the most important skills and techniques CSP brokers need at the moment?*
2: *How do CSP brokers actually utilize these skills and techniques in their actual brokering work?*
3: *How could the functioning of CSP brokers be improved in their most important application?*

3. **Method: sample and key skill selection**

The relative pristine terrain of academic coverage of the partnership brokers demands a qualitative, explorative and inductive approach (Blumberg et al, 2008; Strauss & Cobin, 2008). We adopted a Delphi method in which a limited number of representative interviews with key brokering and CSP experts in sustainable development around the world were conducted. We conducted semi-structured interviews focused on the perception of CSP brokers and the skill and techniques utilized by them. The selection of interview partners was based on a list of practicing brokers, which was compiled through brokers identified by other research and publications (e.g. Stadtler & Probst, 2012; Gombra, 2013; Wood, 2012), as well as own internet research. The list (Table 1) comprises all different kind of brokers (Accredited Partnership Broker (Firms), Accredited broker trainers (from Partnering initiatives), International Organizations, Local NGOs, National Development Agencies), representing different sectors like education, economic development and health care. In order to keep the sample as representative as possible for development partnerships, all identified brokers were contacted (via email), and interviews conducted with some respondents. In the process of the research, follow-up emails were sent out to non-responsive groups, again to establish an as representative sample as possible. From most organizations information was collected on their brokering roles and related activities, which helped in a thick description of the actual selection of activities undertaken by their brokers. The final selection of interviewees depended on the responsiveness of the approached organizations, so the aim was to cover a broad range of brokers and affiliated experts, in order to gain extensive insights into current practices and potential aspects for improvement. The final group of interview partners contains sufficient variation in institutional and organizational background to legitimize a qualitative approach. In the end, 37 organizations were contacted, of whom 25 responded to the first inquiry. The final number of experts interviewed was 12, as the remaining 13 could not or did not want to be interviewed. The organization of the interviewee is indicated by an asterisk in Table 1.[3] The resulting sample consists largely of brokers related to national and international development organizations, which was the intention of the procedure in the first place. Corporate brokers dropped of the selection, because many of them primarily function as internal brokers. Since the start of the 21st century, the plea for cross-sector partnering and outside brokers has indeed been the strongest in the development area, explaining also for the great need for international brokers (Van Tulder, 2010).

Table 1 approximately here

This study applies process theory in covering entities that participate in the events (Burton-Jones et al, 2011). The interviews were conducted, first, to identifying the most important techniques and skills acquired in brokering trainings and used by CSP brokers in practice. These techniques were ranked according to the importance of the challenges they are supposed to help in solving partnering problems. The experience of the interviewees in the two most important techniques offered by training, were then linked to their actual application in brokering practice.

The list of skills considered key for partnering brokers is long and fragmented. So, the first challenge was to define a number of key brokering skills whose application could be considered in more detail. Although skills have often been organized along the four phases of the partnering cycle, an immense number of different concepts and techniques have been introduced (section 2). We have come to a first selection of the most relevant skill categories by comparing three different sources: (1) the prime skills as identified and trained in PBA courses, (2) what academic publications have covered as prime skills and (3) a recent critical study of the pitfalls of partnerships (i.e. skills that are particularly needed).

[3] At least two of the interview partners requested to be kept anonymous, which is why the results of the interviews are integrated in the text with reference to the source of information, but without specifics.

Tennyson (2005) identifies four key brokering skills (2005): facilitating (i.e. systematically helping the partners to accomplish the goal of the session), negotiating (based on underlying interests to find mutually satisfactory solutions, through interest-based negotiation), coaching (to train and transfer more and more partnering responsibilities and tasks to the partners) and reviewing (of the partnership's impact as well as of the partnership itself). The first and in practice most important step of the partnering cycle is scoping the partnership; it is defined as "the early exploration of an idea or project by looking at data from a wide range of sources" (Tennyson, 2005: 58). In this phase, other important skills and tools for the correct partnership viability assessment are included, such as the screening of potential partners and resource-mapping of oneself and the partners, in order to find a suitable match.

The PBA courses also include skills like institutionalization, relationship and knowledge management, but the first phases of the partnering formation receive particular emphasis. Secondly, the scientific literature, not by accident adds a number of more evaluative techniques, such as benchmarking (Stadtler & Probst, 2012), capability- or competence-mapping – broader than resource mapping (e.g. Frost & Sullivan, 2013; Fleischer et al., 2007); more systematic relationship- and knowledge management (Stadtler&Probst, 2012; Schnurbein, 2010; Stadtler & Probst, 2012; Austin, 200). Thirdly, in order to assure more validity, we also included the results of a research after pitfalls for partnerships as performed by the consultancy company 'Frost & Sullivan' (mainly considering B2B partnerships) (Frost & Sullivan, 2013). They define four pitfalls, which can be matched to related skills ~~and related skills~~: (1) the need for the partnership goes untested, which can be assessed by a scoping activity; (2) a lack of agreed upon and communicated partnership goals, which can be approached by the use of Interest-Based Negotiation; (3) the risk that a partner incompatibility goes unnoticed until it is too late, which can be avoided by the use of capability-mapping and reviewing; (4) a partnership which reinforces the weaknesses of each or one of the partners, is often related to a mismanagement of power relationships and can therefore be approached with appropriate institution-building, relationship-management, and IBN.

Table 2 approximately here

The overlap between the identified partnering skills is substantial and particularly applies to scoping, resource-mapping, interest-based negotiations (IBN) techniques, relationship management and reviewing. Scoping is applied to assess whether partnering is a viable and attractive possibility, in comparison to classical 'going-it-alone' solutions or other forms of collaboration. Considering an investigation of (potential) partners, this is better described by the skills of screening and resource-mapping. Instead of using the term resource-mapping, capability- or competence-mapping are often used as a bit broader concepts (e.g. Frost & Sullivan, 2013; Fleischer et al., 2007). A well-done mapping exercise can also mitigate later needs for risk management, which is currently taught most often to organizations that engage in partnership training – such as the UN Global Compact – ~~is for risk management~~, especially of reputational risk that is related to partners from other sectors. Interest-based negotiation is a technique adapted from juridical practice and international relations. It aims to find solutions, which satisfy all parties involved in the negotiation of a problem (Katz & Patarini, 2008). As such it can be understood as a technique to help find solutions to aligned problems, and thus addresses the key basis of a partnership. Besides IBN's utility in conflict situations in a partnering process, it can also help to uncover the driving interests of (potential) partners at the early stages. Accordingly, IBN can be utilized throughout almost the entire partnering cycle (as some form of negotiation always happens), and it is supposed to establishe trust, new communication channels and joint-problem solving approaches (Warner, 2003). Similar to the necessary expertise in communication skills, relationship-management is considered an essential supportive skill for any partnership broker. The majority of their working time is spend on it (Wood, 2012:36). Because of the different cultures, languages, and working styles in each sector, relationship-management in cross-sector partnerships can prove to be more difficult than in other business relationships (e.g. Gombra, 2013). This difficulty however, does not necessarily call for an adjustment of relationship-management skills, but rather on an emphasized use and expertise in them. The questions to be asked when reviewing a partnerships need to be tailored to the partnership and need to assess the functioning of the partnership (, of the broker), as well as the impact on the final beneficiary, the partnership itself and all of the partners (Tennyson, 2005). While this increases the scope and importance of the review, the reviewing skill itself does not necessarily need to be adjusted.

From this overview, combined with the practice of partnership brokers (section 2), we can conclude that the most critical skills as they are related to the *actual* functioning of partnership brokers are presently located in the earlier phases of the partnership formation. In these phases also the majority of mistakes in proper partnership formation appear (Frost&Sullivan, 2013). This answers sub-question 1. In particular scoping (including capability mapping) can be singled out for further study on whether and how they are applied in practice. Most of the techniques introduced in partnership brokering training have been applied under other circumstances and validated for other roles. Now they are introduced in the CSP brokering practice for sustainable development purposes. The question therefore becomes relevant how they are used and to what extent they actually help in addressing some of the challenges of partnerships.

4. The need for scoping and screening respectful of complexity

Scoping is aimed at contributing to setting realistic and common expectations on the current situation, necessary efforts, risks, and probable outcomes (Wood, 2012). By investigating the current situation, including stakeholders and the apparent problem, not only the question whether to form a CSP is addressed, but it should form “a foundation for further project design” (Abrahamson & Becker, 2010:1), and hence for the whole CSP. Though partnership practitioners recognize the importance of scoping, it is noted that they often do not devote sufficient time on it in practice (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Austin, 2000), and the limited attention is often focused on elaborate due diligence analyses. But does time pressure explains all? There is not much research done on the effectiveness of particular scoping exercises for CSPs. Studies on the scoping practice have primarily been performed for environmental projects (Mulvihill, 2003: 40). The importance of scoping is ascertained by respondents as in some cases the most crucial stage of an environmental assessment. This is achieved through “talking and interacting with participants” (Snell & Cowell, 2006: 366). Key insights gained through scoping in this form for CSPs include an estimation of how much time will have to be invested “in building both an understanding of the potential of a partnering approach and active enthusiasm for the idea“(Tennyson, 2005:61). This can only be done through an early interaction with the stakeholders.

Corporations also use scoping of projects to compare different project alternatives, both through objective and subjective criteria (Pinto, 2010: 73). The benefit of including *subjective views* in a scoping assessment is showcased by the requirement of the Environmental Investigation Agency, who requires their directors to give ‘scoping opinions’ on potential projects

(Environment Agency, 2002:13). The diverse and complex nature of the problems tackled by such projects can make a subjective evaluation of an expert very valuable. USAID developed an alliance assessment tool, which can be used for a mission-wide strategic planning process about the best implementation of partnerships with private sector organizations, as well as to generate insights into partnering opportunities in a specific industry at a mission. A technique of increasing importance in scoping is thereby the use of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) (Örtengren, 2004), which builds a logical roadmap from a current problematic situation, to a desired future situation (Abrahamson & Becker, 2010). The LFA is constructed of nine sequential steps, of which three are about assessing and understanding the current situation, one conceptualizes the desired situation, and the last five steps concentrate on the project of how to achieve this change (Abrahamson & Becker, 2010). For a CSP scoping analysis, the first three steps are of particular interest for brokers – 1. Analysis of the project context, 2. Stakeholder analysis, and 3. Problem analysis (Örtengren, 2004). The LFA is used by most large donor agencies as a precondition for administering budgets, in many monitoring and evaluation exercises and increasingly in research projects (cf. Epstein et al, 2008). So brokers are increasingly embracing this technique as well.

4.1 Scoping the project context

The first step of a scoping exercise is aimed at defining the project environment and the general problem context. Doing so in an "explicit and transparent" way is acknowledged as basis for building trust between stakeholders (Abrahamson & Becker, 2010:3-4). The analysis is often based on some relatively simple generic tool such as prompt lists (Environment Agency, 2002), Porter's 5 forces (Jones & George, 2007), variations of a PESTEL analysis (political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal) and/or SWOT analysis (Örtengren, 2004). Often this technique uses interviews with (a selection of) the stakeholders themselves (interview). The results of the investigations are then summarized in a so-called scoping matrix in order to visualize the potential gravity of impact of the various criteria (Environment Agency, 2002). Although a full understanding of contextual factors would be ideal, the countless number of identifiable factors makes such extensive analysis neither feasible nor desirable at this stage. Therefore, the initial investigation remains often rather superficial (c.f. Abrahamson and Becker, 2010). Scoping acts as a funnel to identify key factors (Mulvihill, 2003), which are intended to be analyzed thoroughly at later stages, e.g. in the problem analysis step three, and the analysis of risks (steps eight) and assumptions (step nine) of LFA. Most of the development organizations set frameworks that define the context of the potential partnership and thus give an incentive already in the scoping phase to depart from this particular frame; which makes the project prone to be biased for the particular problem definition of the donor organization.

For this first step, then, practitioners are particularly sensitive not to discourage the partnership formation process. Örtengren (2004) for instance warns of the danger of over-analyzing the situation at this early stage by conducting too many studies oneself instead of relying on available information and data online. As the experience from one broker shows, keeping momentum is critical from the very beginning (Pereira, 2006). Brokers can therefore assist with pursuing a steady progress at this early step, while keeping inventory of important factors to analyze. Furthermore it is advised that the background information should be gathered as close to the "owner of the problem" as possible." (Örtengren, 2004:8). The multiple ownership challenge in cross-sector partnerships therefore stresses the importance of an initial understanding of key stakeholders, which however has not been further researched so far. Brokers being aware of this challenge can help potential partners to deal with such ambiguity and encourage them to see the different viewpoints of the various owners as a challenge, which needs to be overcome together.

In theory, the scoping analysis is supposed to give a first indication whether partnering is the most suitable approach to the problem, but in a study of ten years of environmental impact assessments in the UK, Glasson (1999:366) noticed that in practice "little considerations of alternatives" (p.366, 1999) were given. The comparison can be particularly difficult, as it requires sufficient expertise about other approaches, be it in specific strategies to 'go-it-alone' or other collaborations, such as dialogue platforms. Thus, there is a potential challenge in balancing neutrality and advocacy towards building a CSP. Brokers can be experts at least in the field of different collaborative approaches (e.g. platforms and partnerships), while they should seek the assistance of external experts to preserve their neutrality and legitimacy. In the end, an unbiased comparison can lead to a grounded reasoning for (or against) forming a partnership, which can be used as a preliminary vision for the CSP. Brokers, however, also have to be (somewhat) knowledgeable about the issue that the partnership is supposed to address to be able to assess whether sufficient alternatives have been explored. A primarily process oriented approach runs the risk of lacking sophistication in its problem analysis. The technique(s) practiced by partnership brokers to have the participants themselves come up with a problem analysis critically depends on the selection of participants and their willingness (and ability) to define the causes of the problem.

Risks assessment, is another field of scoping analysis that is actively used by organizations involved in partnerships, such as World Vision and UN Global Compact (e.g. World Vision, 2013; interview*). In the initial scoping phase a distinction can be made between 'real' and 'perceived' risks (Environment Agency, 2002:17). Both dimensions proof important to address in initial stakeholder dialogues. It has been acknowledged to organizations considering their involvement in CSPs, one of the most mentioned reservations is related to reputational risks (e.g. Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Gombra, 2013; interviews), but this is very difficult to assess and requires a type of knowledge of brokers which they very often do not have or find difficult to acquire (Van Tulder with Van der Zwart, 2006). One broker proposes the use of a 'scoping note', which conveys the 'rationale', 'initial exploration' along 'ethical guidelines' and 'risks and their mitigation' of the partnership, and also includes the "perception of each party's possible interests, drivers and contributions" (Wood, 2012:13). The scoping note can be seen similar to an early letter of intent or memorandum of understanding mentioned by Tennyson (2005:46). The solution proposed by many brokers is that the participants *themselves* share their subjective perceptions on reputation risks. In practice this is a rough technique which not necessarily provides the participants with sufficient knowledge on how to identify other risks that were not revealed during the scoping stage for whatever reason – even when they appear during the process. Most brokers are only able to help participants to identify relatively superficial types of reputation risks, but not to analyze and understand them in detail (interviews). Systematic comparative research on reputation risks in general and for CSPs in specific has not been done yet. Furthermore little consideration is given to alternatives (Glasson, 1999) which in case reputational problems arise will be one of the areas that non-participating/selected actors will point at in order to criticize the partnership. Reputational risk comes as much from participants as from non participants (cf. Van Tulder et al, 2014).

4.2 Screening as stakeholder identification

Screening implies the identification and analysis of stakeholders, as the second step in the LFA as well as in the partnering cycle. Because of the high interactivity in multiparty systems such as CSPs, and because of their broad reaching impact, it is generally accepted that a careful screening process is particularly important (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b). In the end, the right partner makes for the best partnerships (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Tennyson, 2003). This is also reflected in practice, as large international organizations state their need to be more strict and selective when choosing their partners and partnerships (UNICEF, 2012: 13). For brokers this is a key area to add value through making their knowledge of the local networks, organizations and key individuals available to the potential partners (interview), which was also mentioned by one broker as a key skill for brokers (interview). But, how to identify 'relevant' stakeholders?

The present broker practice lets stakeholder identification primarily happen through brainstorming or sweeping exercises that rely on the assessments of the individuals involved in the scoping effort (Tennyson, 2003: 48). This exercise runs the risk of myopia or biased selections of stakeholders, partly depending on the definition of the problem that the partnership wants to address. It happens rarely that an objective content analysis is made of primary and secondary stakeholders that are related to the problem (interview). There is a considerable risk of bias in this exercise, because critical (primary) stakeholders might not want to participate in this brainstorming exercise or are left out of the initial considerations to create a big enough coalition. Furthermore, the profile presented by the actors themselves in this brainstorming phase might not necessarily represent their real profile (in terms of capabilities, but also ambitions and willingness to participate) (interview).

In practice a number of agencies try to deal with these problems in a variety of manners. USAID's India mission is currently creating basic profiles of each type of partner in order to better communicate with each one, these are then complemented by a survey to be filled out before working together for the first time, which "are a great tool to identify capacity building possibilities" (interview). It is suggested, but not very often practiced, to include opposing organizations just the same as supportive organizations in the stakeholder analysis (EID Handbook, 2002; van Tulder, 2011).

Another technique concentrates on the influence stakeholders have on the focal issue or that the focal issue has on the stakeholders (Örtengren, 2004). Here, the perceived affectedness is just as important as real affectedness (EID Handbook, 2002:16). A set of typical criteria important for CSPs are abilities to capture and disseminate information, expertise on technical, managerial and collaborative level, relationships and networks and direct products and facilities (Tennyson, 2003:12).

Other agencies tried to come to more strict partner selection procedures, but most of them do this on the basis of rather general criteria. In UNICEF's call for a stricter partner selection, they also appraise that the use of tools and standardized processes already help to be more selective (UNICEF, 2012: 13), such as checklists or scoring models. The criteria in these frameworks need to be adapted to the idiosyncrasies of cross-sector partnering and need to be flexible enough to account for unique circumstances (Örtengren, 2004; Pinto, 2010). As a further advancement in the selection process, UNICEF proposes the use of "systematic mapping" (UNICEF, 2012: 13), which can be done for example by plotting the estimated influence against the estimated interest on the project (Tennyson, 2003:43). In Dutch PPP facilities for sustainable water and food security it has proven particularly difficult to make a good 'partnership check' which aims at defining the right configuration of partners to the actual problem (PrC evaluation, 2014; Kemp and Van Tulder, 2014).

The screening role is also increasingly organized through portals, such as those from UN Global Compact or the Crossroads Foundation, which act as matchmaking platforms. The experience of these websites at the moment is mixed. One interviewee estimates the established partnerships (via business.un.org) to be roughly only a dozen a year so far (interview). The German GIZ entertains a number of websites, which offer ideas competitions to start transactional partnerships and ‘strategic alliances’ across sectors. GIZ-EZ Scouts act as standing representatives who help to convene between the private sector and the development agencies, which helps to overcome the companies inhibition to educate themselves about cooperation possibilities with the GIZ (interview).

Because of the wickedness of many sustainable development problems, it can be anticipated that organizations will find it difficult to go to a neutral broker in the form of a website. The fundamental problem related to these matchmaking sites – as well as to some other screening techniques - is that they do not necessarily identify the most important stakeholders for addressing the issue, but primarily list those that are willing to engage in partnerships. As such ‘coalitions of the willing’ are formed, that not necessarily constitute the most relevant partnerships in two respects: (1) for the fit between the partners (the organizational or cultural fit) and (2) for the fit between the problem and the partnership (the issue fit).

Organisational fit

The problem of a proper organization/cultural type as precondition for an effective partnership is regularly identified and discussed (e.g. Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; van Tulder & Pfisterer, 2013, Kolk, 2013). The assessment of the organizational fit goes beyond regular analysis of ethical business conduct (in due diligence assessment for reputational risk), considering the organizational culture and values and the management style of the organizations, which influences for example their attitude towards risk and cooperation in general (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; van Tulder & Pfisterer, 2013). It can also run counter to the individual preferences of the partners. So far, the importance of the organizational fit is acknowledged by some scholars, but not necessarily in the community of practicing and publishing CSP brokers. While Tennyson (2005:61) recognizes the importance of dealing with skepticism or even potential hostility between stakeholders and potential partners from the different institutional spheres, she does not explicitly include the screening for such cultural fit in her guidebook. The interviewees recognize the importance of the topic, (interviews), but do not yet apply any concrete implementation measure for screening towards such factors, besides for example the check “that senior management at the different organizations were all on the same page” (interview). The GIZ has a documented assistance sheet about well functioning relations with other organization and is looking for a good interpersonal fit, but does not use this as a decisive criterion (interview). Rather, it is emphasized that general ground rules for a collaboration across the heterogeneity of organizations from different sectors should be established (interview) which, however, might run counter to taking into account the more individualistic characteristics that have proven so important to assess the nature of the organizational fit. Austin and Seitanidi (2012b:935) propose to look for criteria for resource configuration that produce a mix of the four types of shared value that can be achieved by CSPs [associational, transferred, interaction, and synergistic]. In particular the synergistic value creation is achievable through a high organizational fit. The Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW) developed a framework on building and managing collaborative business relationships, which became a national standard in the UK (BS 11000) and is in the process to become an international one (ISO) (ICW, 2014). This framework includes several tools of which one, the maturity assessment, provides “a collaborative profile for an organization, assessing three key areas: Attributes, Abilities, Attitude” (ICW, 2014: 3). This dimension, however, reinforces another bias in partnerships, i.e. that of already established partnerships. Experience with partnerships – even if they were not successful or fit with the problem for which this partnership is constructed – strongly influences the formation of a new partnership (and its reception by funding agencies; interview).

Complementary capability, capacities or functions are often suggested in the partnering and brokering literature (Tennyson, 2005; Tennyson, 2003; Abrahamson & Becker, 2010; Frost & Sullivan, 2013). ~~The example of~~ Abrahamson and Becker ~~also~~ show in one example how ~~such~~ mapping can already be useful e.g. during the problem analysis stage in LFA (p.8, 2010), and Tennyson explains the use of mapping in an exploratory workshop (p.67, 2005). Furthermore she names resource mapping as the first task for brokers in the second phase of the partnering cycle (p.69, Tennyson, 2005). Hence, mapping can already be very useful in the screening process, and the technique, benefits and risks of it are briefly explained. But the literature on what constitutes an 'optimal' configurational fit of complementary capabilities in CSPs is not well defined yet (Kemp and Van Tulder, 2014).

At present mapping is used for a variety of purposes and with a diverse set of techniques. The focus of mapping has been on resources, capabilities, competences, capacities or functions (Hafeez, Malak & Zhang, 2007; Abrahamson & Becker, 2010, Tennyson, 2005). The effective use of various types of resources (e.g. physical, intellectual and cultural) together make a capability, while networks of valuable capabilities can be considered as competences (Hafeez, Malak & Zhang, 2007). Second, it is increasingly acknowledged that the purpose of mapping is to better grasp the current constellation e.g. of resources at a stakeholder, but also of oneself. With this, organizations can analyze their own positioning, the overall situation and potential matches to collaboratively improve the situation by finding and exploiting synergies. Another purpose of mapping is to better conceptualize the interrelation between e.g. different functions, which together make up a process (Abrahamson & Becker, 2010; Beimborn, Martin, Homann, 2005). According to these purposes, there are different ways to perform a mapping analysis. The mapping of functions in a process helps to identify dependencies (e.g. of certain outputs of functions), in order to get to the root cause of the problem (Abrahamson & Becker, 2010). When mapping capabilities, one can categorize them according to core and support capabilities, to better analyze the stakeholder's organizational or business model (Calhoun, Lynch & Dowling, 2009). Another and frequently used way to map capabilities, is by subdividing more generic capabilities into more specific sub-capabilities, for example becoming more industry specific (Beimborn, Martin, Homann, 2005). In the context of cross-sector partnerships, Tennyson (2003) provides an exemplary framework for a resource map that categorizes the criteria, which are typically important to CSPs. Further analyses based on capability maps, such as their connection to 'value-adding-modules' (Fleischer, Herm & Ude, 2007) are possible, but the basic benefit is a "taxonomic diagram that describes the interplay of capabilities while doing business" (Beimborn, Martin & Homann, 2005:6). This enables a better understanding in the own operations, and shows room for improvement, for example by using a gap analysis (e.g. Beimborn et al, 2005; Fischer et al., 2007; Hafeez et al., 2007; Frost & Sullivan, 2013). For CSPs, such gap analysis can be particularly useful when trying to match own capabilities with complementary ones of potential partners. This enables for a better partner selection and should thus prevent larger, snowball effect errors in the future. While the screening of key stakeholders is an established and integral part of current partnership building processes, there is evidence neither in the literature nor the interviews yet about the use of mapping tools to assess for a cultural or organizational fit of the potential partners.

Issue fit
The second challenge of correct screening, the issue-partnership fit, is getting only recently attention in the literature and is marginally systematically addressed in the practice of partnerships, not in the least because of the implicit bias in favor of coalitions of the willing and

a related self-selection/survivor bias (Van Tulder & Pfisterer, 2014). The fit refers on the one hand to an assessment of the required complementary capabilities of the participants that is needed to effectively match the complexity of the issue. More complex issues, tend to require a larger involvement of bigger groups of stakeholders and thus provide a different challenge for the broker than regarding simpler problems. On the other hand, the partnership might not involve all relevant stakeholders. Many partnerships prove ill-constructed because they bring together a one-sided group of stakeholders or crowd-out more relevant stakeholders (ibid). The longer term effectiveness of a partnership critically depends on the ability to include all relevant stakeholders. This has been particularly relevant for partnerships between firms and NGOs, in which governments are not included – even if they bear primary responsibility for some of the issues. Crowding out in this case implies that the partnership deprives the non-participating party from an incentive to act, which in the end seriously hampers the impact of the partnership (and might even result in opposite effects).

Finally, the configuration might be too static and time-bound. The proper issue-partnership fit should provide room for a dynamic relationship. The issue changes, so the necessary partnership configuration could also change. The collaboration literature increasingly emphasize the importance of CSPs being adaptive to the changing environment (e.g. Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b), which can be due to first effects of the project itself (interview), and calls for the ability to be continuously learning, e.g. through feedback loops (e.g. Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; van Tulder, 2010b; USAID, 2012; Edmondson, 2013) and triple-loop learning. These insights can be incorporated into the screening phase by evaluating dynamic capabilities of stakeholder organizations. Dynamic capabilities constitute each organisation’s "ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments” (Teece et al, 1997: 561). An organization that is able to dynamically adjust current- or build new capabilities, is probably more likely to quickly be able to contribute to the partnership. The screening for such dynamic capabilities can concentrate on areas with a high dynamic in the projects environment. This is a difficult task. Therefore, dynamic capabilities are at the moment hardly addressed in screening practice (interview).

All the mentioned biases in the scoping phase present understandable risks for brokers. The necessary effort to conduct a real and unbiased analysis of all potential partners is considerable (Tennyson, 2003), and an extra effort to assess a potential organizational fit is “time consuming and challenging” (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b: 932). There exist tools and frameworks to assist brokers in this task, but a considerable number of them are not used in practice (interviews) nor introduced in the broker training, in particular those tools that help analyze the problem in detail and screen primary and secondary stakeholders for their involvement in addressing the problem in the longer run and thus contribute to sustainable outcomes.

A means to address the latter problem can be the involvement of a broader audience or public in the scoping process (e.g. Mulvihill, 2003; Glasson, 1999). For many projects, especially partially publicly funded ones, public recognition and participation is also important for means of legitimacy as well as for critical insights about the context and potential impacts (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Mulvihill, 2003). Mulvihill depicts such insights as especially valuable in very complex problem situations, in which a ‘closed’ scoping activities do not generate reliable predictions about future impacts (2003). The involvement of advocates as well as opponents is furthermore recommended, as “those who deviate from group norms can be extremely important in helping overcome ‘groupthink’” (Bresnen, 2007; 369). Critics however voice concerns about unnecessary efforts and complications by involving a wider public (Snell & Cowell, 2006: 368). To overcome these difficulties in public participation, Örtengren (2004: 9) suggests a planning workshop in which key stakeholders participate. It acknowledges that a personal contact with key stakeholders is necessary at this stage, in order to "motivate and if possible secure the engagement" of potential partners (p.58, Tennyson, 2005). The Brokering Guidebook includes a "sample design for an exploratory cross-sector workshop" to get to know the various stakeholders' capabilities and attitudes towards partnering and towards the issue, which then can be mapped in order to build a common vision (Tennyson, 2005: 67-68). These workshops however, are also restricting participation to "a 'same time same place' format" (Mulvihill, 2003: 42) and primarily based on coalitions of the willing. Besides, the right conduct of these types of workshops, requires considerable knowledge of the moderator/broke on the actual topic. The proposed solution to this problem – interest based negotiations – is only partially helpful as the next section will explain.

Others have pointed at the possibilities of modern ICT that could allow for more seamless and broader participation (Mulvihill, 2003: 42). More recent research on the use of ICT and social media in decision-making and trust-building processes, however, have stressed the importance of life participation and interaction in particular in the first phase of a partnership (refs). The German example of EZ Scouts shows another way how a personal contact can be established on an ongoing basis to potentially initiate partnerships. These scouts have considerable content and context knowledge. Furthermore they also enable a feedback mechanism for the partnering development agencies on the interests of collaboration from the private sector, in order to adapt and develop collaboration models (interview). As such they act as a new two-way communication channel for a better understanding across sectors.

4.3 Problem analysis

The third step of the scoping/LFA approach generally contains the detailed problem analysis. Organized liked this, this step represents a logical, but relatively belated sequence of addressing the partnership formation challenge. It would be more logical to first identify the nature of the problem, followed by the selection of all relevant stakeholders and the formation of the partnership. But this would necessitate a more independent position of the broker right from the start. The broker then brokers between the problem and the stakeholders, whereas this sequence reveals a much more practical approach in which the broker first brokers between stakeholders and only then specifies the problem that the partnership addresses in more detail. With this sequence, the partnership runs the risk of becoming a 'solution in search of a problem" (interview). As step 3 in the scoping procedure, the problem definition gets primarily aimed at specification and convergence.

Departing from the broad contextual assessment of step one, causes and effects get analyzed (Örtengren, 2004:9) intended to formulate a concise problem statement "to provide a central idea for the partners to work to and to provide a foundation for all future work" (Wood, 2012:14). Participants are stimulated to set limitations to the scope of the project and priorities within it (p.10, Örtengren, 2004). These are logical steps, provided the right general problem definition and context is given, leading to the selection of appropriate partners. The interviews indicate that this is open for debate. This particular sequence also runs the risk of simplified general problem statements, leading to skewed partnership configurations which then, on the basis of practical considerations related to how to make a partnership actually work, pushes in a relatively early phase of the partnership formation process to measurable results.In practice, it is not more than sensible to argue that too broad a set of related issues (Mulvihill, 2003: 40) can over-complicate the understanding and inhibit progress. Priorities are best set not on the visible effects but on the root causes of the problem. A helpful tool to conceptualize the causal relationships of the effects and of different but related problems is the creation of a problem tree (Örtengren, 2004: 10). Following, the high uncertainty in tackling wicked problems can be decreased somewhat by being better able to understand and approach the interconnectedness of the problems. While Örtengren warns about the common mistakes to be too unspecific and 'absent solution' in the problem description, creating a problem tree represents a great chance to invite all key stakeholders for a workshop (2004: 10-11). The collaboration on defining a common problem enhances a common base for the partnership to grow upon.

Another proposed tool for the identification of 'drivers of change' is the use of scenario analysis (Mulvihill, 2003:45). Mulvihill sees an advantage of using the insights of a large base of participants over difficult estimations of single criteria, especially when facing complex problems. While being aware of many potential downsides of using a scenario analysis, for example a large investment of monetary, human and time resources on "scenarios which are plausible but unlikely" (ibid), he argues that "the value of scenarios lies not in their capacity to predict the future, but in their ability to provide insight into the present" (Raskin et al, 1998: 3). Identifying drivers of change can help to decide which course of action is most promising. In the end the helpfulness of such additional efforts probably depend on the size of the planned projects and the corresponding care and attention the situation deserves.

The most important task for brokers here is to ensure that a thorough problem analysis is carried out by the potential partners and under the inclusion of key stakeholders. The latter is already problematic given the limitations of step 2. The negligence of a proper problem analysis under the assumption of a common understanding of the issues at hand cuts up any logical framework towards a systematic collaboration and hinders improvement on the focal issue. CSP brokers can therefore insist on a lengthy and inclusive investigation, facilitate problem analysis workshops and mediate between stakeholders during scenario analysis. The challenge is the extent to which brokers (again) have been able and had the time to identify and engage relevant stakeholders in this scoping process. The result of this third step in the LFA ideally is an established common problem understanding and opens the door for a concrete approach to tackle the problem (Örtengren, 2004). This corresponds to the specific goals and certain principles established in step three of the partnering cycle (Tennyson, 2005), which in turn is the result of step four in the LFA and calls for the determination of the objectives of the partnership. Örtengren expects that the latter presents a logical outcome of the scoping exercise: "If care has been taken on the problem analysis, the formulation of objectives shall not result in any difficulties" (2004:11).

In the practice of cross-sector collaboration however, a common understanding of the problem is naturally helpful, but opinions on the strategy and operations how to tackle the identified challenge can still greatly diverge (interview). One reason for such differences can stem from the tension between a focus on decision-making efficiency versus, e.g. environmental precaution in the case of the EIA (Snell & Cowell, 2006), or between differences in the efficiency orientation of the company and equity considerations of the NGO (van Tulder, 2013a; interviews). With natural time pressures, the balancing of these issues during a scoping analysis can set the tone for the handling of them during the implementation phase of a partnership. This tension should therefore be clearly addressed *before* starting the scoping activity, in order to raise a common awareness and be able to adjust the balancing more efficiently during the process. In practice this is not usually done (interview). One way to make the transition from a common problem understanding to a concrete objective for the partnership – given the composition of the partnership - is to generate multiple solution options, of which the partners negotiate to agree on the perceived best one. This is a step for which the IBN method is also intended, but for which is might not be sufficiently appropriate given the earlier mentioned biases. One broker consequently described that her support during this scoping phase is to "take account of different interests, whilst articulating a single overall goal for the partnership" (Wood, 2012:13). The ultimate question related to interest articulation as a means of scoping links to the tension between: (a) broadly defined vs narrowly defined interests, (b) present and future interests, (c) direct and indirect interests. Which again is related to the selection of stakeholders and issue definition.

4.4 Challenge for the present scoping practice

A successful scoping phase for CSPs brings the various stakeholders together at an early stage. When managed well by the CSP broker, they can build a common understanding various levels and on various topics, such as the issues, dependencies, resources, final problem and approach to a solution. This way, scoping potentially "highlights the benefits" of the proposed solution (Environment Agency, 2002:12) and sets clear boundaries on what is critical in a project or partnership, and what is only 'nice to have'. In case the broker is able to included aspects of language, ethics and expectations, scoping provides a very broad foundation for a well functioning partnership in the future. While the scoping process is often perceived as laborious and long-winded, it usually "saves time and money" in the end (Environment Agency, 2002: 13). The dangers of omitting an analysis of scope are a 'scope creep', which will surface in overspending, missing deadlines and a large amount of necessary rework. When not paying sufficient attention to avoid such dangers in the scoping process, the resulting difficulties during the project can lead some partners or key stakeholders to abandon the partnership.

Furthermore, there exist typical dangers in the scoping process itself, which are increasingly realized by the CSP brokering organizations. For one there is a human tendency to be overly optimistic in the assessment of projects, which the World Bank for example recognizes "as a systematic problem and highlights the need to correct for "optimism bias" in project analysis" (World Bank, 2012: 24). The bank additionally alerts on potential problems resulting from political and personal interests during the scoping and selection phase (ibid).

The findings of the scoping process can be captured and summarized in a 'scoping report', which ideally should also include any open "gaps in information" that could not be closed so far (Environment Agency, 2002: 15). Detailed scoping reports like proposed are not (yet) regular practice, certainly in case of more complex problems that a partnership wants to address (interviews). One reasons for this finding can be that the parties do not want to be overly explicit on their levels of uncertainty. Another reason comes from the political environment in which partnerships operate which makes sensitive to showing any type of ambiguity. A third reason derives from the way in which the scoping process is handled – under time constraint. A fourth reason is the lack of skills with the broker to establish a good issue fit. Most of the brokering skills capacity development exercises at the moment are aimed at establishing good organizational fit, not necessarily at identifying other scoping gaps.

Content cannot be substituted for by process knowledge only. Proposing the use of frameworks such as LFA, one has to be aware of the danger of overlooking positive and negative novel impacts and consequences when relying too much on standardized reports (Snell & Cowell, 2006: 374). Additionally, Snell and Cowell warn of the risk to become too technical (ibid: 367). Brokering is a matter of experience as well. But there has been a learning curve based on the experience in scoping (Glasson, 1999), which therefore seems also possible for other organizations, in particular for CSP brokers who would be frequently involved in scoping exercises. Similarly, a too strict, 'mechanical' orientation along the LFA plan during the project implementation may deter from observing "the way the system is reacting to the intervention" and from making necessary adjustments (interview), a danger also reported in other studies (e.g. Snel and Cowell, 2006).

5. Challenges ahead: what defines sophisticated scoping

We can now summarize the main benefits and deficiencies of the way CSP brokers deal with the three first steps in the scoping phase, which until now has constituted the prime practical orientation of most brokers (Table 3). Arguments in favor and against the present practice of scoping can be summarized along a cost-benefit sequence: benefits in terms of outcome (main and secondary), costs in terms of efforts. Furthermore, this cost-benefit analysis is influenced by realistic implementation practices, perceptions of participants and the actual position of the external CSP broker as third party.

Table 3 approximately here

Scoping proves a very important technique for the creation of sophisticated CSPs. Challenges with the present scoping process as they are managed and trained are (a) difficult assessment whether partnering is actually the best way to go forward, (b) dealing with multiple problem 'owners', (c) screening for an organizational, cultural fit between the potential partners, (d) including a thorough joint problem analysis early in the process, and (e) the transition from a problem analysis to specific partnership objectives that do justice to the complexity of the actual problem, (f) include capacity building and continuous learning possibilities in CSP set-up. Each of these challenges is seriously impacted by the unfathomable characteristics of wicked problems that CSPs often try to resolve. The inclination for a selection bias for simpler problems, for simplifying problems in the partnership formation stage and for coalitions of the willing rather than an optimal fit, is strong (but understandable).

Firstly, one of the key challenges of a scoping process remains finding the best approach to tackle a problem. In the case for CSPs, this boils down to the question if partnering across sectors is indeed presents the best approach, compared to 'going-it-alone' or engaging in other forms of collaboration, e.g. establishing platforms for dialogue. And in case partnering is necessary, between which parties (government, civil society and firms) and in what constellation. In the partnering cycle this question is faced twice: The first time is at the very beginning of the initial, situational analysis (Step 1 of LFA), before making a choice to screen for stakeholders and potential partners with whom to analyze and approach the problem together. And a second time after a thorough and collective problem analysis, to decide if partnering is still the best way forward. Partnering is currently often consciously chosen and promoted by the leaders of top international organizations from all three sectors, because former solo approaches were not sufficiently successful and the prospect of combining all types of resources to achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness for commercial as well as social goals are combined with shared risks and long-term commitment (Wang et al., 2010). Even though such reasoning may be implicitly shared, a check and restatement of it gives legitimacy to all of the following partnering activities and are thus crucial to be executed. When comparing different collaborative models, brokers need to make sure that a common understanding exists about the exact terminologies and specifications of the different approaches. During the process it is also important for brokers to be honest and not create their own jobs by suggesting partnerships when not appropriate.

The second challenge for CSPs in the scoping process is to effectively deal with having multiple problem 'owners', where traditional LFA relies more on one project owner. This problem is easily amplified in cross-sector collaborations due to the enduring skepticism or even outright hostility between the sectors (e.g. Gombra, 2013; Tennyson, 2005; Berger et al., 2004; UNGC, 2011). Brokers need to pay attention to first establish a better understanding in between the parties and build a foundation for a relationship (e.g. in relationship building workshop, including presentation and appreciation of oneself and other organizations; similar to first step of explorative workshop described by Tennyson, 2005 (p.67)), and second establish an appreciation of the other parties' viewpoints, upon which a joint problem analysis and solution generation can be based. IBN is a main tool for brokers for such mediation, but that has its limitations as will be analyzed in a separate paper (Van Tulder and Kahlen, 2014).

Third, when aiming at innovative solutions that bring transformational change to wicked problems, an organizational and cultural fit between the partnering organizations are named as a critical factor. Concepts how to assess for such potential match however remain largely theoretic, and their use in practice, customized to each partnership's unique requirements needs to be tested and advanced by brokers.

Fourth, one of the biggest challenges currently faced in CSP practice, therefore, is the inclusion of a thorough joint problem analysis. While being an integral part of the Logical Framework Approach, critical problem analysis is usually not emphasized neither in the theoretical nor the practitioners partnering literature. Many partnering tool books or monitoring frameworks do not start with the problem definition and diagnosis of a partnership project, but immediately jump to the intended outcome and design (Van Tulder, 2010b). As a thorough problem analysis leads to a better understanding of it, this is a form of knowledge creation, which is undervalued in "a hyperkinetic society, in which fast thinking is more important than deep thinking" (van Tulder, 2010b:3-4). Brokers must not fall prey to such time pressures and resist the temptation to jump to ostensible solutions without conducting a joint-analysis.

The fifth challenge for CSPs scoping and a more sophisticated brokering is the transition from a common problem understanding to a specific partnership objective. This challenge incorporates several of the other challenges, e.g. issues with the multiple ownership or arriving at a common problem understanding and ultimately a shared vision. Brokers in the present practice find it difficult to encourage partners to incorporate such a vision on a complex problem, in order act in concert.

The final challenge in scoping relates to the current trend towards an emphasis of capacity building in partnering and continuous learning (e.g. Burke & Pearson, 2013; Abrahamson & Becker, 2010; WorldVision, 2013; GIZ Capacity WORKS, 2012; UNGC, 2013; Glasson, 1999). Abrahamson and Becker's study show how helpful the application of LFA can be for capacity development plans in the case of disaster risk management collaboration (2010). In their works on collaborative value creation Austin and Seitanidi describe the importance for organizations to stay adaptive, and to engage in "deliberate role recalibration" and experimentation on partnering design and substance (2012b: 938). CSP Brokers can therefore seize an opportunity to incorporate dimensions of flexibility and continuous (loop) learning into the partnership design and processes. This should also help to prevent the occurrence of too technical and complicate procedural action plans as the outcome of scoping, as criticized by Snel & Cowell (2006), or of LFA, as criticized by an interviewee. Many partnerships at the moment seem primarily to be interested in formation. Only when explicitly asked, for instance by donor organisations, monitoring and evaluation procedures are elaborated with some degree of sophistication (Keen and Van Tulder, 2014). Regularly the memorandum of understanding – result of the scoping phase – specifies that M&E 'will be developed' in the first stage of the partnership execution. As a result, many partnerships fall short of a good zero-measurement (IOB evaluations, 2013), while the monitoring process becomes part of a political (re)negotiation process during the implementation of the partnership. This is bound to influence the dynamics of the partnership and ultimately its success (interview). Setting the conditions for proper Monitoring and related governance, thus, can be considered a vital task of the broker in the scoping phase.

6. Conclusion: improving practice from subjective to issues-based scoping

After analyzing the academic and practitioners brokering literature on the questions of who, what, why and how brokers operate, the largest discrepancy and need for better understanding was located at the how question. It further showed, that partnership brokers for sustainable development, are primarily concentrating on the early stages of partnership formation. Despite the claim that they can also play an important role in later phases (and even in the dissolution of the partnership) most of the training and practice of brokers seems to concentrate on the formation phase of partnerships. This mirrors the actual need for partnerships and the relative stage in which most of the cross-sector partnerships have materialized over the last decade. There are not many partnerships that exist longer than five to ten years. It points, however, also at a fundamental weakness of our knowledge on the effectiveness of partnership brokers. The broader claims cannot be substantiated (yet). This paper also showed that for the more modest claim as to the role of brokers as 'intermediaries' in the early stages of partnership formation, still considerable areas are open for discussion both theoretically and at a practical level.

This paper focused in particular on the role CSP brokers play during the scoping phase. Scoping presents a very important step for any cross-sector partnership. When done vigorously (related to the complexity of the problem) and with sufficient time, it has a large positive impact on the actual partnership formation process, as testified by most of the respondents. There remain however sizable challenges that often inhibit a proper execution of a scoping process. We found a number of biases in training as well as the practice of CSP brokers, in particular a selection bias and a problem definition bias. Part of these biases materialized because of the sequence of scoping chosen. In this sequence, partnerships are constructed primarily on the basis of coalitions of the willing, rather than as a coalition of the responsible or relevant stakeholders for a particular problem. There exist a considerable danger of 'subjectivity' and 'simplification' in the present techniques used, either because of limitation with the broker, with the participants or both. The selection of stakeholders as source of information is particularly open for debate. Given the wickedness of many of the sustainable development problems, this approach is understandable, but contains serious risks. For instance, the risk of formatting the wrong partnership vis-à-vis the problem. We have seen that in particular as regards the issue-partnership fit, considerable gaps exist in the actual functioning of the broker. That can also lead to serious misappropriation of energy and efforts, and therefore also lead to underutilized potential of partnerships. The dependent and sometimes vulnerable position of external brokers – being dependent for instance on funding by the parties – does not make it easier for brokers to deal with these challenges.

The paper listed a number of techniques introduced by brokers and broker associations in practice that provide some answers to the above challenges. Most of these techniques are not validated yet, however. Brokers can help to overcome these challenges by adhering to guidelines such as LFA, but need to be careful to allow for enough flexibility and learning loops in its implementation and in the resulting action plans for the CSP. While making use of their mediating, translating and relationship building skills, partnership brokers can furthermore improve the scoping process by helping partners to develop a preliminary vision, ensure a thorough and open problem analysis, and to agree on a shared vision as the development objective. For all these consideration on the advancement of the work of CSP brokers, one must not forget that brokers are not replacing the key roles and works of partners themselves. They can give support and guidance to the partners along the scoping process, of which they can become experts. The practicing community perceives this support as very valuable (interviews). To make themselves more effective in their scoping activities, and consequently enhance the impact of partnerships, brokers cannot focus only on processes and negotiation techniques. They have to accumulate content knowledge as well. It seems that the most influential brokers have that profile already. Further research should indicate not only who they are, but also what exactly they are doing differently from other partnership brokers.

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GIZ-development*	Indian Business Alliance on Water
World Bank*	German Water Partnership
UNIDO*	PPIAF
Dixon Partnering Solutions*	Business Humanitarian Forum
GIZ- EZ Scouts*	GAVI
United Nations Development Program (GSBI, GIM)	Unicef
USAID*	WHO
Canadian International Development Agency	IFC
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)*	OECD
World Economic Forum	Austrian Development Agency
Business in the Community	Dutch Development MMF
Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln*	BPD Water
World Vision	Shell
The Partnering Initiative/ Partnership Broker Association	Microsoft – Collaborative Impact*
UNOP (Office for Partnerships)*	Nike
GSEDC (Great Southern Employment Development Committee)*	Unilever
Devex	BG Group
Accenture Development Partnerships	Alcoa
Business for Social Responsibility	ANZ
UN Office of the Global Compact*	Alcoa
Madrasati	BHP Billiton
European Academy of Business in Society	Partnership Sourcing
Crossroads Foundation	Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW)

Table 1 Sampled Brokering Organizations and interviewees (*)

PBA Training London	Academic literature and other publications on brokers	Frost & Sullivan Pitfall Skills
- Scoping	- Scoping	- Scoping
- Resource-mapping	- Resource-Mapping	- Resource-Mapping
- Facilitation	- Facilitation	
- IBN	- IBN	- IBN
- Relationship -mgmt.	- Relationship-mgmt.	- Relationship-mgmt.
- (Reaching agreement)		
- Reviewing	- Reviewing	- Reviewing
	- Institution-building-	- Institution-building
	- Communication Skills	
	- Coaching	
	- Screening	
	- Benchmarking	

Table 2 Key Brokering skills

Skill Category	Pro-arguments	Counter-arguments
Outcome	- Giving a strong foundation for the partnering approach (p.3, Abrahamson & Becker, 2010) - Avoid grave follow-up problems throughout entire partnering cycle - Concise problem statement (p.14, Wood, 2012) - "Vision of & for the partnership" (p.58, Tennyson, 2005) - Detection of potential synergies (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b) - "Analyze and present current capacities" (p.2, Abrahamson & Becker, 2010)	- Consequences of a (partially) biased problem assessment: - Overspending - Scope creep - Longer time frame - Disappointment of stakeholders and potential abandoning of the project, which can lead to lack of essential resources - Many follow-up negotiations "Little considerations of alternatives" (p.366, Glasson, 1999)
Further Outcomes	- Understanding (Issues, challenges, interests, motivations, etc.) (p.58, Tennyson, 2005, p.13, Environment Agency, 2002) - Identification of stakeholders (p.5, Abrahamson & Becker, 2010) - Internal assessment (p.13, Wood, 2012) - Identification of internal champion(s) (p.13, Wood, 2012) - Due diligence (risks & mitigation) (p.15 & p.13, Wood, 2012; p.26, World Vision, 2013) - Setting expectations (p.14, Wood, 2012) - "Highlight the benefits" (p.12, Environment Agency, 2002) - "Identify additional project options" (p.13, Environment Agency, 2002) - Detection and clear overview of organizational capabilities (and of potential synergies)	- Too standardized reports can miss novel impacts and consequences (p.374, Snell & Cowell, 2006) - Identification of issues can lead to a broadened set of related issues (p.40, Mulvihill, 2003), which can over-complicate the understanding and inhibit progress
Effort	- About LFA: "Avoid making additional studies, if they are not necessary!" (p.8, Örtengren, 2004) - Do not need to be too technical (Glasson, 1999)	- Very difficult forecasting, scenario analysis (Mulvihill, 2003) - Requires sufficient expertise on other approaches - Involvement of all stakeholders and general public (Mulvihill, 2003) - Risk of too technical scoping reports (p.367, Snell & Cowell, 2006)
Realistic implemen-tation	- If kept to the most important criteria, can quickly give a first estimation	- Questionable: How to assess organizational fit, potential for synergies - Potential challenge in balancing neutrality and advocacy of CSP approach - Tension between decision-making efficiency and a precautious approach to the problem at hand, e.g. environmental risks (Snell & Cowell, 2006) - Optimism bias & influence of personal and political interests (World Bank, 2012)
Perception	- Especially helpful for capacity development plans (Abrahamson & Becker, 2010)	- Time consuming and a roadblock to get finally started
3rd party involve-ment	- Helpful for neutral assessments	- Critical if 3rd party is a partnership advocate → bias towards CSP as solution

Table 3 Opportunities and problems in CSP Scoping Practices