

HOW INTER-ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS (IORS)
DEVELOP OVER TIME: A CASE STUDY OF A
CONSORTIUM ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN VOLUNTARY
AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS (VCOS) AND A
VOLUNTARY AGENCY

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory study of a project partnership between a group of Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) and a Voluntary Agency that were commissioned by the Local Authority to deliver a combined service. The partnership is based on a consortium arrangement, an inter-organisational relationship (IOR) between locally driven, delivery-based service providers, and a non-delivery partner, a coordinator. Though their arrangement was only meant to last twelve months, relationships continued after the project ended. While there is an abundance of studies that have examined private and public sector partnerships and multi-agency arrangements, a review of literature established no general theory or framework through which to consider how VCOs collaborate in a project partnership over time. This study was therefore designed to explore how these organisations worked together to complete the project and what became of the partnership after their initial objective was accomplished.

In addition to findings from an evaluation study that examined whether organisations achieved their targets and shared objectives, there were another two interview phases that further illustrated how organisations worked together. Data from seventeen in-depth interviews were collected and analysed until the point of data saturation. Other sources included non-participant observations, mainly from partnership meetings, a focus group, field notes, and secondary data. By triangulating this data, this thesis constructed a collective account of the partnership's journey to complete the pilot project and identified several factors that influenced the partners' IOR. The research process was iterative, unfolding and reflexive. A phenomenological approach using a qualitative methodology was employed to understand the case study.

From the first phase of data collection and analysis, four main themes were identified that captured how these organisations worked together. This involved there being a strategy, participants, process, and an outcome. From the second and third phase of data collection and analysis, further sub-themes were identified within these categories. Being a project, the partnership was a temporary arrangement. Consequently, the consortium had a life-cycle, which is a sequence of phases organisations will come across to deliver their services (Turner, 2009; Weiss and Wysocki, 1992; Westland, 2006). Members experienced a beginning (formation stage), a middle (development and

performance stage), and an end (termination stage). However, as shared meanings were organised into themes, the process captured five stages of development, which coincided with Wilson and Charlton's (1997) five-stage model of partnership working, and Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) group development framework. As data was being triangulated with other sources, the model was modified to account for long periods of relative stability that were punctuated by periods of change (Gersick, 1988, 1989), an overlap between stages, and a reformation period. How their inter-organisational arrangement developed became an emerging and cyclical process (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994).

A further examination of findings identified five underlying themes that influenced the IOR of a partner; these involved (i) the orientation of the project and its management, (ii) the time allocated to forming, developing and nurturing relationships, (iii) the behaviour, interaction and interdependence of organisations or individuals with others in the partnership, (iv) learning and growth, and (v) sustainability, a continuance of relationships and renewed membership. These themes captured how individual, organisational and environmental factors affected collaborative development over the pilot project, and the challenges encountered when charity-based providers form IORs for the first time to deliver a combined service. While this thesis presents a phenomenological approach to understand how locally-driven service providers in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) work together, it also provides a framework to support future studies of collaboration between VCOs in temporary project partnerships.

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I would like to start by thanking all those participants who have kindly given me their time to discuss and observe what it means to collaborate in a consortium. I have learned a great deal from your journey and the challenges voluntary and community organisations face in your sector. Though you may no longer work as a partnership, this research study has documented a final account of your efforts and the time you spent working together. It is something I will always remember.

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Dedications

This work is dedicated to my family.

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PART ONE
OVERVIEW OF THESIS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

As we begin the 21st century we look again to the voluntary and community sector to help us rekindle the spark of civic services that fires the building of strong civic communities; to reform the operation of public services and build a bridge between the needs of individuals living in those communities and the capacity of the state to improve their lives. Our aim must be to build a new partnership using the sector's strengths to challenge and stimulate new ideas, complement our shared objectives and take forward the development of social policy generally (HM Treasury, 2002, p.3).

In the United Kingdom (UK), partnership working has become a key component of the government's modernization agenda (Wildridge et al., 2004). While national and regional governments are developing policy and strategy in the delivery of public services within the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) (McLaughlin, 2004), locally-driven initiatives that aim to make the sector more efficient, effective and manageable are driving organisations to collaborate with other service providers (NCVO, 1996, 2008, 2010). Governments are now focusing on how organisations, agencies and local bodies can work together, preferably in some form of partnership, whereby "two or more organisations join some of their forces to accomplish a specific task" (MacDonald and Chrisp, 2005, p.308). The size, nature and scope of these partnerships vary, and they occur for a number of reasons (Tait and Shah, 2007). The Audit Commission (1998) sees them as delivering coordinated services, tackling 'wicked issues' (i.e. complex problems, such as community care and health improvement, that cross traditional professional boundaries), reducing the fragmentation of local service delivery, bidding for new resources, and meeting statutory partnership working requirements (see Tait and Shah, 2007). There is certainly evidence of organisations being driven to an inter-organisational arrangement (NCVO, 2007a), but who exactly is involved in these relationships? And how do these partnerships benefit a voluntary and community organisation (VCO)?

Ranging from small, local charities to large, well established, national and international organisations, these businesses are mainly non-profit making organisations that provide a wide range of health and socially related services to individuals and local

communities. While these new arrangements have reported benefits in reducing duplication in a sector that has hundreds of thousands of VCOs, there are also risks involved (NCVO, 2007a). VCOs are now being made to change how they operate and bid for projects with other organisations to generate income (NCVO, 2008). Because of the number of VCOs, these reforms have led to greater competition for limited resources (Bussell and Forbes, 2002). Funding that has traditionally been held by government and regional bodies to support the sector does not now exist. These reforms have forced service providers to adopt new business and management practices (e.g. formal working, accountability, and service delivery by contract), and if they do not change they may be forced to close. Osborne (1996) identified this change as an:

....increasing need of voluntary organisations to be seen to manage and to be accountable as they take on an enlarged role in service delivery (p.202).

This has also increased pressure to measure their activities. In order for organisations to demonstrate their competency, to achieve legitimacy, and obtain funding (Barman, 2007), the UK government is calling for new ways of working (NCVO, 2006a). These include assessment and planning, negotiating and specifying procedures, monitoring and managing projects and their evaluation. According to Blackmore (2006), if voluntary organisations are to deliver public services to meet the needs of individuals and communities:

....it must be on their own terms: public service delivery should contribute to the delivery of their own mission; it must be undertaken in ways that respect the independence of the organisation and the expertise and knowledge that they contribute; and the services they provide must be properly costed and paid for (p.1).

For most VCOs, their capacity now depends, in part, on their relationship with others (Paxton et al., 2005). This now involves amalgamating into formal collaborative relationships (Young and Denize, 2008), reducing duplication, and being more 'business-like' in their approach (Dart, 2004; Handy, 1988; MacDonald and Chrisp, 2005). As a result, these organisations are under pressure from government and funders to change and build their capacity (Cairns et al., 2005; Harris and Schlappa, 2007; HM Treasury, 2007), which means these organisations becoming more accountable for the use of public funds (Kelly, 2007). Because this is a new phenomenon, examining collaboration in a joint working arrangement is quite important to theory and practice. The topic of inter-organisational relationships (IORs) is, however, conceptually

fragmented across several disciplines. Research has also mostly focused on ‘public-private partnerships’ (e.g. Deakin, 2002; Field and Peck, 2006; Smith and Wohlstetter, 2006; Trafford and Procter, 2006) and ‘multi-agency arrangements’ (e.g. Armistead and Pettigrew, 2008; Atkinson and Maxwell, 2007; McConkey, 2005). This research study therefore aims to contribute to the field of collaborative theory by exploring how a consortium of several VCOs and an agency develops over time. In doing so, this thesis will attempt to provide new insight into and knowledge of these temporary project arrangements.

1.2 The Case Study

This thesis explores a single case study of a partnership that commenced in 2007. Originally I was contracted as a Research Assistant by the Centre of Knowledge, Innovation, Technology and Enterprise (KITE) within Newcastle University Business School (NUBS) to evaluate whether this partnership achieved its objectives. During this examination, I felt there was more to the inter-organisational arrangement that was first evident, that is, how organisations worked together to complete the project. I took it upon myself to explore this phenomenon further. While taking into consideration findings/results from the evaluation project, this research study provides a more comprehensive understanding of collaboration. This involved interviewing organisational members and observing the partnership over different periods of time. By taking this approach, I attempted to capture how IORs developed and what happened to the partnership as a result of the pilot project.

The partnership is a consortium of service providers consisting of locally-driven organisations that are charities. They are run by a handful of individuals who are mainly paid members of staff and volunteers. These organisations were contracted in April 2007 to deliver employment and training provision to people with disabilities and mental health illnesses as a ‘combined service’. The partnership was funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and commissioned by the Local Authority (LA). Chapter 6, section 6.5, and Chapter 9 provide an account of these organisations in the case study. The pilot project lasted twelve months but organisations continued to meet and work together. This study therefore draws upon two periods of time:

- the first is the *pilot period*, when there was a contractual obligation to deliver services as a group, and
- the second is a *continuance period*, which looks at what happened to their relationship after the project ended.

In addition to findings from the evaluation report, this thesis examines seventeen in-depth interviews with members that represented the organisations in the partnership, a focus group exercise, non-participant observational methods, and secondary sources. The research process involved retracing the partnership's journey from the very beginning and observing it to the point when it ended.

1.3 The Research Question and Aims

During the evaluation study, which became the first phase of fieldwork in this thesis, a research question emerged:

How do Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) and a Voluntary Agency, which have been commissioned to work on a pilot project partnership, collaborate to jointly deliver employment and training provision to people with disabilities and mental health illnesses?

While the main objective of this thesis is to explore how VCOs working in a partnership experience collaboration, the research process has been designed to:

1. Examine each organisation's account of the phenomenon and compare it with those of other providers, which will attempt to capture meaningful expressions of collaboration that are shared amongst individuals in the partnership;
2. Construct a collective account of the project partnership by exploring shared meaning, e.g. categories and themes of collaboration. This will attempt to demonstrate how collaboration formed, developed and ended; and
3. Identify underlying themes that influenced the partners' IOR. This will take into account everything that was collected, analysed and documented to uncover the

essence of the partnership's journey – those factors that affected how these organisations worked together.

The primary objective of this thesis is to capture how a group of service delivery organisations working with a non-service delivery partner experience collaboration. However, this research project will also identify how the partnership's journey is experienced and interpreted by the researcher (see Finlay, 2002; Johnson and Duberley, 2003; Johnson et al., 2006). This will involve reflexivity, which means “reflecting on the way in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p.208). This approach requires the researcher to document and examine his role/position, assumptions, behaviour and actions as part of the research process. A phenomenological approach is important in this exercise (Smith et al., 2009). By employing a case study design using a qualitative methodology to explore the partnership's journey from the beginning (conception) across a period of time to its end (termination), this thesis will attempt to advance the study of collaboration for its use in organisational behaviour and management studies.

1.4 Research Framework

The research framework of this case study is summarised in table 1.

Philosophy	Phenomenological
Ontology	Relativist or Social Constructionist
Epistemology	Interpretive
Methodology	Qualitative
Approach	Iterative
Research Design	Case study: mainly cross-sectional but also, in part, longitudinal (e.g. non-participant observations of partnership meetings)
Methods of Data Collection	Primary: findings from an evaluation exercise, in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and a focus group. Secondary: field notes and secondary data.
Analysis	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which will involve a constant comparative analysis method and a hermeneutic cycle.

Table 1. The research framework

This study has employed a phenomenological philosophy and a qualitative methodology because of the exploratory nature of this research project. Myers (2009, p.9) claims this type of research “is best if you want to study a subject in depth (e.g. one or a few organisations)” and “when the particular topic is new and there is not much previously published research on that topic”. A case study design was chosen to provide a descriptive account of human experience, i.e. how organisations worked together, and how meanings, those meaningful expressions of collaboration, are shared amongst organisations that were part of the project partnership. Being an interpretive study my position is dissimilar from those of the positivistic (scientific) tradition that use quantitative research methods. For an interpretivist, there is no objective reality. A researcher will attempt to understand the multiple realities of a given experience. This would initially involve interviewing participants and then triangulating observations with other data collection methods. Part 3, Chapters 5, 6 and 7, will examine the research framework in this thesis.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) refer to the procedure of capturing and exploring meaningful expressions of a phenomenon as ‘intuitive locating’, a process in which data and analysis unfolds over time to identify how a phenomenon has taken place. This is supported by McAuley (2004). It involves what Smith and Osborn (2008, p.53) refer to as a “two-stage interpretation process”: participants will attempt to interpret their experience while the observer will articulate their sense-making into some sequential order (Weick, 1995). In doing so, this provides a ‘phenomenological structure’ (Giorgi, 1970), which involves “collecting statements from participants, specifically their descriptions of the phenomenon being studied, and systematically and rigorously interrogating these descriptions ... to arrive at the structure of the experience” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p.213).

To avoid the temptation of labelling their experiences the first time they are read (Giorgi, 1970), a rigorous process of examination of interviews takes place over three phases of fieldwork until observations reach a point of data saturation. This is a time when no new data emerges or when observations stop. This type of study indicates data collection as typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). The subsequent analysis of these methods is then triangulated to improve the quality and validity of research findings (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009). The period of writing

up formalises the content and structure of my discussion chapter, which will give detailed conclusions at the end of this thesis.

Taking these issues into consideration, the researcher has a particular responsibility to ensure that a study is conducted ethically and responsibly (McNabb, 2008; Myers, 2009) (see Chapter 7, section 7.7). The researcher should be mindful of the methods used, their presence during fieldwork, and the implications these have for others and the topic being investigated (Saunders et al., 2009). For a qualitative researcher, ethical practice is usually defined as “a moral stance that involves respect and the protection for the people actively consenting to be studied” (Myers, 2009, p.45). This view is also supported by McNabb (2008). Consent was something obtained prior to commencement of this research study. Participation was voluntary, and consent was agreed by all partners in the partnership. Organisations were advised they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point should they wish to do so. It was also agreed that individuals would be kept anonymous. Real names of interviewees (participants) would not appear in this thesis. While verbatim quotes were included, all names were removed and coded so as not to associate sensitive information with the individuals that provided it.

1.5 Summary and Outline of Thesis

This chapter has attempted to introduce this thesis and the motivation behind it. It identifies the aims and objectives of this research study, the research framework, and an overview of its content. It has also briefly taken into account the exploratory nature of this case study, ethical considerations, and issues pertaining to the validity and reliability of research findings, which will be examined in more detail in subsequent chapters. Table 2 provides an outline of this thesis.

Part	Chapter	Section	Description
1	1	Introduction	This section discusses the research problem, the need for the study, the research framework, and an overview of the thesis.
2	2 & 3	Literature Review	This section has two parts. The first part will discuss the main areas of consideration and debates surrounding the case study; these include partnership working, IOR and collaboration, and other literature in the research topic, e.g. project working and group development theory. The second part will discuss research and studies that have examined the VCS and consortium arrangements.
2	4	Theoretical Framework	This section draws on the literature search to construct an integrated theoretical framework to examine the research question.
3	5	Philosophical Assumptions and Paradigms	This section describes the philosophical approach that guided this thesis to a phenomenological, interpretive study.
3	6	The Research Strategy, Methodology, and Methods	This section provides a review of the case study's research strategy, which has used a qualitative methodology and different research methods to explore collaboration.
3	7	Data Collection and Analysis Process	This section identifies the process and the steps taken to understand collaboration, e.g. how data was collected, managed and analysed.
4	8	Findings & Results	This section identifies the findings and results from the analysis process, the main categories and themes of collaboration from an organisation's shared experience, and the collective account of the pilot project.
5	9 & 10	Discussion & Conclusions	This section has two parts. Part 1 discusses the researcher's observations, reflections and reflexivity, and underlying themes that influenced the partners' IOR. Part 2 is this final chapter, which serves to discuss and conclude this research study. It also identifies possible areas of further study, implications and limitations of this thesis, and gives concluding remarks.

Table 2. An outline of the thesis

As this study was not conducted in a well-defined sequence, as one stage was completed another stage followed, the research process was iterative (see Figure 1).

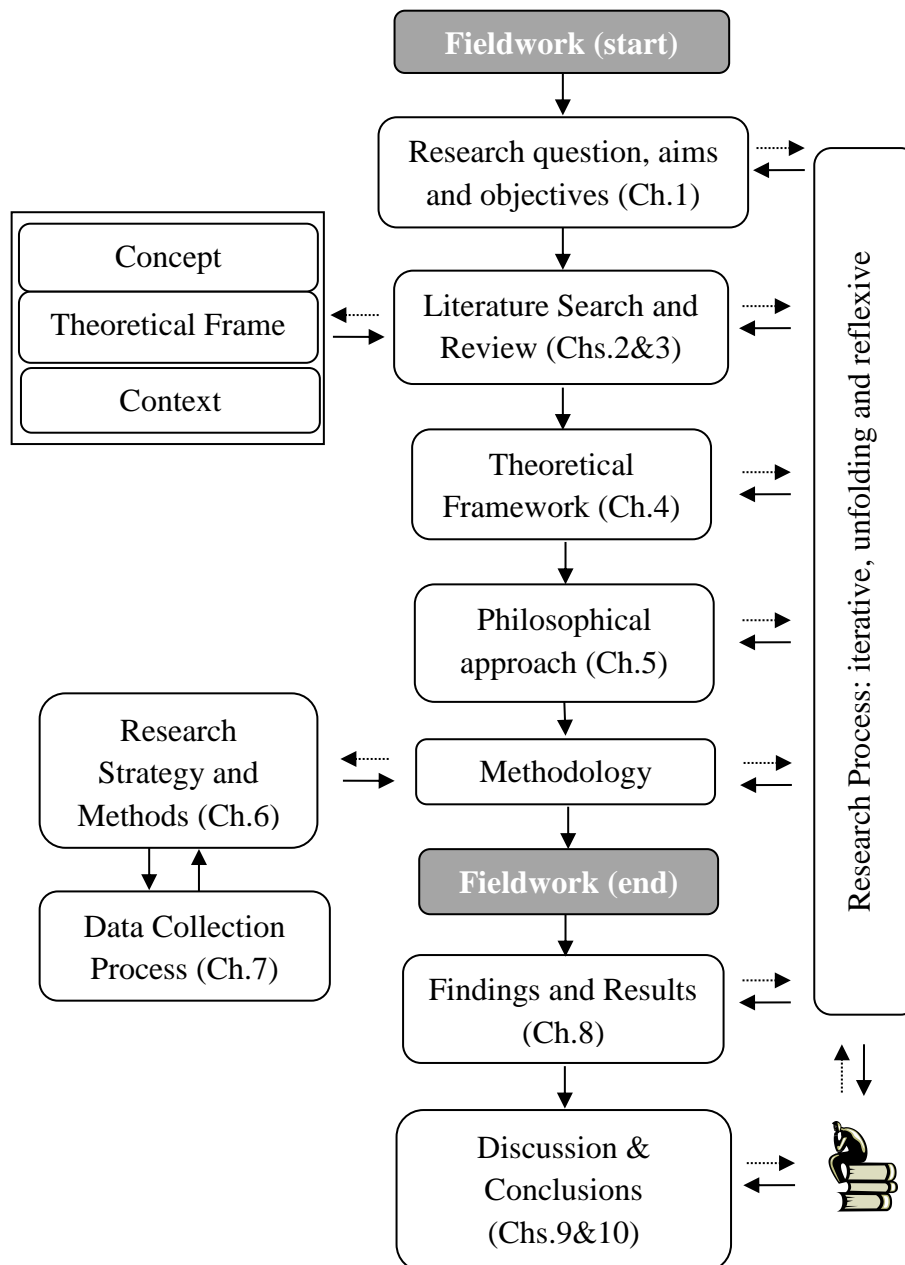


Figure 1. The research process

This research process demonstrates fieldwork and the development of chapters in different stages. However, at different points in time earlier stages were revisited (Saunders et al., 2009). This helped to define, develop and refine chapters 1-7, and, as a result, the process informed findings and results, discussions and conclusions after fieldwork came to an end.

PART TWO
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CHAPTER 2

MAIN CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAME: PARTNERSHIP WORKING, INTER-ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS (IORS) & COLLABORATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first part of the literature review, which aims to demonstrate the main debates and discussions of partnership working that have been researched and discussed by a number of scholars across several disciplines. The second part can be found in Chapter 3, which addresses the *context* of the case study. Chapter 2, however, will review the *concept* and *theoretical frame* of the research question. This section will identify research that has explored and examined partnerships and inter-organisational arrangements, why organisations work together, and how they do so over a period of time. It has been organised into two interrelated sections, these include:

1. *Main concepts in the topic*: partnership working, inter-organisational relationships (IORS) and collaboration between organisations, and
2. *The theoretical frame*: the transformation process of collaboration over time, which looks at: (i) whether change is something planned or emerging, (ii) whether groups develop in stages / phases, and (iii) whether the process of collaboration transforms linearly and/or non-linearly.

While partnerships have become broadly conceptualised across several disciplines, there is little evidence of a partnership's journey, or models and frameworks that specifically demonstrate how Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations collaborate over time. There is no stage-by-stage or life-cycle explanation of an IOR between organisations in a VCS partnership (see Cropper and Palmer, 2008). This chapter has therefore been designed to provide insight into the main issues of this topic, as-well-as to discuss collaboration as a concept, process and an outcome. This means initially defining partnership working and an inter-organisational arrangement, and the problems inherent in the subject matter, before looking at the study's context, which follows this chapter.

2.2 Defining Partnership

The term ‘partnership’ has been extensively considered by various advocates and writers in Education, Health, Government and Society, Social Policy and Administration, and Organisational Behaviour & Management studies. However, understanding organisations working together is not as straightforward as it seems because there is no single definition or model to explain the topic within and between these disciplines (Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Pinkus, 2003). Glendinning (2002) has defined partnerships as organisations, groups or agencies that “denote a particular type of relationship in which one or more common goals, interests and/or dependencies are identified, acknowledged and acted upon, but in which the autonomy and separate accountabilities of the partner organisations can remain untouched” (p.118). Brinkerhoff (2002) claimed a partnership to be a:

...dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. Partnership encompasses mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability and transparency (p.21).

These arrangements can range from limited and loosely formed collaborations to relationships where there is complete organisational integration between parties (Walshe et al., 2007). Partnerships have become an important feature in the formulation and delivery of a wide range of policies, programmes and projects in different sections, and can be a “preferred means of tackling complex problems that are perceived to be intractable and not amenable to resolution by any one agency working alone” (Percy-Smith, 2006, p.313). They can also be a “solution to reaching efficiency and effectiveness objectives, and as the most appropriate relationship as defined by its value-laden principles” (Brinkerhoff, 2002, p.21).

Though there are many benefits of partnership working, the topic has become broadly conceptualised with terms that are frequently used interchangeably (Tait and Shah, 2007). For example, words like strategic alliance, joint venture, coalition, collaboration, inter-organisational relationship (IOR) and inter-organisational collaboration have all been used to explain a partnership. While others have stated the logic of partnership is plain (Macdonald and Chrisp, 2005), there has been relatively little progress in

addressing the ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions of partnership working (Dowling et al., 2004). There is also a failure to include the underlying views and experiences of different stakeholders that either work in a partnership or have been affected by it (Glasby and Lester, 2004). Despite the history of partnerships in many fields, a solid understanding of the topic and the different types of partnerships that exist is lacking (Smith and Wohlstetter, 2006). While a broad view of partnership working has been presented, the following sections will provide further understanding of this subject.

2.3 Evaluating Partnership Working

A number of tools have been developed to help participants and the managers of partnerships to evaluate the progress, ‘health’ or success of partnership working (Glendinning, 2002; Wildridge et al., 2004). Armistead and Pettigrew (2008) identify them as articles, books and training packages that have been developed to:

...assist organisations working in partnership. Increasingly, government agencies have produced guidance but they tend to be based on their own requirements rather than those of the partnership. Others have reviewed the literature for prescriptions on partnership working and suggested that there is no easily transferable model of partnerships. Nevertheless, the impression given is that there are plenty of prescribed recipes for effective partnership-working (pp.20-21).

These evaluative frameworks have been developed primarily as ‘management tools’ to help participating partners and various stakeholders identify obstacles and the progress of a partnership (Glendinning, 2002). “The interest in evaluating partnership outcomes is commonly driven by a desire to justify the investment of resources, to identify and replicate what works and to eliminate interventions that do not work” (Boydell and Rugkasa, 2007, p.218). However, in terms of what is being evaluated, the purpose of the evaluation, and who is evaluating it, can raise substantial ‘methodological challenges’ (Glendinning et al., 2005; Ling, 2000). Boydell and Rugkasa (2007, p.218) claim “these frameworks mainly intended to assess the way in which the partnerships are functioning and to inform ongoing development”, which “usually pay more attention to partnership processes than the measurement of impact”. Drawing on theory and evidence from the partnership literature, two overarching avenues to understand partnership working in the delivery of services have been identified, namely the process and the outcome of an

inter-organisational arrangement (e.g. Boydell and Rugkasa, 2007; El Ansari et al., 2001; Dowling et al., 2004; Halliday et al., 2004). Then again, another feature is the ‘nature’ of these partnerships (Powell and Dowling, 2006). Are they private, public or voluntary? Why are these organisations entering into a partnership? What are their individual and collective expectations? Although the literature establishes a clear social and political rationale for organisations to enter partnership working across several fields (e.g. Health, Education, Geography, and Social Policy), there is insufficient evidence of more mainstream organisational and management research that evaluates and questions different dimensions:

- (i) At a strategic level: a decision-making approach where organisations provide more effective service provision through joint working;
- (ii) At a functional level: how organisations adopt collaboration within their day-to-day operations; and
- (iii) At a behavioural level: the relationships between individuals and organisations.

Evidence shows that partnership working, per se, does not guarantee positive improvements to services or progress towards outcomes (Pierson, 2008). “To work well, partnerships require a continuous reflection on the collaborative process” (Pierson, 2008, p.52). However, Newman et al. (2008, p.542) have another view, in which “organisations create ‘synergies’, where positive outcomes for service users depend on high levels of service integration at the point of delivery”. Their study of how users and carers viewed a partnership captures the importance of effective joint working in order to deliver the outcomes valued by users and how added value is gained by participants cooperating (Petch et al., 2007). This view is supported by Wildridge et al. (2004). Successful partnership working is about human interaction where “the act of working together is a benefit in its own right, alongside any anticipated improvements in service delivery” (Wildridge et al., 2004, p.4).

Emerging from the corporate strategy literature is the concept of ‘synergy’, which refers to “the additional benefits of companies acting together rather than separately” (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998, p.308). The synergy, or added value, approach is aimed at increasing the value created by combining complementary competencies of separate organisations. Lasker et al. (2001) see it as a practical framework to study and

strengthen ‘collaborative advantage’ (see Huxham, 1993). The idea of partnership carries a positive resonance that appeals to both policy-makers and practitioners that can be conceptualised as $1+1+1 = \text{more than } 3$ (Dhillon, 2005, 2009). By working synergistically, “individuals and organisations can achieve more by working together, in partnership, than they can by working individually” (Dhillon, 2009, p.687). The synergy or added value that partners seek to achieve through collaboration is more than a mere exchange of resources.

A partnership creates synergy by combining the perspectives, knowledge, and skills of diverse partners in a way that enables the partnership to (1) think in new and better ways about how it can achieve its goals; (2) plan more comprehensive, integrated programs; and (3) strengthen its relationship to the broader community. The synergy that a partnership can achieve is more than simply an exchange of resources among its partners. When partners effectively merge their perspectives, knowledge, and skills to create synergy, they create something new and valuable - a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Weiss et al., 2002, p.684).

Hastings (1996) and Mackintosh (1992) also state that partnerships may be created to generate synergy, to transform the goals and cultures of one or more of the partner organisations or to enlarge the budget available to tackle a particular policy or welfare problem (see Glendinning et al., 2005; Powell and Dowling, 2006; Slater et al., 2006). Lasker et al. (2001) found most organisational synergies take one of six forms:

- Shared know-how
- Coordinated strategies
- Shared tangible resources
- Vertical integration
- Pooled negotiating power
- Combined business creation

While literature demonstrates a number of reasons for synergy, there are also downsides to these relationships. They are every bit as real as the upsides of synergy but are just not seen as clearly (Goold and Campbell, 1999). For example, collaborative inertia or negative synergy can result in value being obscured and problems occurring between organisations (Ball et al., 2010). If partnership working is to provide good value for money, it is essential that costs are outweighed by the benefits achieved (Sorensen-

Bentham, 2007). Lasker et al. (2001) illustrate several determinants that influence synergy (see Table 3).

Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Space, equipment, goods • Skills and expertise • Information • Connections to people, organisations and groups • Endorsements • Convening power
Partner characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heterogeneity • Level of involvement
Relationships among partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Respect • Conflict • Power differentials
Partnership characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Administration and management • Governance • Efficiency
External environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community characteristics • Public and organisational policies

Table 3. Determinants that influence synergy

This table identifies the specific attributes of each determinant that influence a partnership's level of synergy and resulting effectiveness (Lasker et al., 2001). Most commonly, issues concerning aims, culture, communication, power, trust and complexity tend to get in the way of organisations making any real progress (Vangen and Huxham, 2006). Vlaar et al. (2006) state that this could be based on problems of understanding, which can emanate from participants in these relationships as they could be accustomed to different structures, cultures, internal environments, management styles, and working practices or ideologies. Unfortunately, the preponderance of this literature has focused on private and public sector settings. This thesis therefore "recognises partnerships can operate at a number of levels" (Miller and Ahmad, 2000, p.12), within and across different sectors (Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Wilson and Charlton, 1997), and are developed for different purposes (Tait and Shah, 2007; Walshe et al., 2007).

2.4 Forming an Inter-organisational Arrangement

Despite there being no consolidated body of inter-organisational theory (Williams, 2002), Hall (1999) identified three types of inter-organisational relationships (IORs);

they involve dyadic (pairwise) relationships, inter-organisational sets, and inter-organisational networks. Whetten's (1981) research identified the same themes in four categories. Sets were recognised as 'organisational', which is the total sum of inter-organisational linkages established by an organisation, and 'action', essentially purposeful networks. The former refers to an interacting group of organisations, whereas the latter is explicitly centred around a single organisation (Whetten, 1981). Broadly speaking, a dyad displays a relationship between just two organisations. A 'set' places emphasis on a focal agency and all of its dyadic relationships with other organisations. A 'network' consists of multiple organisations linked by a specified type of relation to achieve certain goals or resolve specific problems (Elgarah et al., 2005). There is some overlap between Whetten's (1981) action set and Elgarah et al.'s (2005) depiction of a network relationship. Because this thesis is focusing on the relationship between the interacting group of organisations within the partnership and not its network, which comprises multiple linkages and organisations, the case study is associated with Whetten's (1981) action set category. This involves a group of organisations forming a temporary alliance or arrangement where there is a common goal or shared activity to achieve.

Forming relationships with other organisations can be a means to develop horizontal, vertical and symbiotic forms of collaborative practice. They can be within a sector or outside it, e.g. a cross-sector relationship. They can also be within a specific location or across it, e.g. a cross-regional relationship. Depending on the purpose or objectives of the partnership, relationships can be short-term or long-term arrangements (Miller and Ahmad, 2000). According to Ranade & Hudson (2003, p.33), "partners will attempt to co-design something new together for a shared purpose, based on an understanding of the 'whole system' and the interdependence of its parts". They refer to cooperation between organisations as a 'co-evolving partnership' that requires commitment from partner agencies and individuals. Ranade & Hudson (2003) identified several necessary conditions for success in a co-evolving partnership, which they adapted from Pratt et al. (1999). They include:

- Building relationships: people need time to explore purpose.
- Changing mental maps: so that people see themselves as part of a whole and stop shifting blame to other parts of the system.

- Diversity: sufficient mix of people from different levels and organisations to enable new possibilities to emerge.
- Expectations: that change can be fuelled by passion and energy, not just money, and that common purpose is the source of coherence.
- Iteration: people need to be able to try and try again.
- Leadership: facilitating common ownership and responsibility for the behaviour of the ‘whole’ as well as one’s own individual behaviour.
- Future: incentives which enlarge future possibilities and enable people to see their future as linked (Ranade & Hudson, 2003, p.33).

These types of relationships have been referred to as ‘inter-organisational collaboration’ (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). This involves working collaboratively across organisational, sectoral and national boundaries in order to deal more effectively with issues that cannot be tackled by an organisation acting alone. However, the complexities and challenges faced by organisations wishing to engage in collaboration have been widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Franco, 2008; Gray and Clyman, 2003; Huxham and Hibbert, 2005; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; McCaffrey et al., 1995). To address these difficulties and increase the likelihood of collaborative success, researchers and practitioners of collaboration advocate different approaches to develop and nurture inter-organisational collaboration (e.g. Gray, 1989). The next section will examine these approaches by reviewing the concept of collaboration to distinguish its various features and dynamics.

2.5 Collaboration between Organisations

There are a multitude of definitions that give an account of collaboration as a concept. “Its Latin roots identify it as a means to ‘work together’, where two or three organisations form a partnership to achieve what no single organisation could (easily) achieve on its own” (Nowella and Harrison, 2011, p.20). “Collaboration is understood to involve: (1) cooperation, coordination, and exchange of resources (e.g. people, funding, information and ideas), and (2) mutual respect for individual goals and/or joint goals” (Lewis et al., 2010, p.462). Gray (1989, p.5) defined collaboration as “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their limited vision of what is

possible”. The search for a more comprehensive definition leads to a myriad of possibilities, each having something to offer and none being entirely satisfactory to conceive a definitive model or framework. One of the problems in attempting to understand collaboration or any phenomenon that has been used in so many contexts is to define it (Phillips et al., 2000; Thomson et al., 2007). Chen (2010) and Gajda (2004) both agree that the definition of collaboration is ‘elusive’. It is also “often difficult for organisations to put collaboration into practice and assess it with certainty” (Gajda, 2004, p.65). “To put it simply, lack of consensus among scholars on the meaning of collaboration makes it difficult to compare findings across studies and to know whether what is measured is really collaboration” (Thomson et al., 2007, pp.23-24).

Although much is understood about why partnerships form, relatively little is known about how collaboration works among different types of organisational relationships (Thomas, 2009). For example, how the collaborative process enables partnerships to accomplish more than individuals and organisations can on their own (Weiss et al., 2002), or how a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an ‘interactive process’ (Hartono and Holsapple, 2004) using “shared rules, norms, and structures to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (Wood and Gray, 1991, p.146). Gray (1989) captures this collaborative process in three phases: (i) problem setting, which involves problem definition, identification and legitimacy of stakeholders, and resource identification, (ii) direction setting, which includes establishing ground rules, agenda setting, and exploring options, and (iii) implementation and monitoring. Wilson and Charlton (1997) extend this into a ‘five-stage model’ (see Table 4), and Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) refer to it as a ‘four stage life-cycle of partnerships’, which includes pre-partnership collaboration, partnership creation and consolidation, partnership programme, and partnership termination and succession. Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) note that each stage has a predominant mode of governance and relationship between stakeholders.

Stage	Activities
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners come together through mutual recognition of a common need, or in a joint effort to obtain public funds. • If they have not worked together before, the partners begin the process of overcoming differences in backgrounds and approach, building trust and respect. • There may be a need for training, building each partner’s capacity to operate effectively in this new organisation.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through a process of dialogue and discussion, the partners establish the common

	<p>ground and work towards agreeing a vision and mission statement for the initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The original core group might agree on the need to involve more individuals and organisations in the initiative. • The partners develop mechanisms for assessing needs and quantifying the size of the task they propose to undertake. • The initiative combines the information generated by the needs assessment exercise with the vision and mission statement to produce an agenda for action.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The formal framework and organisational structure of the partnership is designed and put in place. • The partners set specific goals, targets and objectives linked to the agenda for action. • Where appropriate, the executive arm of the partnership selects or appoints a management team to oversee the work of the initiative.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partnership delivers to its action plan, whether this be service provision or some other function. • The executive arm seeks to maintain the involvement of all partners, formulates policy decisions and ensures the continuing accountability of the partnership. • There is an ongoing process of assessing, evaluating and refining the operations of the partnership.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate, the partners should plan their exit strategy. This involves developing a new set of goals for the survival and continuation of the work of the initiative in some form. • They should seek to create 'life after death' by transferring the assets of the partnership back into the community with which they work.

Table 4. Stages of partnership working (Source: Wilson and Charlton, 1997, pp.16-17)

According to Wilson and Charlton (1997), the development process is not necessarily sequential. "Partnership initiatives can move through stages of development process at a different pace, sometimes attaining goals that are set out in the later stages of development quite early on in their life" (Wilson and Charlton, 1997, p.17). Lowndes and Skelcher (1998, p.331) also suggest how tensions change over time "as their primary tasks change from formation into delivery and then to closure or succession". Hickman (1998) refers to collaboration as a process through which parties, who see different aspects of the problem, are able to constructively explore their differences and similarities to search for solutions that go beyond an organisation's individual vision of what is possible. Hickman (1998) goes on to say that collaboration is essentially an emergent process rather than something that identifies a prescribed state of being. Osborne (1996) describes some of the kinds of goals that are seen in collaborative situations. There are three levels. At the top level there are the meta-goals, the reasons for collaboration. This can be seen in a 'joint statement' that documents what organisations are aiming to achieve. The second level is the macro-goals, which are goals that each of the participating organisations is likely to want to achieve for itself

through the collaboration but which are not related to the overt purpose of the collaboration, something which organisations can use for other projects. The third level is the micro-goals, which are goals that individual members of participating organisations may wish to achieve, e.g. to improve how the organisation is managed by learning how other organisations operate. In order to achieve value (e.g. meeting individual, organisational and societal aims), partners have to decide on the extent to which these goals are presented to others. Huxham and Vangen (2005) refer to this as ‘common wisdom’, which is shared understanding and consensus between members.

Having goals explicitly stated in the contract will identify their collective purpose and what partners are aiming to achieve (NCVO, 2008). However, incompatibilities may demonstrate different goals. Huxham and Vangen (2005) refer to this as ‘common practice’. Due to the variety of organisational and individual agendas, reaching an agreement between parties can be difficult. Organisations may have to be willing to compromise their own priorities for the sake of defining collective goals for the collaboration to function. Certain questions and issues therefore need to be addressed before a partnership commences:

- First dimension - Partnership Congruence: do partners operate at arm’s length or arm in arm? Is the relationship one of dependency or interdependency?
- Second dimension - Strategic Alignment: how well does the collaboration fit the partners’ missions, strategies and values? Is there overlap? Can greater alignment be achieved?
- Third dimension - Collaborative Value: are partners’ resources being mobilised so as to generate as much value as possible? Are partners leveraging their distinctive competencies and combining them synergistically?
- Fourth dimension - Relationship Management: is the partnership a minimally managed collaboration or does it require joint effort? Is responsibility for the relationship an assigned duty? Are adequate structures in place to encourage collaboration? Are communication processes explicit? How high are performance expectations set, and how is accountability ensured?

Halseth and Ryser (2007) found organisations that have previous working relationships will find these dimensions easier to manage than a new arrangement where there is ambiguity and uncertainty between partners (see Huxham and Vangen, 2000a; Osborne

and Murray, 2000). Another important area of thought is how a partnership manages and maintains these new arrangements. Because individual representatives can come and go as they take on new roles within their organisations or move in or out of them altogether (Huxham et al., 2000), the possibility of maintaining continuity is difficult (Huxham and Vangen, 2000b). Sections 2.8 and 2.9 will look at these issues in more detail. These theories often denote a life-cycle explanation of collaboration (Cropper and Palmer, 2008; Jap and Anderson, 2007; Quinn and Cameron, 1983). They demonstrate a beginning, evolvement and dissolving period of an IOR (Jap and Anderson, 2007; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). These relationships can be conceptualised as a process theory of organisational development and change (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). This transformation process will be discussed in subsequent sections.

2.6 Collaborative Advantage and Collaborative Inertia

‘Collaborative advantage’ is broadly defined as the value or benefit gained by a group of participants working together (Huxham, 1993, 2003; Huxham and Macdonald, 1992; Huxham and Vangen, 2004; Kanter, 1994). It essentially captures the synergy argument (Huxham, 2003; Lasker et al., 2001; Weiss et al., 2002), i.e. $1+1+1 = \text{more than } 3$. According to Huxham (1996, p.141), “achieving collaborative advantage requires that usually something creative is produced – perhaps an objective is met – that no organisation could have produced on its own and that each organisation, through the collaboration, is able to achieve its own objectives better than it could alone”. However, a second concept that has dominated studies of collaboration is ‘collaborative inertia’, which captures what happens very frequently in practice, i.e. an outcome that does not fulfil all expectations (Huxham and Vangen, 2004). This is demonstrated when the rate of output is extremely slow or where there are stories of pain and difficulty (Huxham, 2003). Clearly, there is a desire to achieve advantage rather than inertia (Huxham and Vangen, 2004). Huxham and Vangen (2004) concluded in their research that unless potential for real collaborative advantage is clear, where there is added value or synergy, it is generally best, if there is a choice, to avoid collaboration. They presented seven overlapping perspectives of management conflict when collaborating:

1. We must have common aims but we cannot agree on them;
2. Sharing power is important but people behave as if it’s all in the purse strings;

3. Trust is necessary for successful collaboration but we are suspicious of each other;
4. We are partnership-fatigued and tired of being pulled in all directions;
5. Everything keeps changing;
6. Leadership is not always in the hands of members; and
7. Leadership activities continually meet with dilemmas and difficulties (Huxham and Vangen, 2004).

This set of perspectives does not paint a positive picture of collaboration but does illustrate possible issues when organisations work together, realising collaborative advantage is ‘challenging’ and inertia may take place at any point in time. It is a joint effort to resolve these issues (Vangen and Huxham, 2006).

Whilst there are no easy answers to managing collaborations, it is possible to reach good outcomes if you understand how collaborations work. Because collaborations are complex and dynamic, much of what takes place is not within the control of individual managers (Vangen and Huxham, 2006, p.4).

However, Douglas (2008) recommends not being ‘seduced by the rhetoric’; if the need for partnership working is critical for organisations, then they must carefully plan for it but also cooperate to make it happen. Otherwise, as advised by Huxham and Vangen (2004) and Thomson and Perry (2006), ‘don’t do it!’ The result will be inertia, but the scale of this or how much it will cost an organisation to enter and maintain a partnership will depend on how inefficient and ineffective their relationship has been. Moreover, if organisations have a history of past relations with each other and the legacy is a positive one, there may be a good store of trust and reciprocity for service providers to draw upon (Arney and Scott, 2010). However, “if the legacy is negative and laden with past conflicts, then one organisation may be held responsible by another for the perceived acts of their predecessors” (Arney and Scott, 2010, p.80). Collaboration can thus be an activity that may be difficult to manage and sustain without organisations working together in unison or where there is, at least, a commitment or contribution by individual members to achieve common goals.

Because the partnership in this thesis was based on a project initiative, the following sections aim to discuss the main issues, and contributions of literature surrounding IORs that support the understanding of collaboration. Three main areas have been considered;

they involve the nature of projects, collaborative development over time, and the transformation process of IORs.

2.7 The Nature of Projects

Summarising the current conceptual base of project management may be a logical place to start but is not easy. There is no single theoretical base from which to explain and guide the management of projects. There are instead various theoretical approaches, many of which overlap. These operate both for individual aspects of project management (e.g. control, risk, leadership, etc.) and for the discipline as a whole (Winter et al., 2006, p.640).

Projects and project management in practice and theory is an expanding field (Clegg et al., 2002; Larson and Wikstrom, 2007; Van Donk and Molloy, 2008). “It is an activity that can be found in virtually all organisations” (Van Donk and Molloy, 2008, p.129). While project management focuses on the management and organisation of single projects, “project working often involves many separate organisations interacting with one another” (Larson and Wikstrom, 2007, p.328). Grabher (2002, pp.207-208) refers to projects as “one-off, self-contained, temporary and complex tasks that do not easily fit into routine organisational processes and often require dedicated modes of organisation and specific management practices and techniques”. This was also recognised by Manning and Sydow (2011). They describe projects as “contractual, temporary, and relatively short-lived arrangements, where many relationships do not even exceed one single project” (Manning and Sydow, 2011, p.6).

While project-based working is frequently reported in the private sector (e.g. ship building, construction, engineering, and manufacturing), and in the public sector (e.g. health and social care, employment, crime, and regional regeneration), little is known about these formal, contractual relationships in the VCS from the perspective of the individuals and organisations in a partnership. Therefore, this section will provide a general overview of project working until further case studies are examined.

It is recognised that the contexts of projects within an inter-organisational arrangement can be diverse and tailored to the objectives and requirements of several partners within a temporary timeframe (Hellgren and Stjernberg, 1995; Lawson and Wilstrom, 2007). The project’s success is, in part, also dependent on the skills and abilities of the individual project members (i.e. the ‘project manager’) and how they work with other

organisational members (Turner and Müller, 2003). Jones and Lichtenstein (2008) define inter-organisational projects as:

Two or more organisational actors from distinct organisations working jointly to create a tangible product/service in a limited period of time (p.234).

Project-based organisations (Bredin, 2008) or temporary organisations (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995; Modig, 2007; Turner and Müller, 2003) demonstrate an emerging organisational form to integrate diverse and specialised intellectual resources and expertise (see Sydow et al., 2004). Much of the complexity in and around projects stems from time-related aspects such as sequence (dependencies over time), duration (long-term perspective or short duration), synchronization (the necessity of performing different activities simultaneously), and the rate or tempo (relaxed or stressful and intense) (Cropper and Palmer, 2008; Maaninen-Olsson and Müllern, 2009). According to Bredin (2008) and Sydow et al. (2004), projects are also likely to be embedded in more permanent contexts. By this definition, project-based organisations do not include ‘single-project organisations’ where the entire organisation is dissolved after the completion of a project (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998). This refers to what Whitley (2006) calls project organisations with ‘low singularity’ where core activities are carried out in a series of projects. These organisations “organise work around recurrent projects, and often rely on outsiders for completing individual tasks but retain a core group of employees for initiating, organizing, and conducting separate projects” (Whitley, 2006, p.81). This is consistent, for example, with Packendorff’s (2002) terminology of ‘project-based work’, which implies that employees are affiliated to the organisational context rather than to the project. Though these individuals will set out to complete a specific task, they will always be mindful of their organisational interests, to their day-to-day duties and responsibilities.

When looking at how projects evolve, various life-cycle approaches and theories have been developed. The number of phases within each of these approaches differs, as well as the names used to describe the phases. Turner (2009) refers to them as start, execution, and close-out. Westland (2006) distinguishes them as initiation, planning, execution, and closure, while Weiss and Wysocki (1992) identified a five stage process, which includes definition, planning, organisation, control, and closure. “The life cycle metaphor suggests a natural progression in which the passage of time is associated

predictably with changes or transitions – the dynamics – in the character of the IOR” (Cropper and Palmer, 2008, p.645). However, while previous researchers have looked at these relationships and have developed models to illustrate them, they have not been supported (Cropper and Palmer, 2008). For example, Jap and Anderson (2007) have investigated such issues but their work identified a number of limitations when examining this phenomenon. They were unable to “capture potential intermediate movement between phases” (Jap and Anderson, 2007, p.273). The following section aims to explore the temporal dynamic of collaboration to provide further understanding of this subject.

2.8 Collaborative Development Over Time

Time is not just ‘out there’ as neutral chronology but also ‘in here’ as a social construction. Thus there is the constant challenge to study events and the social construction of events in the context of the local organisational time cycles that modulate the implicit rhythms of social systems (Pettigrew et al., 2001, p.700).

Pettigrew et al. (2001) suggest that the temporal analyst must identify events and chronologies to use as stepping stones in the search for patterns and structures (e.g. to explore patterns in the process), which develop or evolve as time progresses. Previous studies have identified a linear sense of time, which is “strongly reflected in conceptions of and procedures for inquiry in IOR” (Cropper and Palmer, 2008, p.650). Although Ancona et al. (2001) claim that some temporal research can be inherently complex as it is not clear when some factors may happen, “the temporal lens brings new functionality to research” (Ancona et al., 2001, p.647), and draws attention to what they call ‘timing norms’, which “people experience as shared, expected patterns of paced activity” (Ancona et al., 2001, p.648). When considering the temporal qualities of IORs, Cropper and Palmer (2008) advise researchers to pay attention to:

....the duration of IORs, to the rate or pace of development and change in IORs, and, especially, to issues arising in the coordination of IOR behaviour – sequence, timing, synchrony and entrainment (p.650).

The research question in this thesis is focused on the sequence of events and interactions among organisational parties that unfold, shape and influence collaboration over a period of time, e.g. when the project begins and ends. But “relatively little scholarly research has been devoted to studying developmental processes of IORs”

(Ring and Van de Ven, 1994, pp.90-91). Additionally, although collaboration manifests over a given period, “the role of time in shaping the behaviour of collaborations, and collaborative systems, is not well understood” (Seebeck et al., 2005, p.123). According to Cropper and Palmer (2008, p.656), more rigorous research is required, i.e. empirical enquiries that “test, enrich and extend theory”.

Against a backdrop of limited empirical research that explains the dynamics of IORs and time in and between different sectors, research on collaboration suggests a sequence of stages through which organisations move as they try to establish themselves and meet their goals (e.g. Gray, 1985, 1989; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Wood and Gray, 1991). These theories refer to a sequence of stages, which involves formation, implementation, maintenance, and accomplishing goals or outcomes (Butterfoss et al., 1993). However, with any sequence of stages, there is likely to be considerable overlap from one stage to another (Kreuter et al., 2000). Kreuter et al. (2000) identify four stages including pre-formation / pre-planning [stage 1], which is a stage prior to the official formation and funding of the arrangement; formation [stage 2], which clarifies the mission, the recruitment of members, and formalises rules, roles and procedures; and stages 3 and 4, which involve the implementation and maintenance of strategies. Within the early stages, communication is particularly important (Legler and Reischl, 2003), as well as how organisational efforts are monitored in the latter stages to meet the partnership’s long-term goals and objectives.

Downey et al.’s (2008) work on coalition development is built on Butterfoss et al.’s (1993) theory of coalitions. Their work expands previous coalition research by documenting the process through which actual coalitions went from formation to the outcome stage of development. Butterfoss et al. (1993) provided the most comprehensive analysis of the stages of coalition development, which ranges from the formation, implementation and maintenance of strategies to achieving outcomes. Formation begins at the initiation of funding and consists of developing committees, using individuals in the community. The most important element of formation is direction setting or articulation of a clear mission which helps to guide a partnership. The implementation stage consists of the formalisation of rules, the roles of coalition members, and procedures for accomplishing coalition goals. The maintenance stage primarily monitors and continues the planned activities of committees. The outcomes stage comprises the impacts that result from the coalition’s efforts (Butterfoss et al.,

1993). Downey et al.'s (2008) findings suggest that coalition development is more than simply getting a group of organisations together to achieve a common goal. For it to take place “there are certain essential components that must exist and processes that should occur” (Downey et al., 2008, p.138). These include funding, data, coalition structure, membership, leadership, partnerships, coalition enhancement, community support, education, outreach, publicity, and evaluation (Downey et al., 2008).

This development can be seen as a ‘collaboration continuum’ (Austin, 2000), which Austin (2000) describes as a conceptual framework for categorizing different types of partnerships and studying their possible evolution through three principal stages. These are philanthropic, transactional, and integrative stages:

In the philanthropic stage, the nature of the relationship is largely that of charitable donor and recipient. This characterizes most nonprofit–business relationships today, but increasing numbers are migrating to the next level. In the transactional stage, there are explicit resource exchanges focused on specific activities; for example, cause-related marketing, event sponsorships, and contractual service arrangements would fall into this category. Some collaborations have moved to the integrative stage in which the partners’ missions, people, and activities begin to merge into more collective action and organizational integration. This alliance stage approximates a joint venture and represents the highest strategic level of collaboration (Austin, 2000, p.71).

Practitioners and researchers can therefore identify the kind of partnership they have or are examining along this continuum. Austin (2000) illustrates different types of collaboration on the continuum with distinct characteristics and functions, which may evolve from one phase or stage to another, just like a developmental process (Gray, 1989). “As one moves along the continuum the level of engagement deepens, mission relevance becomes more central, resource deployment expands, activities broaden, interaction intensifies, and managerial complexity magnifies, but so, too, does the strategic value” (Austin, 2003, p.24). Progression along the continuum is not automatic, it is not necessary to sequentially pass through each stage, and regression can occur (Austin, 2000). The continuity of a relationship between organisations in a partnership is not always a guarantee. Austin (2000, p.94) concludes that “there is much to be studied and much to be learned as we enter the age of alliances”.

2.9 The Transformation Process of IORs

Collaboration as a process can be seen as a “sequence of events that describes how things change over time” (Van de Ven, 1992, p.169). “Process research addresses dynamic questions about temporally evolving phenomena” (Langley, 2009, p.409). In contrast, variance theories examine the antecedents or consequences of particular concepts, the variables of which statistically explain variations in other variables (Mohr, 1982). While process theories examine how a particular concept forms, develops and terminates in a temporal sequence or order, research that looks into how IORs change has “not followed the process through its life-cycle” (Casey, 2011, p.304). To address this, literature has drawn attention to three interrelated areas: (i) whether *change* is something planned or emerging, (ii) whether *groups* develop in stages / phases, and (iii) whether the *process* of collaboration *transforms* linearly and/or non-linearly.

2.9.1 Change: Planned or Emerging?

Collaboration as a process, not a form, refers to a change-oriented relationship of some duration (Gray and Wood, 1991; Hartono and Holsapple, 2004). While empirical evidence demonstrates a need to implement change in order to respond to a dynamic and changing environment (Higgs and Rowland, 2005), there are a number of models to understand change as a concept. Two key paradigms can be identified within the change management literature. They include ‘planned and emergent change’ (Bamford and Forrester, 2003).

Planned change is an iterative, cyclical, process involving diagnosis, action and evaluation, and further action and evaluation. It is an approach which maintains that once change has taken place, it must be self-sustaining (i.e. safe from regression). The purpose of Planned change is to improve the effectiveness of the human side of the organisation by focusing on the performance of groups and teams. Central to Planned change is the stress placed on the collaborative nature of the change effort: the organisation, managers, recipients of change and change agents jointly diagnose the organisation’s problem and jointly plan and design the specific changes (Coram and Burnes, 2001, p.96).

The planned approach is a set of internal actions designed to produce specific outcomes. There is a belief that change is best accomplished through a sequence of pre-determined steps, which implies a universal formula for success (Rollinson, 2008). Much of the literature relating to the planned approach to organisational change is drawn from

Organisational Development (OD), a movement in the 1950s to 1970s. The origins of most of the developments in this field can be traced to Lewin (1951), who developed 'Action Research' and 'Three-Phase Models' of planned change. Various authors have developed rational, linear models very similar to Lewin's (1951) force field analysis. In spite of the widespread popularity of planned approaches to change, there have been an increasing number of criticisms of this approach in change management. An alternative stance to the planned approach has been termed the 'emergent approach'. Its proponents have argued that the emergent approach is "more suitable for the dynamic and unpredictable conditions faced by organisations" (Coram and Burnes, 2001, p.97).

The emergent approach is less reliant on defined goals and action plans. It prefers to work with emerging strategies and develops the priorities for change as they arise (Esain et al., 2008, p.22).

Emergent change is specifically founded on the assumption that organisations operate in a dynamic environment. Change is said to be a messy, unpredictable, open-ended, and a political affair (Burnes, 2009). The idea of emergent change has been linked with the concept of organisations as 'open systems' (Wilson, 1992). Organisations will strive to maintain a state of equilibrium where the forces of change are balanced by the forces of stability. Organisations viewed as systems will always strive to restore equilibrium whenever they are disturbed by internal and external forces in their environment (Esain et al., 2008). According to this view, the organisational system is constantly sensing its environment, and will continuously adjust to maintain its purpose and optimum state (Senior and Fleming, 2006).

In inter-organisational studies, Van de Ven and Poole (1995) identified four types of mechanisms, or 'motors,' that could drive organisational change that can be separated analytically. They are life cycle, dialectical (struggle-based), evolutionary, and teleological (vision-based). These four types of change differ with regard to two basic dimensions, whether change occurs in a single unit or multiple units, and whether change is prescribed or constructive (see Figure 2). This distinguishes the sequence of change events as either prescribed *a priori*, or whether it is constructed and emerges as the change process unfolds.

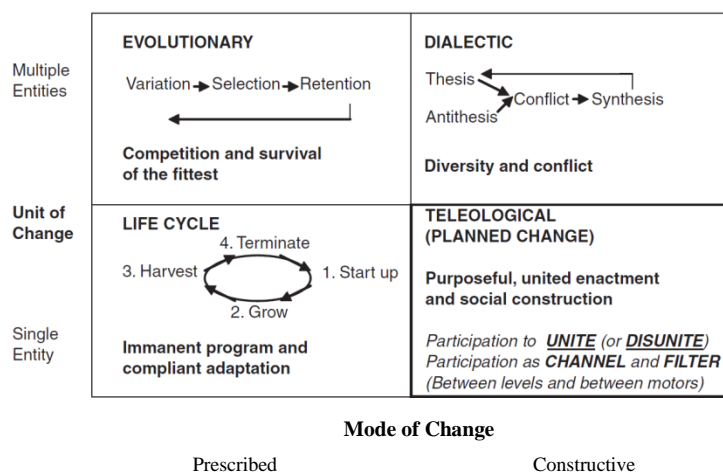


Figure 2. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) four types of change (Source: Nielsen, 2008)

Life cycle change can be identified in terms of stages of maturation and growth or aging. Dialectical changes occur through the interplay, tensions and contradictions of social relations. Evolutionary changes, such as developing sustainability strategies to deal with environmental regulations, are essentially adaptive. Teleological change is driven by strategic vision. However, Nadler's (1998) four-part typology identifies two dimensions along which change can be categorised. They include the scope of change and timing of change. They identify four responses to change:

1. Tuning. The firm anticipates a change in conditions and takes incremental action.
2. Adapting. The firm reacts to a change in conditions and takes incremental action.
3. Redirecting. The firm anticipates a change in conditions and takes radical action.
4. Overhauling. The firm reacts to a change in conditions and takes radical action (Coughlan et al., 2003, p.1255).

If organisations operate in dynamic or changeable environments that are temporally affected by external and internal factors (Senior and Fleming, 2006), then change cannot be prescribed through a 'one-best-way' approach (Woodward and Hendry, 2004). Hence, there are many different ways an organisation will change to achieve an objective, particularly when working in a partnership where there are a number of organisations involved in the process. Hudson et al. (1999) describe this change as:

..... a sequential activity, and although such a logic can be identified, it would be wrong to suggest that there is some iron law of collaborative endeavour through which agencies must dutifully progress – some may have made more progress on later stages than earlier ones, or may find themselves losing some of the success they may have gained at a particular stage (p.237).

While organisational change theories have often been modelled on the ‘unfreeze-change-refreeze’ developed by Kurt Lewin, a complexity theory framework for the analysis of organisational change enables an analysis of the discontinuous, disruptive and emerging patterns of change in organisations (Black, 2000; Dooley and Van de Ven, 1999). This theory refers to systems as being open and able to change their character, often radically, in order to survive (Linstead et al., 2004). Complexity theorists have also noted that organisational change may not be an orderly, sequential or linear process that is controlled by an organisation (or change agents) (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Fonseca, 2002; Sanders, 1998; Stacy, 1996; Wheatley, 1992). Complexity theory regards systems as organic, non-linear and holistic. This theory views change as spatial, temporal, participatory, operational, organisational, and technological. In this context, it is very difficult to fully comprehend how change works at a single point in time or to describe it using just one model (Falconer, 2002).

2.9.2 Group Development

Forming an inter-organisational group is a way of bringing organisations together to achieve a shared objective (Schopler, 1987). These arrangements are usually made up of representatives from member organisations (Alexander, 1995), and in order for a group to function effectively, members need to interact and cooperate at different stages during their relationship (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). “These inter-organisational groups may come into existence through the routinization of informal contact such as ad-hoc meetings, or it may be a product of deliberate institutional design responding to a perceived common problem or interdependence” (Alexander, 1995, p.64). This can involve a process of sharing work experience, interpreting and comparing different understandings of aspects of care and constructing shared meaning on the performance of their work tasks (Huzzard et al., 2010). However, according to Schopler (1987, p.702), “the literature neither defines inter-organisational groups nor provides a framework for generating and testing hypotheses about the development and operation of these groups”. Recent studies by Aronoff & Bailey (2005), Gajda (2004), Huzzard et

al. (2010), McMorris et al. (2005), and Morrison and Glenny (2012) have all looked at inter-organisational arrangements using group development theory.

This body of literature identifies small groups developing in four stages (e.g. Tuckman, 1965). These stages are form, storm, norm, and perform, which have been used to describe the development of collaboration (e.g. Frey et al., 2006; Gajda, 2004; Gajda and Tulikangas, 2005; Woodland and Hutton, 2012). In 1977 ‘adjourn’ was added as a fifth and final stage (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977), which recognised the end of a group (see Figure 3). Axelsson and Axelsson (2006) refer to these groups as a ‘multidisciplinary team’. However, their conceptual framework did not identify Tuckman (1965) in their model or even in their explanation of their thinking.

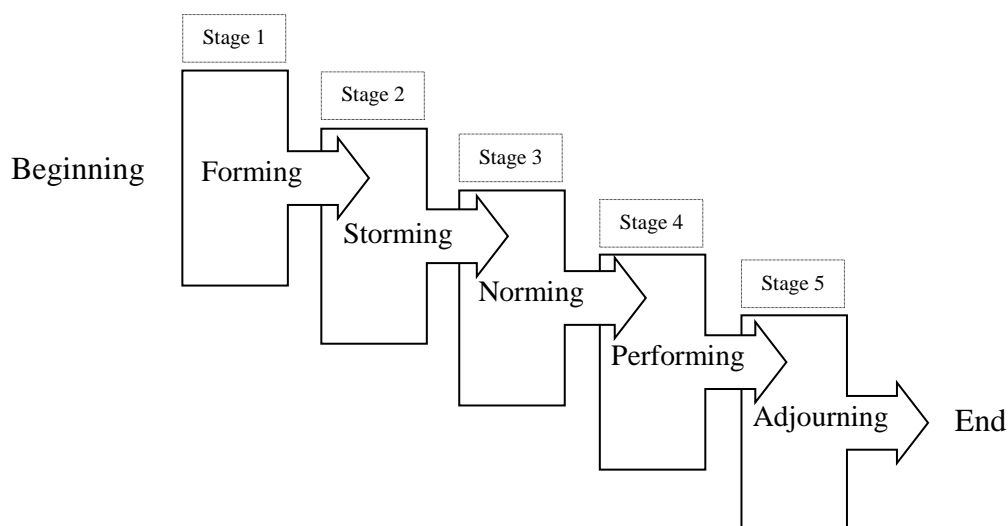


Figure 3. Stages of collaboration in group development (Adapted from Tuckman and Jensen (1977))

Key aspects of this model have been identified by various studies (e.g. Arrow et al., 2004; Bonebright, 2010; Chang et al., 2003; Gajda, 2004; Miller, 2003; Rickards and Moger, 2000; Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1999; Walker & Mathers, 2004); they include:

- *Stage 1* – Organisations form a relationship with other members in a partnership. Shared values and rules are established, as-well-as a process to monitor the group’s performance. Because it is a new arrangement, there is ambiguity and confusion.
- *Stage 2* – During the storming stage conflicts and disagreements over priorities may emerge. Group members deal with issues of power, authority, and

competition. Members gradually clarify common values, which increases group stability.

- *Stage 3* – As conflicts are resolved, trust between individuals gradually develops. Members work out their differences and work more cooperatively. This norming stage prepares the group for the task orientation of their arrangement. There is consensus, cohesion and structure, and there are accepted forms of leadership and participation, and more stable roles. Communication becomes more open and task-oriented.
- *Stage 4* – The group performs. Members have more awareness of time and what they need to do. Organisations share the group goals and have conformed to a group norm. This stage represents a number of behaviours aimed at completing both individual and group objectives. They can include problem solving, decision-making, and various implementation activities. Roles become flexible and functional, and group energy becomes more collaborative.
- *Stage 5* – The group has achieved its task or objective and comes to an end. Members evaluate their work together, share feedback and their thoughts, and then separate or remove themselves from the group.

Over the years, researchers and practitioners have noted the relevance, influence, and endurance of Tuckman's (1965) widely referenced work in organisational studies (McMorris et al., 2005). The literature citing these models is quite extensive. Though Tuckman's framework is "valid on the surface", it is "lacking in a complete explanation of how groups change over time" (McMorris et al., 2005, p.219). An alternative approach of Tuckman and Jensen's linear framework is illustrated by Gersick (1988, 1989). Gersick (1988) highlights rapid and fundamental change taking place at different points in time. Time and temporal pacing between stages are central to Gersick's punctuated equilibrium model (Miller, 2003). It has been used in recent studies (e.g. Casey-Campbell and Martens, 2008) and as an integrative model/approach to understand change in organisations (Chang et al., 2003; Dennis et al., 2008; Michinov and Michinov, 2007). Chang et al.'s (2003) research focused on groups undergoing a two-phase (rather than a two-stage) developmental change.

Phase 1 lasts for half of the group's allotted time. At the midpoint of the allotted time, the group undergoes a transition that sets a revised direction for phase 2. The midpoint acts as a reminder of the approaching deadline that interrupts the group's

basic phase 1 strategies and facilitates the midpoint transition and thus the onset of phase 2 (Chang et al., 2003, p.107).

Their integrative model is based on an integration of group development research over the last four decades (e.g. Bales, 1953; Bion, 1961; Tuckman, 1965). Groups are viewed as progressing through five developmental stages, each described by a unique pattern of behaviours. Stage 1 demonstrates dependency and inclusion, stage 2 - counterdependency and fight, stage 3 - trust and structure, stage 4 - work, and stage 5 - termination (Chang et al., 2003). It is possible, therefore, that the stage model and equilibrium model are complementary and co-exist at two different levels of analysis. While the punctuated equilibrium model focuses on how a group works on a specific task, a joint effort between members to achieve their objectives, the stage model focuses on the overall development of the group over a period of time (Chang et al., 2003). However, Aronoff & Bailey (2005) advise these inter-organisational group-based partnerships may move through different phases in a non-linear way instead of a sequential process. Issues associated with this are discussed below.

2.9.3 Linear and/or Non-linear Progression

According to Carnall (2007), though linear models possess the merits of simplicity, they fall down in respect of unintended consequences. Linear models break down because environments external to an organisation are too complex; they cannot be planned (Burnes, 2009). This is supported by Hay et al. (2001). They view change as a linear process controlled by management who underestimate the impact of increasingly turbulent environments. Ring and Van de Ven (1994) provide a particularly useful framework to examine this phenomenon within collaborative theory. They see collaboration as something that is “iterative and cyclical rather than linear”, and which has a “nonlinear and emergent nature” (Thomson and Perry, 2006, p.22). This is supported by Batonda and Perry (2003), who identified inter-firm relationships as infrequently going through a definite step-by-step development process. This evidence makes a stage model somewhat inadequate. However, research by Martin (2004) analysed collaboration in terms of four dimensions:

1. Between-stage linear progression;
2. Within-stage linear progression;

3. Between-stage nonlinear progression; and
4. Within-stage nonlinear progression.

His model and research identifies times where there will be a linear progression between and within stages, as well as other times when there will be nonlinear progression. Therefore, the model will depend on how organisations work together, and also on the complexity or scope of an IOR. For example, as organisations in this research study are small, charity based providers, their relationship, structure and resources would form a relationship that would be dissimilar to, and not as complex as, that of a national organisation in a multi-agent or cross-regional arrangement. The partnership in this thesis is based on a small group of organisations that are in close proximity of each other, where there is only one person to observe who is the organisation's representative. A bigger, more regional or national partnership would involve an inter-organisational arrangement with a larger network. This would consist of several departments, divisions, branches, and locations that are linked to the partnership, which would require greater effort to understand and preferably a multi-level analysis to examine the partnership's network and its relationships (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005). Martin (2004, p.1116) found no previous study that focused explicitly on "the chronology of the stages or of events within each stage in the IOR process over time - from the very beginning, IOR formation, to the final stages of evaluation and conclusion or repetition". This thesis attempts to address this research gap.

2.10 Conclusion

Research and evidence of partnership working, IORs and collaboration between organisations have explained in many ways how and why organisations work together. It is a topic that has been examined by a number of scholars across several disciplines. As a subject, partnership working and IOR theory are interconnected with collaboration and often overlap in many cases. For a partnership to function, organisations will gradually form and build relationships with other organisations to collectively achieve something from their arrangement that could not otherwise happen if they worked independently. Partnerships and IORs will vary in terms of membership, purpose, expectations, and how external factors beyond the partnership's control may influence the way organisations collaborate. They can also involve different organisational motives and objectives, resources being shared in the partnership, and could mean

working across several locations. To get a better understanding of collaboration as a subject, literature on project management, organisational change, and group development theory was also examined in this chapter. This literature has demonstrated the nature of project working in temporary arrangements, how inter-organisational groups can develop over time, and the transformation of collaboration within a partnership.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONTEXT: ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)

3.1 Background

There are many organisations across the United Kingdom (UK) that aim to deliver social and environmental benefits and which are neither profit making nor statutory. They can be charities, social enterprises, and voluntary bodies. These organisations have together been referred to, at policy level, as the voluntary and community sector (VCS), the Third Sector (TS) or, more generally, the social economy (Haugh and Kitson, 2007). Despite its name, the sector is characterised by a huge diversity of goals, structures and motivations, and while organisations aim to improve the quality of life of individuals living in a community, the sector as a whole has been portrayed as a ‘loose and baggy monster’ (Kendall and Knapp, 1995) with a complex structure and fuzzy boundaries (Brandsen et al., 2005). Because the sector is so diverse (Kelly, 2007) and fragmented (Osborne, 1998), defining what organisations do, of what they consist, and how they contribute to people’s lives and communities is quite problematic.

On paper, the complexity of the sector can appear bewildering (Kelly, 2007). Kelly (2007, p.1005) points out that “commentators who describe the sector in different ways rarely capture the diversity of the sector”. According to current figures, there are around half a million voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in the UK. These can involve small, local community groups or large, well established, national and international organisations. Some have no income at all and rely on the efforts of volunteers (Lie and Baines, 2007). Others are, in effect, small to medium-sized businesses run by paid professionals. There is little doubt that the VCS is ‘heterogeneous’ (Paxton et al., 2005; Perotin, 2001). The sector consists of a diverse arrangement of individuals, organisations, agencies and public bodies that are, by nature, context and ‘place’, distinctive in how they operate and provide their services (Harris and Rochester, 2001; Milligan and Fyre, 2004). Soteri-Proctor (2010) confirms this and advises that the sheer variety of organisations makes the VCS difficult to fully comprehend as a collective group of organisations that have individual or unique ways of working.

VCOs make a major and literally incalculable contribution to the development of society and to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the nation (Home Office, 1998). Their aim is to deliver and manage services in the best interest of their users, and they are now a key partner in delivering government policies (HM Treasury, 2002). Over recent years, the VCS has seen a movement of VCOs into the mainstream of public service delivery, which has changed the dynamics of the sector (Kelly, 2007). This has “entailed a shift in the funding relationship between governmental and voluntary agencies, with ‘arms length’ grants giving way to a variety of contractual relationships regulating the ‘agency’ status of VCOs relative to government” (Cairns et al., 2005, p.870). These organisations now face an expanding range of national and regional regulation and monitoring demands (Rochester, 2001), which is making VCS management and committee members more accountable in the provision of their services.

While there are perceived advantages in the joint delivery of contractual based projects, which include improved organisational effectiveness, reduced duplication, better use of resources, and more value for money (Charities Commission, 2009), the government now expects each agency and VCO within the sector to identify how collaborative working might best work for them (NCVO, 2008, 2010). However, collaboration and joint working is something that these organisations might never have done before. Nonetheless, these providers now have to adapt to this new way of working. Pressures from their external environment are driving organisations and their management to provide services that are equivalent to those in the public and private sector. While this may be the case, a number of key research gaps and priorities were raised from a review of literature on third sector service delivery that was conducted by Macmillan (2010). He identified new forms of collaborative relationships as one of these themes. “Further research is needed on inter-organisation working at various levels” (Macmillan, 2010, p.26). This thesis attempts to address some of these issues by exploring a new model of inter-organisational working between organisations in a consortium arrangement.

3.2 Government, Policy, and the Local Arena

The central claim made by the Government, and by advocates of a greater role for the sector in service delivery, is that third sector organisations can deliver services in distinctive ways which will improve outcomes for service users (House of Commons, 2008, p.3).

While research has focused on the modernization of public sector organisations in the latest round of reform, where New Labour focused on widening choice and the personalisation of services (Balloch and Taylor, 2001), the government has been working with organisations to expand their role in shaping, commissioning and delivering public services (Kelly, 2007). New Labour claimed that this would provide an antidote to the problem of professional rigidities and self-seeking behaviour commonly found in public sector organisations (Bleas, 2003; Milburn, 2001, 2003).

In part they believe that a mixed economy of providers can offer greater consumer choice. They also consider that the voluntary sector offers a better breeding ground for innovative thinking about practice, and are persuaded that, again in some areas, the voluntary sector can offer greater community and local engagement or control. Equally they believe that some voluntary organisations have demonstrated that not only can they develop services to meet the needs of individual consumers, they can also offer the users the potential to lead and manage the services themselves. In a pluralist society, they argue, the voluntary sector can offer more appropriate, more user responsive services (Paxton et al., 2005, p.42).

Although the sector will continue to provide specialised services, its expansion into mainstream provision is a new departure for these organisations but not without risk to themselves and their clients (Kelly, 2007). Since 1997, the VCS in the UK has received significant government support (Kendall and Almond, 1998), which has enabled the sector to move from the economic margin towards the mainstream (Cairns et al., 2005; Kendall, 2000; Osborne and McLaughlin, 2004). The VCS now plays an increasing role in economic, political and social life (Haugh and Kitson, 2007). The role of VCOs in UK public service delivery, and their relationship with the state are considered to be governed by the 'Compact' with government (Carmel and Harlock, 2008). This was established in 1998 and has become an independent organisation responsible for overseeing the relationship between the government and the VCS (House of Commons, 2008). While the activities, services, and projects carried out by VCOs are governed by their charitable objectives, there have been numerous attempts to bring together at a local level the different parts of the voluntary, public and private sector so that initiatives work together (Geddes et al., 2007). They can be seen as non-statutory partnerships, which provide a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other partnerships can operate. This can be referred to as a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). These types of partnership are responsible for developing and

driving the implementation of Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements (LAAs). They are also responsible for agreeing the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF). While the LAAs are “a new mechanism to improve and join up local service delivery” (Geddes et al., 2007, p.98), LAAs represent a major challenge to local partnership working as LSPs lack the capacity and structures for rapid and effective decision-making (Geddes et al., 2007).

While central government spending in 2003/04 on the VCS in the UK was estimated to be £4.9bn in cash terms, and local government spending was estimated at £4.3bn, the total for both central and local government spending rounds up to £9.3bn. With an annual income of around £16bn, the UK VCS is increasingly perceived as ‘big business’ (Wainwright, 2003). It is said that national policies set the tone, and much of the interaction between the public and voluntary sectors takes place at a local level (The Audit Commission, 2007). As VCOs are increasingly taking over the role of public bodies in providing welfare support (Glendinning et al., 2002), there has been a move towards funding providers through ‘contractual agreements’. This involves a payment by a public body to a provider for the provision of specific services. VCOs will often bid against other rival providers for these contracts or service level agreements. While these contracts are changing the process of how organisations go about applying for funding, further concerns have been expressed about the risk to VCOs of becoming vehicles for public service delivery and public policy implementation at the expense of their ability to help resolve more pertinent local issues (Hutchison and Ockenden, 2008). An additional concern is that these contracts are often short-term, but are ‘unnecessarily short’ (House of Commons, 2008).

Nobody seems to be claiming that one-year contracts are generally sensible. Although there are disadvantages of overlong contracts too, in that it is harder to secure accountability to commissioners, there are clear practical problems with the length of many contracts currently (House of Commons, 2008, p.41).

The NCVO (2006b) also found VCOs need to be sure that they can fulfil the terms of a contract before committing themselves to it. “Contracts are legally binding so an organisation may face legal action if its terms are not met” (NCVO, 2006b, p.4). It is therefore important for an organisation and its trustees to carefully consider the commissioning and procurement process before taking on a contract and committing to something that they may have difficulty achieving.

3.3 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Commissioning

The VCS in the UK comprises over 600,000 not-for-profit organisations, including 188,000 registered charities (HM Treasury, 2002). They are registered and unregistered charities, voluntary organisations, local community groups, social enterprises, co-operatives, and mutuals, which are constituted as partners or potential partners with local or national government and public bodies (Carmel and Harlock, 2008). Broadly speaking:

- The voluntary sector includes many charities, housing associations, community associations, and national campaigning organisations;
- The community sector is usually constituted of small and locally organised groups, and includes civic societies, support groups, and community and neighbourhood associations; and
- The social enterprise sector includes organisations that are businesses with social objectives, such as credit unions and community interest companies.

While external pressure to change and adapt has been well documented in many reports and publications, there are also internal pressures to meet current trends as traditional ways of working are being challenged with more innovative initiatives that are emerging from contractual relationships. The VCS is progressively engaging in providing state-funded services and as a result VCOs must demonstrate value for money (Cairns et al., 2005). However, the UK Government is not the only stakeholder placing pressure on VCOs to demonstrate accountability and ‘achievement’ (Moxham, 2009). External pressure to measure activities may come from non-government funders, donors, volunteers, employees, and users or beneficiaries (Wainwright, 2003).

In the past, the voluntary sector tended to operate in niche or specialist areas that had been neglected by the public sector or never delivered by the state. In recent times there has been a notable increase in alternative provision in some areas of the public services (Davies, 2011, p.643).

However, “a major problem for voluntary organisations as service providers under contract has been one of independence, in regard to both the relatively narrow issue of the terms and conditions of service provision, and the broader issue on the part

voluntary organisations might play in policy shaping at both central and local levels” (Lewis, 2005, p.121). The shift from grant aid support to performance-based contracts (Harris, 1998; Lewis, 1996) has created a new environment for VCOs (Roberts, 2007). While business-style models and approaches are being developed, where there are performance indicators and monitoring processes (Roberts, 2007), it seems that informal structures, systems, and roles that made the organisation what they were intentionally set up to be are being weakened with more formal practices and procedures. Scott et al. (2000) found contracts to impose public sector procedures and mechanisms, which can restrict an organisation’s freedom and their true nature because of a great competition for funding and services being measured against certain expectations from public funders. “Simply, the operating environment for voluntary organisations has become more highly regulated, more competitive and more output-driven’ (Tonkiss and Passey, 1999, p.261). Tonkiss and Passey (1999, p.261) claim that this creates potential conflicts “between the aim of ‘doing good’ in relation to social issues and causes, and the pressures of ‘doing well’ as organisations in an increasingly professional and competitive environment”. With the increase in contractual working, a series of new challenges now awaits these organisations and the sector (Davies, 2011). This has also opened up a new agenda for research (Entwistle and Martin, 2005), e.g. competitive to collaborative forms of procurement.

The pressure to obtain funding and the intensification of competition are affecting how VCOs operate (see Davies, 2011). Historically, income for VCO’s is derived from three main sources, these involve ‘voluntary income’ (e.g. fundraising, donations, legacies, lottery, and money raised from the sale of donated goods), ‘investment income’ (e.g. share dividends and interest on savings), and ‘earned income’ (e.g. trading, fees, and contracts) (Haugh and Kitson, 2007). Because this income is now harder to come by, VCOs now appear to be cutting pay and employment conditions to continue delivering their services, which has created ‘workplace discontent’ (Cunningham, 2001). Additionally, “the distribution of government funding is very uneven with less than a quarter of charities in receipt of the majority of funding: 78 per cent of charities receive no government funding at all” (Davies, 2011, p.643). While VCOs are now being held accountable to different agencies within the public sector, their reason for existing is much the same and something that they will always continue doing as long as there is funding. They will always provide what people need at the best quality and at a manageable cost (Gann, 1996).

3.4 Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) and Capacity Building

The origins of many UK voluntary organisations lie in the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, with a history of campaigning for anti-discriminatory legislation. These organisations occupy a social space in which societies and cultures construct questions about the good society and test out new and evolving responses. As fashions and ideas change so new forms of organisations come into existence whether they be philanthropic, charitable, mutual aid or self-help organisations, user or member controlled – these all represent different ways of responding to questions of suffering and inequality (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2008, p.321).

While there is no internationally accepted definition of the voluntary sector (Perotin, 2001; Vincent and Harrow, 2005), voluntary organisations are defined by Kendall and Almond (1998) and Kendall and Knapp (1996) as independent and self-governing organisations that are non-profit making. They are normally run by a paid workforce and volunteers (Cunningham, 2008), and can operate outside (or between) both the market and the state (Kelly, 2007). According to Schwabenland and Tomlinson (2008), these organisations are located at the heart of society, where there may be a struggle for social justice. It is said that these organisations “develop new answers to social problems and new forms of organising out of aspirations of their clients or communities” (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2008, p.321). They also have unique resources and specialist knowledge when dealing with service users which “traditional service organisations often lack” (Kelly, 2007, p.1010).

These non-profit or not-for-profit (NFP) organisations play a major role in almost every society, helping to provide health, education, and social welfare to people that need support (Liao et al., 2001). Responsibility or accountability of VCOs and their work rests with their Board of Trustees, sometimes referred to as Management Committees. Each organisation is quite independent. They have their own practices and views on how to respond to their user group. They deliver a wide variety of services, some of which are not delivered elsewhere and some are delivered specifically to their user group. Schwabenland and Tomlinson (2008, p.320) refer to them as “innovative services developed in response to the needs of their constituents”. For instance, they may focus on:

- providing services to strengthen communities;

- mutual aid and self-help for members of organisations;
- policy advocacy or campaigning;
- advocacy on behalf of individuals, and;
- expressing and fostering culture and identity (Mandell and Keast, 2008, p.176).

The context in which organisations in this sector operate means that they do differ from the public and private sector (Parry et al., 2004). These organisations are more likely to be value-led rather than profit or market-driven (Gann, 1996; HM Treasury, 2007).

There are also “claims that the sector has a distinctive culture based on participative forms of decision-making and to values linked to the organisation’s cause or mission” (Cunningham, 2001, p.227). These values may influence the way people are managed, and the people who choose to work for these organisations may do so because they are committed to its cause and have formed a moral attachment, which is also likely to have an impact on the way the organisation is operated and governed (Armstrong, 1992).

Professional managers in voluntary organisations are likely to be accountable to a number of interest groups (e.g. trustees, providers of funds, voluntary workers, and people that use their services). Because there are a number of stakeholders, it may be difficult to develop a coherent strategy (Barman, 2007). Organisations in this sector may also be subject to multiple decision-making processes that are across different networks, which are often run by groups or committees of which there are several members, making decision-making a long and complex process. The range of financial sources also tends to be greater than other sectors (Palmer, 2003). However, funding streams may be irregular and unpredictable, making long-term planning difficult (Barman, 2007).

These organisations therefore face a dynamic and changing environment. This requires them to adapt by finding ways to continue operating, which is identified in *institutional theory* (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organisations will adopt the dominant practice rather than maintain a distinctive identity as a result of changes that are occurring in their environment. These organisations are thus conforming to other practices to survive. Because they operate at a local, regional and national level, they are part of a complex ecology of relationships, networks, and external forces, but whilst not driven by a profit motive, they are accountable to their stakeholders (e.g. members, trustees, and funders). They do not and cannot operate as individual actors, making decisions separately without consideration of individuals and other variables

within their environment. Indeed, for most VCOs, their capacity and their authenticity, in part, involve building a relationship with other providers (Cairns et al., 2005; NCVO, 2007a; Paxton et al., 2005). For the vast majority of organisations in the VCS, competition for funding, short-term employment contracts, the transitory nature of volunteer participation, the evolving policy environment, and the desire to maintain responsiveness to their user group, all combine to mean that change is the only constant and something the sector cannot avoid (Mckinney et al., 2004).

VCS organisations may have the same overall goals of the public sector, in terms of increasing the public good, but they may also have to demonstrate economic viability in commercial terms (Reed et al., 2005). Governments and agencies now require organisations to build their capacity “to deliver public services, to be quality oriented and responsive to customers” (Carmel and Harlock, 2008, p.165).

Capacity building is about ensuring that VCOs have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to realise their full potential. It is second tier activity that supports front line delivery and typically involves removing barriers to involvement and investing to maximise the contribution that VCOs can make. It is as much about releasing existing capacity as about developing new capacity (HM Treasury, 2002, p.19).

According to Harris and Schlappa (2007), building the capacity of VCOs is an established social policy goal, driven by three interlinked policy streams. The first stream is the wish of central government to draw the VCS into an expanded role in delivery of ‘public services’ (National Audit Office, 2005; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005). A second stream is the desire to foster ‘social cohesion’, ‘civil renewal’, and ‘active citizenship’ in the UK with VCOs being seen as vital agents of community involvement (Home Office, 2004a). The third stream reflects New Labour’s intention to collaborate with non-governmental ‘partners’ in the implementation of public and social policy (Glendinning et al., 2002; Rummery, 2006; Taylor et al., 2002). Taken together, these three streams have pointed to a perceived need to make the VCS more organisationally ‘fit for purpose’, where organisations, agencies and bodies will work together to deliver public and social policy goals (Harris and Schlappa, 2007). Consequently, there is an increasing need of VCOs to be seen to manage and to be accountable as they take on an enlarged role in service delivery (Osborne, 1996). Part of this now means working with other organisations for improved delivery of individual

objectives and the creation of new practices to cope with new ways of working (Huxham, 1996).

This motivation to collaborate can be explained in *resource dependency theory* (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Under conditions of resource scarcity, interdependence, and uncertainty, “organisations establish links with other organisations to reduce environmental uncertainty and manage their dependence” (Tsasis, 2009, p.6). These relationships can occur in response to “current or potential threats from competitors or the perceived opportunity to expand domains and, in the process, extend influence and secure new resources” (Lowndes and Skeltcher, 1998, p.317). In doing so, organisations may gain access to “tacit knowledge and complementary skills, new technologies or markets, and the ability to provide a wider range of products and services than otherwise” (Chen, 2010, p.383). However, this might mean organisations giving up their autonomy to develop formal types of collaborative activities (Guo and Acar, 2005).

A central challenge of this strategy is for organisations to manage their organisational boundaries with partnering organisations (Tsasis, 2009). These organisations will “engage in boundary-spanning activities, such as negotiations, contracting, cooperation, and collaboration, to manage their interactions across boundaries and thus their interdependencies” (Tsasis, 2009, p.6). This identifies *resource exchange*, which focuses on “the conditions under which resources are exchanged” (Chen, 2010, p.383). These approaches have received the most theoretical and empirical attention in understanding IORs (Oliver, 1990). Resource exchange theory takes a ‘rational approach’, “organisations make strategic decisions to partner in order to create opportunities and avoid limitations or threats” (Lewis et al., 2010, p.461). While VCOs are continuously entering into contractual relationships to take over public sector responsibilities on behalf of the state (Schwablenland and Tomlinson, 2008), managers are under relentless pressure to conform to new policies to secure funding (IVAR, 2011). In order to do this, organisations have “run down other aspects of their work such as policy development, campaigning and advocacy” (Davies, 2011, p.645). While this research study attempts to develop a framework to help inform theory, the topic is quite fragmented across various sub-sectors in the VCS. The sector this thesis is based on involves organisations that provide employment and training provision, which will be explained in the next section.

3.5 Employment and Training Provision

In the UK, as in the USA and Australia, strategies to encourage disabled people into employment have encouraged employers to address barriers that may hinder individuals being employed. Such guidelines as 'Pathways to Work' (DWP, 2002a) and 'Valuing People' (Department of Health, 2001) have aimed to increase the employment rate of disabled people in the UK and support those with a disability. The recent green paper, 'A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work' (DWP, 2006), marks a shift in UK welfare and employment policy. This report acknowledges that "labelling people on incapacity benefits as incapable of work is wrong and damaging, whilst proposing that the new [Employment and Support] allowance focuses on how we can help people into work and does not automatically assume that because a person has a significant health condition or disability they are incapable of work" (DWP, 2006, p.41). However, Piggott et al. (2005) criticised these central government policies as doing little to change the perception of the employment needs of disabled people within local government.

There are around 7 million people of working age in the UK with long-term health problems or disability. According to the Employers' Forum on Disability (2005), the employment rate of these people is estimated to be no more than 50%, compared to 80% for the population as a whole (Wistow and Schneider, 2007). Employment rates for some types of disability are particularly low, being about 10% for people with learning disabilities (Department of Health, 2001) and 18% for people with mental health problems (Stanley & Regan, 2003). In May 2005, there were 2.74 million people in receipt of incapacity benefits where nearly 40% of these claimants have a mental health condition (DWP, 2006). Economic activity rates were lowest for those aged 55 or over, and for those living in the social rented sector (DWP, 2002b). Clearly, some disability groups face greater obstacles to work than others (Banks and Lawrence, 2006). People also have different beliefs about what constitutes a disability and whom disability affects. These, in turn, shape their attitudes to disabled people (DWP, 2002b). The percentage of individuals with an impairment in employment can be seen in Table 5.

Main impairment	% in employment
Diabetes	67
Skin conditions, allergies	63.3
Chest/breathing problems	62.8
Stomach, liver, kidney or digestive problems	59.7
Difficulty in hearing	59
Heart, blood pressure/circulation problems	58.7
Other health problems or disabilities	53.5
Arms or hands	52
Back or neck	48.7
Difficulty in seeing	48.5
Legs or feet	45.4
Epilepsy	43.6
Progressive illness not included elsewhere	42.1
Depression, bad nerves or anxiety	25.8
Learning difficulties	25.7
Speech impediment	19.2
Mental illness, phobias, panics or other nervous disorders	13.3

Table 5. The different types of impairment and the percentage employed (Source: ONS, 2005)

While the highest % of individuals with an impairment in employment are those with diabetes, individuals that have difficulty in learning, speech impediment, and a mental illness have the lowest % in employment. In England and Wales, government policies that directly target reducing unemployment among those who are disabled, continues to be centred on Incapacity Benefit claimants (Piggott et al., 2005). For example, the ‘New Deal for Disabled People and the Personal Adviser Scheme’ aimed to provide individually tailored packages of support to help people in work and at risk of losing their jobs through ill-health or impairment to move towards and stay in work (Hills et al., 2001; Loumidis et al., 2001). Additionally, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995) gives disabled people certain rights in the UK in respect of employment, in particular making it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against disabled people when they apply for a job, or when they are in employment, unless they can show that making necessary adjustments would be unreasonable (Banks and Lawrence, 2006). Roulstone (1998) defines disability as something that has socially produced barriers, which are the result of wider attitudes and structures in society that limit a person with a physical impairment.

The difficulties faced by people with impairments in the employment sector are the subject of extensive research (Piggott et al., 2005). Work plays a central role in people’s lives (DWP, 2002a, 2002b, 2006); however, unemployed people with impairments deal

with problems that are not of their making and are not within their capacity to resolve alone (Department of Health, 2001). Despite the difficulties for a person in entering employment, agencies and authorities are keen to change this by creating partnerships that provide better services and support those that need help and guidance (Hills et al., 2001; Loumidis et al., 2001). Ideally, people should have access to a range of work, training, and support that is relevant to their changing needs and are flexible to users who may need a longer period of support (Boardman, 2003).

3.6 Evaluating Performance, Contracting and Accountability

In recent years, voluntary and community groups have been called upon to demonstrate greater accountability to stakeholders for the funds they obtain, manage, and invest in the delivery of services (Barman, 2007; Blackmore, 2006). While the efficiency and effectiveness of voluntary organisations is under increasing scrutiny from government and public funders (Moxham and Boaden, 2007), performance measures are demanded by a number of stakeholders (e.g. trustees and committee members), public sector bodies that are charged with regulating them, and employees, volunteers, donors, and service users (Kendall and Knapp, 2000). In spite of this, research has demonstrated limited empirical evidence of the systems used to measure voluntary sector performance (Moxham, 2009; Moxham and Boaden, 2007). The ones that are currently being used do not comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of those involved, in terms of the relationships between the organisations, and the effect of a changing environment to management practice and outcomes. Research that has been conducted to understand different aspects of the performance of organisations to deliver services has been described as ‘grey material’ (Soteri-Proctor, 2010). This comprises unpublished papers and in-house publications, which are often produced by voluntary organisations (Soteri-Proctor, 2010).

According to Morris (2000), once governments have subsidised the VCS using public funds, they have an obligation and right to keep track of performance. Osborne et al. (1995, p.22) describe performance measurement as “a way to ensure accountability for the use of public money by both public and voluntary organisations”. Given that Osborne et al.’s (1995) findings were published 17 years ago, there is limited evidence as to whether these systems used to measure voluntary sector performance are still relevant (see Moxham and Boaden, 2007). While Osborne et al. (1995) looked at the

impact of contextual and processual factors on the development, use and impact of performance measurement systems from an organisational perspective, their approach was case-based using qualitative data that had been collected from four organisations. They concluded that there are some unique context issues faced by organisations working in the VCS. Thus, given the multiplicity of stakeholders, the nature, and requirements of the beneficiaries of the activities in this sector, it is vital to ensure performance is measured appropriately and judged to be effective at all levels (Osborne et al., 1995).

The majority of practical guidance on voluntary sector performance measurement has been conducted by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). This is the largest umbrella body for the VCS in England. They have produced a number of case studies that explore the measurement of performance across a range of VCOs (see Collins, 2003; O'Hagan, 2003; Shar, 2003; Wainwright, 2003). Owing to the service delivery relationship between the voluntary and public sectors, the applicability of business measurement frameworks to the public sector is a useful body of literature to draw on to understand different arrangements (Moxham and Boaden, 2007). As a result of the UK Labour government's current strategy of utilising the VCS in public service delivery (Little, 2005), VCOs must now comply with public sector accountability requirements, which require organisations to monitor their performance (Brown and Troutt, 2004). While VCOs do have some institutional arrangements designed to enable internal or external monitoring (Kendall and Knapp, 2000), they simply might not have the time, resources, or knowledge to make detailed or complex evaluations. Therefore, independent evaluations are carried out by specialist organisations and agencies that have expertise in their planning, execution, and management. The characteristics of the voluntary sector present further challenges to performance measurement that have not been addressed in either the private or public sector measurement literature (Moxham and Boaden, 2007). Taking into account the distinctive features of voluntary organisations will entail going beyond the for-profit sector or new public management models of resource–outcome relationships (Kendall and Knapp, 2000). It may mean understanding the individuals working within these organisations, the subsequent service sectors, and the contextual environment within which these organisations operate.

3.7 Partnerships and Joint Working in the VCS

“Early in its first term of office, New Labour stated its intention to build a culture of partnership with the voluntary and community sector, as part of its determination to improve the delivery of public services but also in order formally to recognise the independence of voluntary organisations” (Lewis, 2005, p.121). Collaboration and partnership working “in the delivery of public services is now a major policy goal across both the developed and developing world” (Miller and Ahmad, 2000, p.1). However, the relationship between the VCS and the state is complex, and the means through which organisations engage with government can be multifaceted (Shammin, 2007). The political drive for partnerships has been to widen participation, to improve regional and sub-regional infrastructure, and increase service levels. This can include “more choice in the nature of provision to citizens and to providers in the way they organise and manage resources” (Armistead and Pettigrew, 2008, p.17).

The message is clear: the pressure to collaborate and join together in partnership is overwhelming. Partnership is no longer simply an option; it is a requirement (Dowling et al., 2004, p.309).

This is supported by Greig & Poxton (2001) and Knight et al. (2001). Joint working between voluntary organisations is seen as a means to drive efficiency and reduce duplication. A problem that charitable organisations face is ‘scalability’ (Archer and Cameron, 2009) resulting from limited capacity and resources to manage such projects (Lewis et al., 2010). By working together, organisations minimise the challenges and risks in their external environment. Small organisations have a greater need to form partnerships as they are more likely to lack the requisite resources to meet contractual requirements (Graddy and Chen, 2006). A common experience in developing successful partnerships is that they require time and effort. They do not just happen overnight (Wildridge et al., 2004).

However, despite its popularity and seemingly inexorable onward march, it is worth remembering that there have been and indeed still remain a number of reluctant collaborators. These have been driven into collaborative work, not as a result of learning that this is good practice, nor by government urging, although this has been strong, but as a result of collaboration being made a requirement of government funding (Miller and Ahmad, 2000, p.14).

Therefore, the creation and development of partnerships raises a series of important questions for those engaged in the theoretical application of collaboration, and the political and practical implications partnerships possess and present. For example, why do these organisations enter partnerships? When organisations do so, are they fully committed to these new arrangements? What are a partner's long-term expectations of the partnership and are they consistent with those of other members? Due to "the changing agenda of local government and with it a desire to address, in innovative ways, those issues that cross organisational boundaries" (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998, pp.315-316), partnership working and collaboration between organisations is continuously growing. Ideally, these partnerships consist of an integrated service (Glendinning, 2002). This involves organisations offering services and solutions that go beyond what any one of the partners are able to offer alone (Miller and Ahmad, 2000).

"UK policy makers have recently piloted a range of new approaches to employability in an attempt to address weaknesses in the performance of standard labour market programmes" (Lindsay et al., 2007, p.545). Although evidence-based policy is by no means a new phenomenon (see Martin and Sanderson, 1999; Sanderson, 2000, 2004; Solesbury, 2001; Taylor, 2005), it might be expected that partnerships are established to improve service user outcomes and bridge boundaries between organisations working in different sectors (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998; Wilson and Charlton, 1997).

Whilst policy makers have acted largely on the assumption that supporting welfare partnerships will, per se, lead to improved outcomes for users and communities, this assumption is as yet unsupported by any large body of empirical work and predicated on the assumption that the failure of the welfare state to respond adequately to need is down to its failure to work in partnership. Neither of these assumptions necessarily holds up to empirical scrutiny (Rummery, 2006, p.296).

Although partnerships are an increasingly central feature in theory and policy, "little attempt has been made to systematically look at the evidence base for outcomes linked to different aims, in different settings, and involving different partners" (Rummery, 2009, p.2). Despite an increase in studies that look at these issues, "there is little effective guidance for emergent practice, taking account of the issues confronting partnership practitioners" (Armistead and Pettigrew, 2008, p.20). While new forms of regulation, planning, and accountability have all been adopted within the ideology of the Third Way (Clegg, 2005; Giddens, 1998), little is understood about the new

obligations and relaxations in delivering services, innovative pilot initiatives, and financial incentives to promote and sustain partnership working (Glendinning, 2002). Because this thesis is based on a pilot initiative, a project partnership that was commissioned by the Local Authority and funded by local government, this study attempts to understand those issues concerning a new, joint working arrangement and what becomes of the partnership after a project has ended (see Archer and Cameron, 2009; Armistead and Pettigrew, 2008; Glendinning, 2002; Lewis et al., 2010).

3.8 Conclusion

While there is a huge, and ever increasing, variety of voluntary and public sector partnerships set up to tackle different social issues across the UK, it is a complex task to understand all of these arrangements due to the variety and myriad of organisations that do exist in the VCS. Localised initiatives and projects, which bring different organisations, agencies and public bodies together, are now being developed to improve the way services are delivered and how they are funded. If organisations do not comply they may find themselves in financial difficulty and ultimately close. As more contracts emerge, an organisation's existence is gradually becoming more dependent on its relationship with other providers that operate within and outside the VCS. Evidence indicates that the ability to change and build capacity are important factors to make this happen.

CHAPTER 4

CREATING AN INTEGRATED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of exploratory research is to seek new insights and find out what is happening. There is attempt to ask questions and assess phenomena in a new light. A more qualitative approach often underpins this sort of enquiry and the focus is on obtaining new insights into current situations and issues (Anderson, 2004, p.14).

Throughout this exploratory study there was an ongoing process of reviewing literature, collecting data, developing / revising models and initial thoughts to understand collaboration as a topic and how it was experienced in the case study. In review of the research question and aims in Chapter 1, and scanning relevant literature in management and organisational studies with other disciplinary work (e.g. Education, Health and Social Policy, Government and Society, and Public Administration), a model or framework that demonstrated how inter-organisational relationships (IORs) between Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations evolve over time had not been documented. Therefore, while collecting and analysing data during fieldwork, an important step of this thesis was to construct an integrated theoretical framework based on what the research study was trying to answer, or, in this case, discover.

Because theory has not established a specific framework or model to examine the case study, a detailed search of literature in and around the research topic was considered using key words that were relevant to this research study. These included partnership working, voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), charities, consortium, voluntary agencies, collaboration, inter-organisational relationship (IOR), interaction, stages of development, process theories, and project life-cycles etc. During this review of literature, it was clear that this thesis would become “a pilot study that can be used as a basis for formulating more precise questions and testable hypotheses” (Gummesson, 2000, p.85) on consortium based partnerships. This approach is supported by Stake (1995) and Yin (1994). In review of Chapters 2 and 3, this chapter has been designed to *outline* an integrated theoretical framework to examine collaboration between organisations and an agency in the VCS that were commissioned to deliver a combined service as a temporary project partnership.

4.2 An Integrated Model

In review of the literature search, figure 4 brings together the main areas of consideration in this thesis.

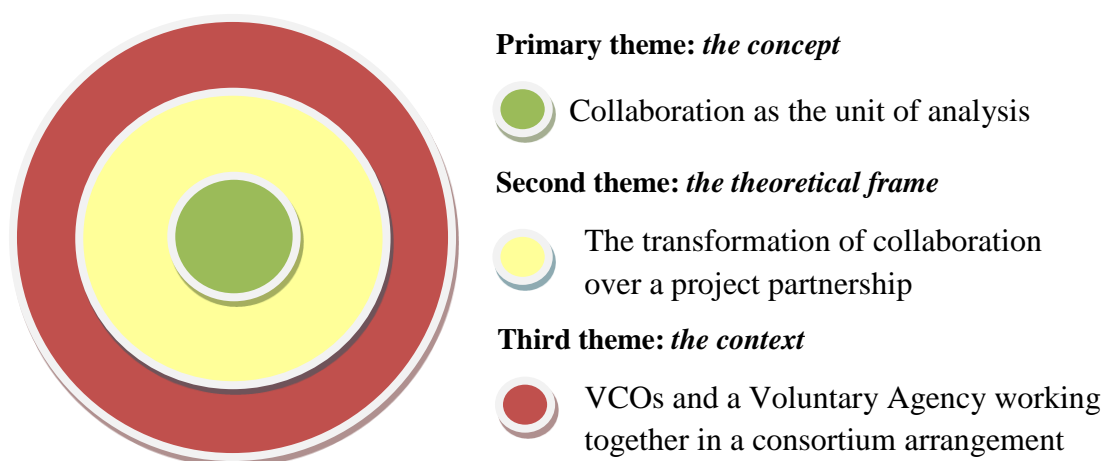


Figure 4. An integrated model of the literature search

The diagram illustrates the central circle as the primary theme, collaboration as the unit of analysis, which has been defined as a concept, process and an outcome (see Section 4.3). The secondary theme identifies the transformation of collaboration over the project partnership, in that to understand collaboration this thesis will explore how organisations collaborated with other members over a project's life-cycle (see Section 4.4). The third theme is the context of the partnership, which has been defined as local service providers and agencies working together in the VCS to deliver employment and training provision in a consortium arrangement (see Section 4.5).

4.3 Collaboration as the Unit of Analysis

The first theme recognises that this thesis is primarily based on understanding collaboration between several organisations working in a project partnership. This involved examining a single case study - how a group of service providers and a non-delivery partner, the coordinator, collaborated to achieve a number of targets and outputs as a combined service. In doing so, the research process aimed to explore the partnership's journey, which meant observing how organisations worked together until the project was completed.

Drawing on literature, two overarching avenues to examine collaboration have been identified. This involved looking at the process and the outcome of collaboration (see El Ansari et al., 2001; Boydell and Rugkasa, 2007; Dowling et al., 2004; Halliday et al., 2004). Collaboration as a concept has been defined as a dynamic, interactive and evolving process between several organisations, which leads to the attainment of objectives and goals that cannot be achieved by any one agent (provider) acting alone (Bruner, 1991; Huxham, 1996; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). The outcome is a product from their relationship, whether this brings collaborative advantage or collaborative inertia (see Huxham, 1993, 2003; Huxham and Vangen, 1996, 2004, 2005; Vangen and Huxham, 2006). While collaborative advantage relates to the desired synergistic outcome of the collaborative activity, collaborative inertia is seen as an inhibitor of advantage. This results in organisations exhibiting slow progress or failure when they collaborate. IORs are therefore more than an exchange of resources and information to achieve a shared objective. By “combining knowledge, resources, and skills”, a “partnership is able to develop new and better ways of thinking and acting” (Slater et al., 2006, p.644). Consequently, organisations will build their capacity, learn how to improve what they do, and become more interdependent with other providers when they form an inter-organisational arrangement.

Studying the process of collaboration involves greater complexity than that of an object that is static as its existence is momentary, conditional, and contextual. In focusing on collaboration as a process, the transition between stages or phases becomes an important factor. The case study in this thesis draws attention to the transformation of collaboration (see Section 4.4). In terms of finding a sequence of defined stages, Gray’s (1989) ‘three-stage model’, Lowndes and Skelcher’s (1998) ‘four-stage life-cycle of partnerships’, Wilson and Charlton’s (1997) ‘five-stage model’, and Mattessich and Monsey (1992) have all contributed to the field of partnership working. This work attempts to build on this literature but specifically explores collaboration as the unit of analysis between organisations that were contracted to complete a project as a partnership in a specific timeframe.

4.4 The Transformation of Collaboration over the Project Partnership

A review of literature establishes collaboration as: (i) an evolving (D'Amour et al., 2005), emerging (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994) and a developmental process (Gray, 1985), (ii) a joined effort between individuals and organisations, and (iii) an inter-organisational arrangement between entities that seek out advantage and or synergy (Huxham, 1993, 2003; Lasker et al., 2001; Weiss et al., 2002). As a partnership progresses, relationships begin to develop, and the level of engagement and interaction between partners will change according to how members work together. Collaboration therefore moves through different episodes or transitions over time during a 'partnership life-cycle' (Lester et al., 2008; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998).

Organisations and their members in project working can be seen as experiencing a life cycle to complete specific tasks and activities (Turner, 2009; Weiss and Wysocki, 1992; Westland, 2006). They can be characterised by a sequence of negotiated stages that are individually and collectively constructed by members (Gray, 1985). These are the developmental stages organisations will pass through or move along as they try to establish themselves and meet their goals (Osborne, 1996). These stages can be referred to as formation, implementation, maintenance, and accomplishing goals or outcomes (Butterfoss et al., 1993), which is supported by Downey et al. (2008). Their study expands previous coalition research by documenting the process through which actual coalitions went from formation to the outcome stage of development. However, "movement through the stages is not always linear because coalitions can cycle back to earlier stages as they take on new issues, recruit new members or update action plans" (Kegler et al., 2010, p.2). This is supported by Hickman (1998) and Wilson and Charlton (1997) who studied similar arrangements.

Consequently, understanding the transformation process of collaboration means understanding the stages of development that occur during a project partnership. Various studies indicate that collaboration proceeds through different phases, which include goal or purpose recognition, partner exploration, establishing objectives and governance structures, implementation, and termination (Hartono and Holsapple, 2004; Wilson and Charlton, 1997). These are quite similar to group development theory (e.g. Gersick, 1988, 1989; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977), which has been used to examine the transformation of stages within an 'inter-organisational group' (Austin &

Worchel, 1979; Schopler, 1987) or in a ‘multidisciplinary team’ (Axelsson and Axelsson, 2006). These groups or teams consist of individuals from different organisations that work together to achieve a shared objective.

A partnership will therefore require individuals from two or more organisations working side-by-side as a group or team over a period of time to achieve something of common interest. This will generally involve different stages or phases of development. These include a formation period (beginning stage), development and performance period (middle stage), and a termination period (end stage) (see Figure 5). The literature has referred to these stages as form, storm, norm, perform, and adjourn (see Aronoff & Bailey, 2005; Axelsson and Axelsson, 2006; Frey et al., 2006; Gajda, 2004; Gajda and Tulikangas, 2005; Huzzard et al., 2010; McMorris et al., 2005; Morrison and Glenny, 2012; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977; Woodland and Hutton, 2012).

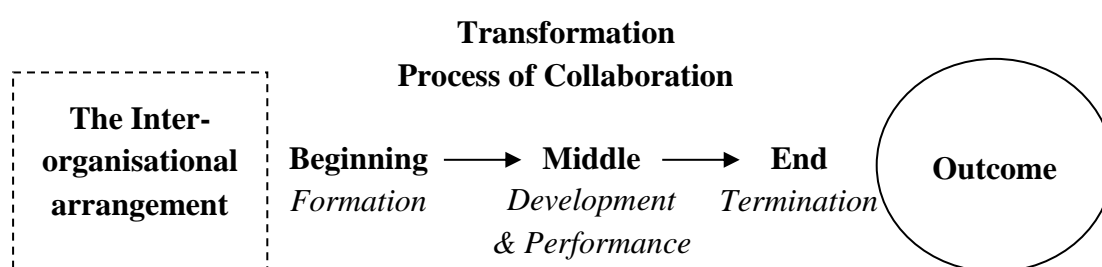


Figure 5. A transformation process of collaboration

Alternatively, Hudson et al. (1999) see this process as a continuum of partnership activities which move from isolation through encounter, communication and collaboration to integration. They proposed ten stages of collaboration endeavour. However, they preferred the term components rather than stages. Whether it is stages, phases or components, collaboration as a ‘continuum’ is likely to be affected by a number of factors (Austin, 2000; Hudson et al., 1999; Thomson and Perry, 2006). They include the degree of convergence between partners’ organisational goals and interests, the levels of communication, and resource exchange (Glendinning, 2002). Another important aspect to consider is how these partnerships are setup initially (Wilson and Charlton, 1997). The partnership in this research study involved a project based on a contractual arrangement. It was funded for a specific purpose, and would only exist temporarily. The short-cyclical nature of these projects may therefore challenge some of the key assumptions of collaboration (e.g. advantage and synergy) and how these relationships develop over time if there is no continuity (Huxham and Vangen, 2000b).

As already highlighted in Chapter 2, Ring and Van de Ven (1994) provide an alternative view to these linear or sequential models. Ring and Van de Ven (1994) identify the process of collaboration as iterative and cyclical. It is a process-oriented definition of collaboration that takes into account the nonlinear and emergent nature of collaboration, which suggests that “collaboration evolves as parties interact over time” (Thomson and Perry, 2006, p.22). This thesis therefore takes into consideration a process that is linear, where there is a beginning, middle and an end, but one that may experience iterative, emerging and cyclical changes within and between stages (see Martin, 2004). This research also recognises that groups may experience stages of development that are planned, where development is sequential (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977), or where it is non-sequential - change that emerges (Gersick, 1988, 1989). This can involve deadline pressures and unforeseen circumstances affecting a partnership.

4.5 VCOs working together in the VCS

The final theme involved recognising the context of the study. While there is a large and growing body of evidence that has examined partnership working in the public and private sector (e.g. mergers and acquisitions, alliances, business networks, and joint ventures), evidence of consortium working between organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is limited. It could be said that “these organisations have either been deliberately ignored, or have been assumed to be too small to merit attention” (Haugh and Kitson, 2007, p.5). Alternatively, another reason they have been overlooked could be that these collaborative arrangements are quite new (Macmillan, 2010). Because there are literally hundreds of thousands of organisations in the sector that have their own individual or organisational agenda, it is difficult to fully comprehend all of these arrangements. They are non-profit distributing (e.g. charities or faith-based groups) and include a degree of voluntarism (Cunningham, 2008; Milligan and Fyre, 2004). These organisations generally consist of paid workers and a large number of volunteers (Bussell and Forbes, 2002).

While this project partnership is based on a consortium of organisations that were commissioned to deliver employment and training provision to people with disabilities and mental health illnesses, historically these organisations have always been autonomous, user-focused, and self-governed, with their own identity and way of

working (see NCVO, 1996, 2010; Williams, 2006). The factors that lead organisations to collaborate can be different from those of organisations that operate in the private or public sector, e.g. there is no profit motive. It may be a response to the external environment or one where a proactive decision is made that it is the best way forward to develop the organisation (IVAR, 2011). With the reduction or withdrawal of government funding to VCS organisations, contractual arrangements, which are temporarily funded projects that consist of joint working for public sector delivery, are growing (NCVO, 2006a, 2010). However, these partnerships take time to develop and manage (IVAR, 2011; NCVO, 2006a). In order to survive financially, organisations must build relationships and work collaboratively with other providers. Resource dependency theory (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) demonstrate why VCOs would need or want to collaborate with other organisations and how this may affect them. These theories identify organisations working together because of external pressure and how organisations change as a result. Partnership working and collaboration between VCOs is a growing form of practice within the VCS (NCVO, 1996, 2011). Therefore, new models and frameworks that capture the main dynamics and characteristics of these relationships have to be developed to get a better understanding of how these arrangements work, or fail to do so (IVAR, 2011).

4.6 Conclusion

On review of the literature in Chapters 2 and 3, this chapter has outlined an integrated theoretical framework when studying collaboration between organisations in the VCS. There are three main areas of consideration that have been identified in this thesis. The first is the ‘concept’, collaboration as the unit of analysis, the second involves the ‘theoretical frame’, the transformation of collaboration over a project life-cycle, and the third identifies the ‘context’, locally-driven service providers working with a voluntary agency in a joint working, consortium arrangement.

PART THREE
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS

CHAPTER 5

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND PARADIGMS

5.1 Background

The research design process begins with philosophical assumptions that inquirers make in deciding to undertake a particular study (Myers, 2009). According to Remenyi et al. (1998), the philosophical orientation that is adopted plays an important role in business and management research and the researcher needs to establish this early on and even before the research process begins. Additionally, these philosophical assumptions, although far from hermetically sealed, provide a frame or structure when conducting a study, and entail a certain position that a researcher will adopt throughout the research process (Pryke et al., 2003). As a result, the philosophical orientation and assumptions provide “the foundations for everything that follows” (Myers, 2009, p.23). Ontology and epistemology therefore contain important questions about how the world is viewed and the way a researcher conducts himself/herself:

- **Ontology:** *What is the nature of reality? Is reality objective and external to human beings or is it created by an individual’s consciousness?*
- **Epistemology:** *What is knowledge and how can it be acquired? What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?*
- **Methodology:** *What is the process of research? What methods, approaches and techniques are needed to understand reality?*

Hence, philosophical assumptions consist of a stance toward the nature of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows what he/she knows (epistemology), and the methods used in the process (methodology) (Creswell, 2003). While this chapter aims to address some of these points, mainly the philosophical, ontological and epistemological approach in this thesis, Chapters 6 and 7 will explore the methodology, research strategy and methods, and the process of analysis. Ontology, epistemology, and methodology can be referred to as “philosophy constructs, which are concerned with the way scientists and researchers develop knowledge” (McNabb, 2008, p.34). Thus the

research philosophy and its process are critical in how individuals understand, discover, evaluate and interpret knowledge.

According to McNabb (2008, p.34), “the ontological position of each individual researcher is a product of the researcher’s own experiences and culture”. He also suggests researchers will approach research from two separate but related epistemological positions. They are the metaphysical or theoretical position, and the empirical or observational position. Previous research examining collaboration has mainly used ‘action research’ (e.g. Eden and Huxham, 1996; Huxham, 2003; Huxham and Beech, 2003; Huxham and Vangen, 2000a). This approach identifies a requirement for a researcher to observe and intervene in the organisations studied (Huxham, 2003). Researchers are seen as a “consultant or facilitator” (Huxham and Vangen, 2000a, p.775) where they will work “with participants over matters of genuine concern to them” (Huxham and Beech, 2003, p.70). By contrast, this thesis uses a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the study of things and events as people perceive them (McNabb, 2008). Ultimately, this thesis aims to identify the essence of what all persons experience about a phenomenon (i.e. collaboration) without meddling or interfering in their arrangement (see Creswell et al., 2007).

5.2 Phenomenological Philosophy

A useful starting point to develop a research study is to carefully consider the research question and the research topic but also how the research project commenced and will be conducted. At the beginning of this thesis there was no initial intention to examine the case study’s inter-organisational relationship (IOR), or how organisations collaborated throughout the project partnership. Indeed, I was an independent researcher evaluating the outcomes of a consortium between charity-based organisations. I later took it upon myself to explore their inter-organisational arrangement more comprehensively, which would involve observing their interactions over time, and examining theory and other case studies relating to the topic that has been researched and published in different disciplines. While conducting a literature search, evidence found few studies that discussed/explained the phenomenon. Because of this, my philosophical approach was drawn to a study free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). It also provided an opportunity to register a reflexive account, which would demonstrate my own position or journey in the thesis as fieldwork was being

conducted (see Alvesson et al., 2008; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Bryman and Bell, 2007; Cassell, 2005; Finlay, 2002; Hardy et al., 2001; Hibbert et al., 2010; Johnson and Duberley, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; Nadin and Cassell, 2006; Orr and Bennett, 2009; Simons, 2009). This data would allow further findings to be considered to understand the case study and the research process (see Finlay, 2002). In doing so, this thesis would need to examine:

... how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions concerning his or her grasp of the world (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.18).

This type of approach is concerned with phenomenology. The term phenomenology is derived from two Greek words - 'phainomenon' (an 'appearance') and 'logos' ('reason' or 'word') (Pivcevic, 1970). The term phenomenology has been conceptualised as a philosophy, a research method and an overarching perspective from which all qualitative research is sourced (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It is a mode of inquiry that has been used across social and human sciences. Because it is interested in exploring human experience and behaviour, it is a method that has been taken up by researchers from a number of disciplines. Some of these include psychological research, nursing studies, education, anthropology, and organisational behaviour and management studies. Phenomenology is an approach that aims to:

..... make explicit the implicit structure and meaning of human experiences. It is the search for 'essences' that cannot be revealed by ordinary observation. Phenomenology is the science of essential structures of consciousness or experiences. The point of phenomenology is to get straight to the pure and unencumbered vision of what an experience essentially is (Sanders, 1982, p.354).

Phenomenology is the "description of things as one experiences them or of one's experiences of things" (Hammond et al., 1991, p.1). It is concerned with 'how' individuals experience phenomena and the meanings that are ascribed or hidden in them, i.e. the essence of experience, which describe their underlying reason (Pivcevic, 1970). Sanders (1982, p.354) sees this as the study of conscious phenomena, "an analysis of the way in which things or experiences show themselves".

The phenomenological school of thought started with the work of Franz Brentano, which was later developed by Edmund Husserl. Crotty (1996) refers to these pioneers as

classical phenomenologists. The movement was later promulgated by Husserl's successor Martin Heidegger. Other important contributors include Alfred Schutz, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre. These later theorists or post-Husserlian phenomenologists attempted to overcome some of the limitations of their predecessors. While Husserl's intention was to develop a schema for describing and classifying subjective experiences of what he termed the life-world (Langenbach, 1995), Schutz (1967) developed the approach as a method which incorporated details of experience often at the level of mundane everyday life. The life-world is defined as the world in which we, as human beings among other human beings, interact and experience different things. Individuals are influenced by them and will act on them (Schutz, 1966).

Modern philosophical discussions and many contemporary social theorists such as Berger and Luckmann (1967), who developed 'social constructionism', and Giddens (1984), who devised 'structuration theory' draw on phenomenology to address complex issues in society. While various forms of phenomenology have been developed over time (Grbich, 2007), recent research in Entrepreneurship and Enterprise has addressed such issues in small business management. What sets phenomenological research apart from other approaches is the explicit and coherent philosophical basis for the suspension of prior theoretical beliefs and preconceptions, which has a central bearing on how researchers prepare for, conduct and analyse their engagement in the field (Cope, 2005). Phenomenology can be captured in three main streams:

- *Classical / realistic / transcendental* phenomenology: this describes the structures of the world and how people act and react to them, in particular the structures of consciousness, intentionality, and essences in the real world. This stream looks at how objects are constituted in pure consciousness, and how these constitutions can be identified through processes of phenomenological reductionism (Grbich, 2007);
- *Existential* phenomenology: Jun (2008, p.93) defines this as something that examines "subjective human experience as it reflects people's values, purposes, ideals, intentions, emotions, and relationships". This stream sees consciousness not as a separate entity but as being linked to human existence, particularly in relation to the active role of the body and freedom of action and choices. Essences become part of human experience (Grbich, 2007). The individual is

seen as an active and creative subject rather than an object in nature. In other words, the existential person is not merely passive or reactive subject to environmental influences but also a purposeful being, who has inner experiences and can interpret the meaning of his/her relationships with others in the social world (Jun, 2008);

- *Hermeneutical* phenomenology: this sees human experience as interpretive (Van Manen, 1997). This stream investigates the interpretative structures of experience of texts (Grbich, 2007), how individuals understand and engage with things around them in reality, which includes how individuals and others interact (Smith, 2008). This can be with an object (e.g. a building), a piece of art or text or a relationship that individuals have with other beings (Cohen et al., 2000).

Thompson et al. (1989) claimed the world of ‘lived experience’ does not always correspond with the world of objective description because objectivity often implies explaining an event or experience separate from its contextual setting. To try and provide predictive knowledge through the construction of generalizable laws that remain ‘true’ across time and space is seen as untenable in phenomenological terms. This is primarily because such a process of ‘context stripping’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) does not embrace the idea that the meaning of experience is temporally and contextually situated. Phenomenological research is thus firmly located at a particular time in a particular context (Cope, 2005). “The epistemology of phenomenology focuses on revealing meaning rather than on arguing a point or developing abstract theory” (Van der Zalm and Bergum, 2000, p.212). A phenomenological approach therefore attempts to understand the subjective nature of lived experience from the perspective of those who experience it. This involves exploring the explanations, interactions, and meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Becker, 1992). These accounts can illustrate shared (Boyce, 1995) and multiple realities (Van der Zalm and Bergum, 2000). The results of phenomenological inquiry are descriptive in nature.

5.3 Organisations as Life-worlds

From a phenomenological perspective, organisations are ‘life-worlds’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) in which all processes of organising and knowing can take place through experiential processes. The primary objective within this interpretive research

tradition is based on an individual's and/or a group's lived experience of a moment in time. This can be a situation, event or activity. The notion of lived experience as a primary research objective can be "traced back to the phenomenological idea of life-world" (Sandberg, 2005, p.47). The subjects' experience of reality is subjective to the individual, but objective in that others have also experienced or been part of that reality. Individuals share a set of meanings with other subjects through their experience of it. Through interactions, individuals are constantly involved in negotiations with other subjects (Gray, 2004). They develop an "intersubjective sense making of it" (Sandberg, 2005, p.47), that is, their experience of a moment in time. To use a phenomenological approach, research has to look beyond the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind it (Remenyi et al., 1998). It is "an interpretative approach to organisational research that has been gaining attention in recent years as an alternative to the more traditional positivist approach" (Lee, 1991, p.342).

For an interpretivist there is no objective, universal reality; instead, there are multiple realities to understand, realities that are constructed by individuals and in different social settings, which are time and context bound (Ohman, 2005). These realities evolve over time, and are embedded in local and specific contexts. The goal of scholars who use an interpretive framework is to understand an individual's day-to-day experiences and interactions in order to capture multiple meanings that are given to routine [habitual] and changing [transformative] events or situations by those in the setting (Bailey, 2007). Phenomenologists tend to oppose objectivism and positivism (also called naturalism), which tend to look at reality in terms of variables, testing of hypotheses, and measurements. However, according to Waugh and Waugh (2006, p.495), "phenomenological reasoning is not diametrically opposed to that of logical positivism". Indeed, phenomenologists, for the most part, do not attack empiricism as being an invalid scientific method. Phenomenological researchers insist only that empiricism presents a narrow view of the social world – an approach that leads to simplification and loss of detail.

A reliance on the positivist paradigm, with its emphasis on reducing the study of the human world to something that can be measured, precludes researchers from focusing on the complexity and ambiguity of the world of human beings and has the potential for generating findings that lose the vital meaning of the experience of being human in the world (Gibson & Hanes, 2003, p.183).

Positivism has come to mean inquiry based on measurable variables and provable propositions. It involves inferential statistics, hypothesis testing, mathematical analysis, and experimental and quasi-experimental design. It also involves the manipulation of theoretical propositions using the rules of formal logic and the rules of hypothetico-deductive logic. These theoretical propositions aim to satisfy four requirements, namely falsifiability, logical consistency, relative explanatory power, and survival (Lee, 1991). Alternatively, the interpretative approach makes use of qualitative methods, which are said to provide a “new means of investigating previously unexplored questions” (Sandberg, 2005, p.42). This school of thought takes the position that people and the physical and social artefacts they create are fundamentally different from the physical reality examined by natural science (Lee, 1991). According to Dahlberg et al. (2001, p.51), understanding “humans and their existence can never be complete without the perspective of the subjective experience”. This involves “capturing the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour” (Johnson et al., 2006, p.132).

While phenomenological research methods “attempt to uncover the underlying essences and meanings of experience to arrive at a deeper intersubjective understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Gibson & Hanes, 2003, pp.183-184), how a researcher should go about doing this is not well documented (e.g. a ‘phenomenological guide’). The approach that this thesis has taken aims to explore a phenomenon that has been experienced by several individuals. The research process involves understanding individual descriptions [subjective reality] to develop a collective interpretation of events over time [objective facticity] (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This approach rests within the interpretive paradigm by which individuals and organisations must be understood within their context (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This would initially mean examining each organisation’s shared experience, their story/account of their partnership journey, to understand how they collaborated with another partner over a project life cycle. Shared meaning is then used to construct a collective account, which identifies how members worked together to complete the project. This process is illustrated in Chapter 7.

5.4 Interpreting a Shared Experience: Understanding Organisational Stories

Qualitative researchers typically spend long hours reading and re-reading text (e.g. field notes, interview transcripts) to achieve an understanding of a participant's experience (Stein and Mankowski, 2004). A particularly important way of exploring experience, and how it transforms over time, is through the study of narratives (Cunliffe et al., 2004). The idea of this form of inquiry considers how individuals and groups 'make sense' of and interpret their actions and behaviour (Boje, 2001). Clandinin & Connelly (1994, p.415) argued that "experience ... is the stories people live. People live stories and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones". Stein and Mankowski (2004, p.22) see it as "making sense of the collective experience of participants by transforming 'participant stories' into 'research stories' based on the experiences and knowledge of the researcher". Recent studies have viewed 'storytelling' and 'stories' in different ways, offering definitions of varying flexibility as to what counts as a story (see Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 2004; Gabriel, 2000). Through stories, researchers are able to study organisations from different stakeholders' perspectives, using a method that has been applied across several fields of study. Stories can reveal:

..... how people make sense of organisational events or fail to do so; they can give useful insights into organisational politics and culture, where they reveal hidden agendas, taboos and lacunae; very often they can disclose not what happened but something quite equally important; what people believe or want to believe happened (Gabriel, 2004, p.23).

Stories help researchers to explore wider and deeper organisational issues (e.g. relationships, behaviour, culture, and change). According to Weick (1995), our understanding of the present is underpinned by our use of 'stories'. These stories act as templates where past events or circumstances lead to a set of outcomes (Öztel and Hinz, 2001). By collecting stories in a particular organisation, listening to and comparing different accounts, investigating how narratives are constructed around specific events, and examining which events in an organisation's history affect behaviour, an understanding is provided of how an event has been experienced at a specific point/period in time (Boyce, 1995). Boyce (1995) found examining stories to be a useful vehicle for collective centring and to confirm how a number of individuals experience phenomena in an organisational setting. Using a similar approach, this thesis attempts to

understand a partnership's journey by exploring a participant's experience and capturing shared meaning, which would involve organising data in a 'time sequence' (Czarniawska, 2004). This involves an arrangement of events in their order of occurrence - a chronological account of something that has a beginning, a period of development or change, and an end (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Boje (2003, p.46) advises, however, "stories are not told in acts of cohesion". The research process will therefore involve examining statements from participants, those descriptions that discuss the phenomenon, and systematically and rigorously interrogating these descriptions to arrive at themes that demonstrate their shared experience (Polkinghorne, 1983).

While Wilensky and Hansen (2001) studied non-profit organisations in terms of the work beliefs of executives, research by Tietze et al. (2003) also focused on understanding individuals within organisations through language and meaning making. By focusing on meaning (and interpretation), Tietze et al. (2003) drew attention to processes that were unstable, dynamic and complex. It is also said that an organisational story will involve a greater number of narrators, characteristics, and dynamics to consider when collecting, analysing and reporting data (Boje, 2001). While stories can be used to illustrate almost any key concept in an organisation (Morgan and Dennehy, 1997), individuals will often recount experiences, and or their reality at work, in a story format with others on a daily basis. Some might see this as 'organisational gossip' (Noon and Delbridge, 1993); however, Gabriel and Griffiths (2004) see stories as opening valuable windows into the emotional and symbolic lives of organisations. Morgan and Dennehy (1997) even go as far as stating that stories are usually more powerful than statistics. However, the meaning of data lie dormant until the researcher crafts them into something meaningful (Bailey, 2007).

Consequently, researching stories in organisations must be carefully carried out so as to represent the many voices that are involved in a specific activity or event (McCarthy, 2008). Then again, Gabriel (2004) found several factors in organisations that inhibit an individual's story. They can be in the form of organisational controls, e.g. what people should say or what they do not say just in-case it has repercussions. Additionally, the complexity of the story will depend on an organisation's size, activities, and what exactly is being explored (e.g. strategy, leadership, decision-making, or relationships in this case). This could mean examining a number of individuals and organisations that

are involved in the process from one or several locations. The process of collecting and analysing stories, ‘turning’ them into a collective account, and a researcher’s role in this process will therefore need to emphasize such things as contextuality, temporality, plurality, reflexivity and subjectivity, which are so often underplayed by traditional approaches when studying organisations and its management (Rhodes and Brown, 2005).

5.5 Organising Experience through Narrative Research

Within organisational studies, the nature and purpose of narratives are theorized in various ways. These can include “creating a coherent shared experience and aligning employees with corporate values by highlighting social conventions and acceptable behaviors, as deliberately ‘authored’ and performed as a means of making sense of a situation, as a means of giving sense by legitimating and normalizing culture, as containing multiple meanings, or as helping storytellers deal with experiences of tensions, trauma and loss” (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012, p.66). A common theme highlighted in the literature is that narratives are a means by which individuals organize and make sense of their experience, where they evaluate their actions from previous/current behaviour (Boyce, 1995). Narratives offer windows into personal experience, “specifically human agency in the face of life events” (Riessman, 1997, p.157). Not only do they offer a window into hidden truths, that are often flattened or silenced by an insistence on more traditional methods of social science (Ewick and Silbey, 1995), but they have potentially transformative power by allowing different voices to be heard at different points in time (Rhodes and Brown, 2005).

Riessman (1993) describes the process of narrative research as consisting of a series of transformations, which involves listening, transcribing, analysing, and reading as the researcher delves into the distinct style and structure of the model of representation chosen by the teller. However, Dutton (2002) advises that this method of research does not fit with most researchers. It is an approach where the researcher puts things into play or context (e.g. people, place, and emotion) and where he/she will ‘weave’ them together to make sense of the situation. This is supported by Fade (2004). Gubrium and Holstein (2008) refer to the occasions and practical actions associated with story construction and storytelling as ‘Narrative Practice’, which looks at:

....the content of accounts and their internal organisation, as well as the communicative conditions and resources surrounding how narratives are assembled, conveyed and received in everyday life (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008, p.247).

As stories change over time, so do narratives (Andrews et al., 2004). Individuals tell stories about their lives to themselves and to others at a particular time. It is through such stories that individuals make sense of their reality, of their relationship to the world, and of their relationship with other people. It is said that individuals are storytellers by nature (Lieblich et al., 1998) and one way of learning about the inner person and their reality is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators who explore and explain their experiences (Riessman, 1993). These are individuals who collect stories and bring them together (Boje, 2001). Additional dialogue is more than likely added from other sources to improve the narrative (Rhodes et al., 2010), e.g. evidence that also document the situation. Morgan and Dennehy (1997) assert that, when hearing or reading a story, the listener / reader is pulled into the scene and feels the emotions the characters feel. The narrator is also drawn into the story by which he/she will evoke both visual image and emotion. One way in which individuals collectively make sense of (or enact) their social world is through jointly negotiated narratives, where groups that comprise individuals, and individuals as members of groups come together to construct and share common meanings (Currie and Brown, 2003). These collective narratives provide shared interpretations of a situation (Boyce, 1995; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Rhodes et al., 2010).

“A narrative account therefore pieces together the order of events so as to make apparent the way they ‘caused’ the happening under investigation” (Glover, 2004, p.51). With this in mind, the researcher begins with questions such as ‘How did this happen?’ or ‘Why did this come about?’ A researcher will aim to identify pieces of information that contribute to the construction of a shared experience to provide an explanatory answer to the research question (Polkinghorne, 1995). Chapter 7, section 7.4 explains this issue in more detail. According to Riessman (1993, p.58), “determining where a narrative begins and ends and the listener/questioner’s place in producing it are textual as well as analytic issues”. Her approach involved starting from “the outside, from the meaning encoded in the form of the talk, and expand outward, identifying, for example, underlying propositions that make the talk sensible” (Riessman, 1993, p.61). The

process is a socially constructed activity and implies a degree of interpretation. Issues associated with this paradigm will be discussed in subsequent sections.

5.6 Paradigms or Worldviews

A paradigm represents a common or shared perspective between a group of theorists that identifies them as analysing social issues in the same way (Remenyi et al., 1998). These perspectives consist of paradigmatic beliefs that influence the purpose, objectives and direction of a research study. These beliefs will identify how researchers will conduct their research, how they will assess the role of values and ethics in their work, how they will formulate relationships with participants in the setting, how their work will be conducted, documented and presented, and many other aspects that are involved in the research process (Bailey, 2007). Of the many models which have attempted to define paradigms in social and organisational theory, the one developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979) has been the most popular. Burrell and Morgan define four paradigms in organisational analysis. They are functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist, and the radical structuralist paradigm (see Figure 6).

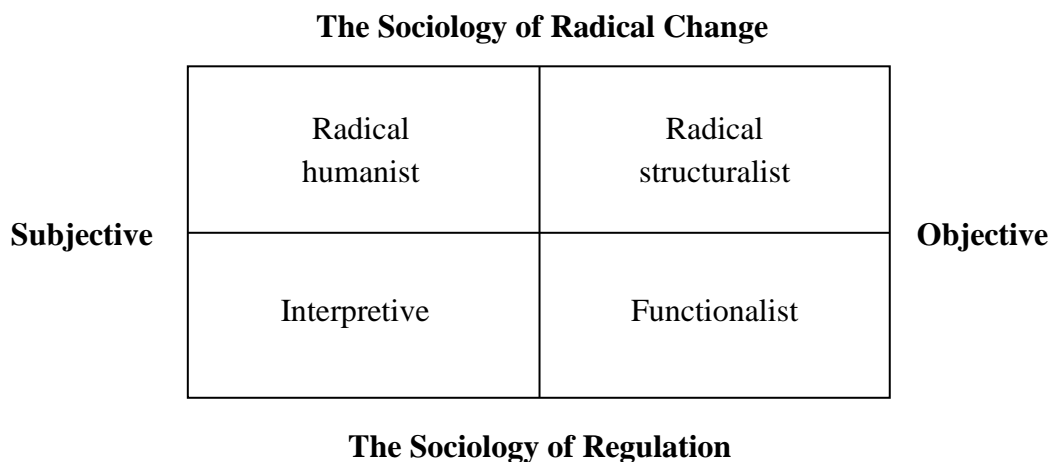


Figure 6. Four paradigms for organisational analysis

These four paradigms have been described by Hassard (1991, pp.89-90):

- The *functionalist paradigm* rests upon the premise that society has a real, concrete existence and a systematic character and is directed toward the production of order and regulation. The social science enterprise is believed to be objective and value free. The paradigm advocates a research process in which

the scientist is distanced from the subject matter by the rigour of the scientific method. The paradigm possesses a pragmatic orientation; it is concerned with analysing society in a way which produces useful knowledge;

- In the *interpretive paradigm*, the social world possesses a ‘precarious ontological status’. From this perspective, social reality, although possessing order and regulation, does not possess an external concrete form. Instead, it is the product of intersubjective experience. For the interpretive analyst, the social world is best understood from the viewpoint of the participant-in-action. The interpretive researcher seeks to deconstruct the phenomenological processes through which shared realities are created, sustained and changed. Researchers in this paradigm consider attempts to develop a purely ‘objective’ social science as specious;
- The *radical humanist* paradigm shares with the interpretive paradigm the assumption that everyday reality is socially constructed. However, for the radical humanist, this social construction is tied to a ‘pathology of consciousness’, a situation in which actors find themselves the prisoners of the (social) world they create. The radical humanist critique highlights the alienating modes of thought which characterize life in modern industrial societies. Capitalism, in particular, is subject to attack in the humanist’s concern to link thought and action as a means of transcending alienation;
- In the *radical structuralist* paradigm, we find a radical social critique, yet one at odds with that of the radical humanist paradigm in being tied to a materialist conception of the social world. In this paradigm, social reality is considered a ‘fact’. It possesses a hard external existence of its own and takes a form which is independent of the way it is socially constructed. In this paradigm, the social world is characterized by intrinsic tensions and contradictions. These forces serve to bring about radical change in the social system as a whole.

Because this research study is based on an interpretive, phenomenological approach, the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying this thesis will be unlike those of the positivistic tradition, where reality is studied using objective methods. The positivist paradigm relies upon experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, and a

rigorously defined quantitative methodology. The interpretivist and constructionist paradigm, however, assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Outhwaite and Turner, 2007). Additionally, to maintain an interpretive awareness means to acknowledge and explicitly deal with a researcher's subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it (Sandberg, 2005).

Although each of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigms have contributed valuable views of organisational knowledge, they are nevertheless incomplete as each paradigm focuses predominantly on one perspective and do not reflect the multifaceted nature of society and organisations (Gioia and Pitre, 1990). However, Burrell and Morgan's (1979) work highlights the role of philosophies in research endeavour that inform researchers about the complexities of organisational enquiry, and raises awareness of different research paradigms on knowledge construction in management research. Burrell and Morgan (1979) claim social scientists, implicitly and explicitly, approach their disciplines via assumptions about the nature of the social world and how it should be researched. They have developed a scheme for analysing these assumptions through a subjective-objective dimension model (see Figure 7).

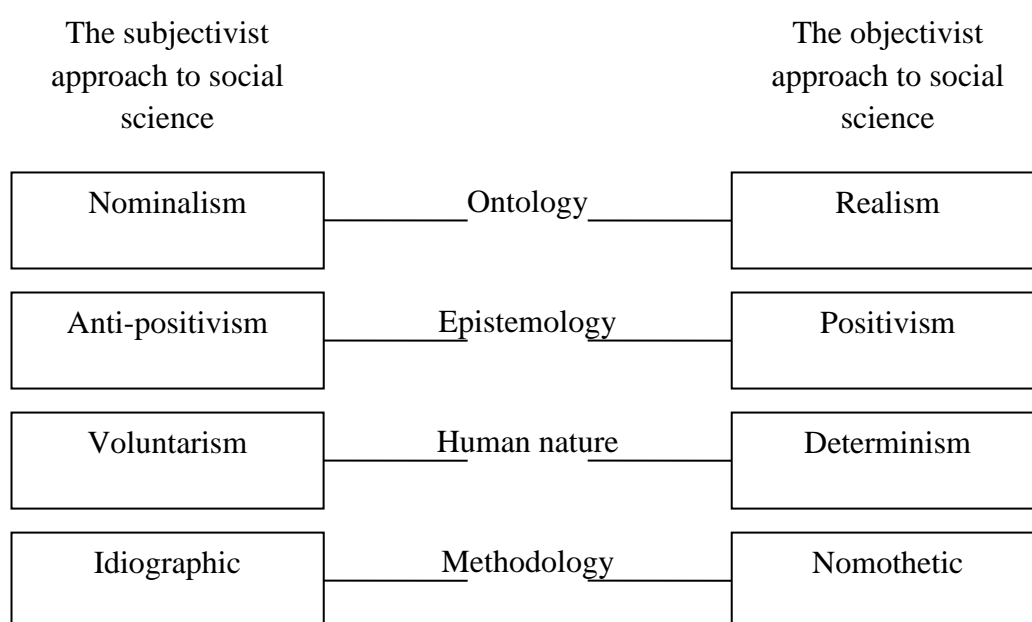


Figure 7. Burrell and Morgan's subjective-objective dimension

This diagram depicts the two major philosophical traditions, their respective assumptions, and the terminology associated with them. Ontology refers to either a nominalist or realist position regarding truth and knowledge. The epistemological assumption refers to the base of knowledge, whether it is hard, real and tangible, or softer or more spiritual and needs to be personally experienced, as in the anti-positivist view (Cohen et al., 2002, 2007). Nominalists argue that there are no real structures in the social world, only names, concepts, and labels used to describe, make sense of, and negotiate the world. Realists, on the other hand, hold on to the view that there is a real social world outside individual cognition, and that it consists of hard, tangible, and immutable structures. Determinism refers to the objectivist point of view where external environment issues determine human behaviour, while voluntarism implies a human being is the initiator of his/her own actions.

Finally, Burrell and Morgan (1979) also argue that the methodological debate between idiographic and nomothetic theory separates subjectivists from objectivists. Idiographic research is an approach advocated by subjectivists. It involves first-hand, ‘inside’ knowledge of the research subject in order to gain deep understanding of the uniqueness of every case (Myers, 2009). In contrast, the nomothetic approach, which looks at general laws of behaviour that can be applied to different groups, is based on systematic protocol and a quantitative technique that is used by objectivists. This approach attempts to find generalizable (statistical) facts about one or several case studies. As this thesis has taken an interpretive position, the research study demonstrates a paradigm or world-view that is quite similar to Burrell and Morgan’s subjectivist approach. This research is idiographic by its exploratory nature - “a deeper understanding of a phenomenon is only possible through understanding the interpretations of that phenomenon from those experiencing it” (Shah and Corley, 2006 p.1823). Meaning is negotiated and constructed through social interaction between individuals that have shared an experience (Boyce, 1995; Gray, 2004). Given these considerations, the following sections will be more specific to the study’s ontological and epistemological assumptions.

5.6.1 Ontology: Relativism or Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theory that describes the social world as something that is socially manufactured through human interaction and language. In other words,

...reality is determined by people rather than by objective and external factors. Hence the task of the social scientist should not be to gather facts and measure how often certain patterns occur but to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience. The focus should be on what people, individually and collectively, are thinking and feeling, and attention should be paid to the ways they communicate with each other, whether verbally or non-verbally (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002, p.30).

Society is not viewed as a pre-existent domain (as argued by Durkheim, 1964) but rather is the product of people engaging with one another. Such interactions become externalised, objectified and then internalised (Berger and Luckmann, 1984). Secondly, constructionists argue that our understanding of the social world is historically and culturally specific. Thirdly, they argue against the notion that there are essential structures within society (Houston, 2001). Instead, they invite the observer to take account of the relativistic and subjective nature of the social world, where all knowledge is perspectival and contingent (Lyotard, 1984). Lastly, constructionism links our narratives (or beliefs) about ourselves and the world to our actions, where people construct meanings and social reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This behaviour cannot be understood unless the observer understands those meanings and such meanings have to be interpreted in the contexts in which they occur (Thomas, 2004).

These assumptions can be categorised into two broad perspectives, one emphasizing the role of 'human agency' in constituting the social world (Giddens, 1991; Mead, 1962), and the other underscoring the role of discourse in shaping experience (Foucault, 1972). Individuals will seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, and lead a researcher to look for the complexity of views between different individuals. Therefore, it is critical for this thesis to observe and explore the participant's experience of events, where meanings are negotiated between participants. Social constructivists believe what individuals and society perceive and understand as reality is itself a construction, a creation of the social interaction of individuals and groups (Giddens, 2006). Meaning manifests itself through interaction and behaviour. Behaviour may be purposeful, directed, and intentional (Chell, 2000). It is often contrasted with essentialist philosophy (essentialism), which involves a set of characteristics within entities or groups that are fixed. They do not accept variations amongst individuals in different times or places.

When Gergen (1999) put ‘Constructionism in Question’, he argued that the creation of meaningful language requires social condition. There is nothing we call language that is born in the private mind (Gergen, 1999). Until there is mutual agreement on the meaningful character of words or actions, this meaning fails to constitute language. Constructivist researchers often address the ‘processes’ of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participant. Researchers also recognise that their own background, behaviours and assumptions shape their interpretation. They will often position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural and social perspectives (Giddens, 2006). Hence, the researcher’s objective is to make sense of meaning others have about the world, or just those in a specific study, e.g. the different meanings organisations share about collaboration without the researcher distorting or fictionalising findings with their own assumptions, behaviours and feelings about the topic. This will be discussed further in Section 5.7.

5.6.2 Epistemology: Interpretivism

Phenomenology is an interpretive paradigm. From this perspective, validity or truth cannot be grounded in an objective reality; rather, it holds knowledge to be a matter of interpretation. Researchers that take an interpretive position in an attempt to understand the subjective meaning of social action (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The reality of an individual becomes meaningful in terms of intentionality, consciousness, and essential relationships between different people and the world around them. Central to this paradigm is that the world is interpreted through the mind (idealism) and in the meanings of human action (subjective reality). This approach does critique positivism and those approaches that mainly use quantification techniques and methods measuring causal relationships. Phenomenological thought suggests there are “things themselves to visit in our experience, that is, objects to which our understandings relate” (Crotty, 1998, p.79). What is taken to be valid or true is negotiated between people, places, and conscious thoughts, which may demonstrate multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon. Understanding these interpretations constitutes a creative, re-productive act, in which the researcher appropriates the meaning of the object, rather than mechanically mirroring it (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000).

“In order to understand the actor’s world one must interpret it, and hence the label interpretivism” (Cassell and Nadin, 2008, p.73). The interpretivist takes an idiographic approach to the study of reality, as opposed to a nomothetic approach. As previously discussed, nomothetic research establishes general principles and generalizations that apply to everyone, while idiographic research describes, analyses, and compares the behaviour of individual participants and/or cohorts to discover a unique understanding of their case. Interpretivism comes from two intellectual traditions - phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. While phenomenology refers to the way in which we as humans make sense of the world around us, in symbolic interactionism there is a continuous process of interpreting the social world where individuals interpret the actions of others with whom they interact and this interpretation leads to adjustment of their meanings and actions (Saunders et al., 2009). Consequently, interpretive methods, which are based on an approach of understanding (i.e. Verstehen), will attempt to comprehend the subjective meanings of individuals from the perspective of the particular actors themselves, where participants in a social situation are constantly negotiating a shared definition of the situation (Gray, 2004).

However, the phenomenological movement is not altogether a coherent one because of the researcher’s position in the research and his/her interpretation of what has been experienced (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). To dispel these so-called biases and prejudices, this research study approached fieldwork ‘reflexively’ (Bringer et al., 2004; Turnbull, 2002). This involves reflecting on the way in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes (Hardy et al., 2001; Nadin and Cassell, 2006). In doing so, a researcher will attempt to produce “culturally situated and theory-enmeshed knowledge, through an ongoing interplay between observations, theory and methods, researcher and researched” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.5). Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2006) suggest reflexivity is the ongoing questioning of one’s place and power relations within a study.

5.7 The Researcher in the Research: Reflections (epoche) and Reflexivity

From a phenomenological perspective, this thesis is interested in how participants experienced collaboration in a project partnership. While individuals recollect their account of the phenomenon in light of their awareness of being researched, the

researcher, using a reflexive approach, observes and records his/her own behaviour and interactions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). As previously noted, the research process (i.e. data collection, analysis, and reporting) can be influenced by the researcher's position and assumptions that are brought to a study. Prior to this thesis, I had no knowledge of partnerships that were similar to this case study, or of any theoretical preconceptions relating to the topic (see Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). There was also no attempt to examine literature on collaboration before data collection as my original objective was something quite different. I was evaluating the outcomes of the partnership and not how members collaborated over the project. In part, this fulfils what Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) refer to as bracketing past knowledge and experiences from the research process. This requires the researcher to remain neutral with respect to personal beliefs and understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher therefore becomes a 'medium' through which organisations are able to express their interpretations of the phenomenon using coherent and reliable methods that would provide rich descriptions of a shared experience from all organisational members without their initially being *a priori* themes or frameworks (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Like Trotman (2006), my ambition in undertaking this research project was essentially to understand how participants experienced collaboration - an experience that was lived and constituted by organisational members (Ray, 1994). Being an active agent in their relationship meant engaging with participants until the point of data saturation. Immediately after interviews and meetings, notes were put into writing, which recorded interactions and behaviours, and my own thoughts and feelings from observations (e.g. times I could have participated, given advice or support but would choose not to do so). Therefore, reflexivity involves addressing the impact of the researcher's 'self' upon the research process (Simons, 2009). According to Bryman and Bell (2007), researchers should always be:

..... reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate. It assumes that all researchers enter the field carrying cultural 'baggage', personal idiosyncracies, and implicit assumptions about the nature of reality (p.712).

Reflexivity in management research has attracted a growing interest in recent years (see Alvesson et al., 2008; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Bryman and Bell, 2007;

Cassell, 2005; Hardy et al., 2001; Hibbert et al., 2010; Johnson and Duberley, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; Orr and Bennett, 2009; Simons, 2009). However, “given the benefits of increased reflexivity for the management researcher, it is perhaps surprising that there is little information available about how we can actually do reflexivity in practice” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p.210). One approach this thesis has taken is the examination of field notes during fieldwork (see Section 6.7.2), which chronologically document observations and reflections as data is collected and analysed. This data can be used as supplementary evidence to understand the phenomenon in question, as-well-as to identify the research process that has led to certain findings and conclusions (Finlay, 2002). Johnson and Duberley (2003) distinguish three types of reflexivity based upon epistemological and ontological assumptions that guide a researcher (see Table 6).

Type of Reflexivity	View / Position	Description
Methodological	Objectivism – Positive Epistemology	Social phenomena exist independently of social actors
Deconstructive	Constructionism – Interpretive Epistemology	Social phenomena are produced through social interactions involving social actors
Epistemic	Constructionism and Interpretivism – Critical Realism	Though it relates to deconstructive reflexivity it goes further into seeking out knowledge through its co-creation; seeking a consensus

Table 6. Types of reflexivity in management research (Adapted from Bryman and Bell, 2007)

Because this thesis uses an interpretive approach to understand the interactions between organisations, positivist notions of objectivity and empirical facts are rejected. “The research process is regarded as being subject to a variety of influences [social interactions] which impact upon the interpretations generated, thus a reflexive stance is required in order to identify and understand what these influences are” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p.208) and how they impact outcomes. This thesis therefore draws on deconstructive and epistemic reflexivity. To be reflexive, researchers should have an “ongoing conversation with oneself about an experience while simultaneously living in the moment” (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.712). This involves “a process of exposing or questioning our ways of doing” (Hibbert et al., 2010, p.48). Like bracketing, if descriptions are to achieve their purest form, it will be an ongoing process of reflection throughout data collection and analysis, and in the reporting of findings.

Reflexivity is an active process of looking back, whether contemporaneously or at different points in the research process, on the actions a researcher takes and decisions they make to deliberate how they influence a study (Simons, 2009). However, “care needs to be taken over how this is done because such explanations may not necessarily take a reflexive stance” (Cunliffe, 2003, p.995). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) describe it as an interpretation of interpretation, which is “another layer of analysis after data has been interpreted” (Thorpe and Holt, 2008, p.184). This reflexive approach will demonstrate my thoughts, feelings, and assumptions when I conducted fieldwork and how this may have affected the research study (e.g. how organisations worked together, and how data were collected, analysed and reported).

5.8 Conclusion

All research is based on some underlying philosophical assumptions that underpin the ways in which data about a phenomenon is observed and analysed. This chapter has therefore taken into consideration assumptions and thoughts pertaining to this research study’s ontology, epistemology and methodology (Creswell, 2003). Because the nature of this research inquiry is exploratory, this chapter has demonstrated those paradigms or worldviews when employing a phenomenological, interpretive approach. Lastly, this chapter has also highlighted how a reflexive approach will be adopted in the research study to support findings. Its aim will be to provide supplementary evidence or an account of the researcher’s presence as data is being collected, analysed and documented, and how this may have affected the research process.

CHAPTER 6

THE RESEARCH STRATEGY, METHODOLOGY, AND METHODS

6.1 Introduction

As research varies from project to project (Marshall and Rossman, 2006), the approach taken to understand a phenomenon will depend on what is being studied and how a researcher goes about studying it (Silverman, 2005). As there are multiple methodologies, methods, and instruments that can be used to study organisations and their management, it is important to make clear the research strategy in a research project as it can often be challenged on grounds of validity and reliability (Saunders et al., 2009). The methodology becomes a guide by which a researcher can identify his/her research methods and approaches, and a means to justify how a study was conducted (Remenyi et al., 1998).

6.2 The Research Strategy

The methodology chosen in this thesis is based on an exploratory, case study design. It consists of a detailed investigation of a shared experience using data collected over a period of time (Hartley, 2004). There are two main approaches to this, which involve either a cross-sectional study, research carried out at one point in time or over a shorter period, or a longitudinal study, which involves repeated observations over longer periods of time. Because this thesis explored an organisation's account retrospectively, after the project took place, and in-situ, as organisations were interacting, the research strategy is a combination of both approaches. Following Silverman's (2005) advice to keep it simple and to have a straightforward fit between the topic, method and model, this thesis applied inductive reasoning using a phenomenological approach to explore collaboration that was experienced by participants in the partnership (see Chapter 5). A qualitative methodology was chosen based on its ability to understand and explore an individual's experience, and capture shared meaning within an inter-organisational arrangement (see Palakshappa and Gordon, 2006).

To sharpen the research focus (Marshall and Rossman, 2006), a review of literature was conducted during data collection and analysis using themes related to the research question and topic. Because there was no framework that specifically addressed the

research question, this thesis set out to develop an integrated framework that illustrated the contextual and temporal dimensions of collaboration in literature to help inform collaborative theory (see Chapter 4). As collaboration is observed over time, Dawson (1994, p.190) describes the use of complementary research methods to generate a “chronology of events”. Therefore, a number of qualitative research methods were selected to capture and explore meaningful expressions of collaboration; these include research from an evaluation study, in-depth interviews, non-participant observations from partnership meetings, a workshop with organisational members, field notes, and secondary research. Since observations and interviews are conducted at different points during the partnership’s journey, the research strategy has to be flexible and iterative (Hartley, 2004). Basically, as data unfolded so did the research process.

6.3 Qualitative Methodology

“Qualitative methodologies have a long history and tradition within organisation and management research” (Cassell and Symon, 2006, p.4). Increasingly, qualitative research can be found in all the domains that cover the diverse organisation and management field. These include marketing (Daymon and Holloway, 2003; Moisander, 2006), market research (Mariampolski, 2001), information science (Myers, 2002; Trauth, 2001), accounting and finance (Humphrey and Lee, 2004), entrepreneurship and small business (Cope, 2005), and international business (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004). However, some theorists tend to avoid the term ‘qualitative research’ as it tends to merely refer to the methods, that is, the procedures and techniques used to obtain and analyse research data (Leitch et al., 2009). Qualitative research by and large means different things to different people (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Table 7 illustrates some of the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research.

Quantitative	Qualitative
Numbers, statistics	Words, text, language, categories
Q: How many? Strength of association? <i>Causation, correlation, dependency</i>	Q: What? Why? <i>Meaning, interpretation</i>
Deductive – Objective	Inductive – Subjective/constructionist
Testing, falsification hypothesis	Generalisation hypothesis
Structured	Unstructured – exploratory
Theory testing	Theory building / generating
Positivist	Interpretivist / postmodernist
Artificial setting	Natural setting
Statistical inference / estimation	Categorising, coding, comparing

Table 7. Comparing quantitative and qualitative approaches

Research generally aims to test an existing theory (a deductive approach) or develop new theories (an inductive approach). A deductive approach involves developing hypotheses from the findings of the literature review. The research project tests the hypotheses and draws conclusions as to their validity. However, there are other considerations to keep in mind, e.g. how to ensure the study will be manageable and how a researcher will remain motivated as a research project can be a lengthy process when exploring, analysing and reporting findings. Generally speaking, qualitative research is concerned with interpreting meaning in textual data and spoken word, rather than using statistical forms of measurement.

The research approach used in this thesis is based on a methodology that interprets and makes explicit the lived experiences of phenomena (Van Manen, 1990). Given the relatively limited and available knowledge of the research study in organisational behaviour and management literature, an inductive approach was chosen rather than a positivistic, quantitative methodology.

Quantitative research is not the evil twin of qualitative research....qualitative work is often characterised as exploratory aiming at discovery, description and theory building. Quantitative work....is about justifying or verifying by test the empirical basis and generality of theory claims (Van Maanen, 1998a, p.xii).

Being aware that not all qualitative research methodologies are mutually exclusive to a disciplinary field, it is important that methods do what they are intended to do. This study is recognised as having a direct concern with ‘Verstehen’ (see Outhwaite, 1975), which involves capturing the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour, e.g. their relationships with another provider in the partnership. This involves investigating how partners experience, sustain, articulate, and share with others these socially constituted everyday realities (see Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990; Schwandt, 1994, 1999; Van Maanen, 1979, 1998b). A qualitative study can therefore be seen as a method to understand phenomena or meanings, to get an understanding of their underlying reasons and motivations as conventional quantitative research approaches only touch the surface (Prasad and Prasad, 2002). Rather than explore how and why things are happening, they quantify data and measure incidences of various views.

6.4 Case Study Design

Case study research continues to be an essential form of social science inquiry (Yin, 2003a). It is neither new nor essentially qualitative (Stake, 2005). “Qualitative management case studies generally seek to establish ‘what’s going on’ in any organisation with primary reference to the views of multiple rather than single informants (often in conjunction with multiple rather than single sources of documentary evidence)” (Llewellyn and Northcott, 2007, p.195). Yin (2003b) describes case study research as an empirical enquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. It is ideal when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the researcher has little or no control (Gray, 2009; Yin, 2003b).

While a researcher can examine single or multiple case studies, which will demonstrate multiple sources of evidence and may even include quantitative data (Bergen and While, 2000), it is essential that the case study takes the reader into the case situation (Gray, 2009). The data collection in case study is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2007). While case is singular, it may include subsections, groups, occasions, dimensions, and domains that also need to be explored to understand the case study’s context (Stake, 2005). Based on Yin’s (1994) approach to case study research, Beattie et al. (2002) demonstrates that a researcher will need to provide or do the following:

1. A holistic understanding of the phenomenon;
2. Investigate the phenomenon over a period of time;
3. Acquire an in-depth understanding of individual and shared meaning; and
4. Adjust to new ideas and issues as they emerge.

Additionally, Denscombe (2007) advised that it is also good practice for any researcher who decides to choose a case study to pre-empt possible criticism by addressing issues head-on; these include:

- Representativeness - *How representative is the case study?*

- Uniqueness – *Though interesting and insightful, are findings unique to the particular circumstance of the case?*
- Generalisation – *How can a researcher generalise his/her work on the basis of research being based on one instance or occurrence?*

The appropriateness of a single case study is based on there currently being insufficient empirical studies and theoretical frameworks of VCS IORs between organisations in a consortium arrangement. This thesis will therefore attempt to understand phenomena before comparing findings with other case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). It is vital to look at the case-study holistically to gather a rich description of the phenomenon in its context (Stake, 2005). Basically, this thesis will attempt to explore how collaboration formed, developed and ended, and possibly continued, before explaining specific variables and concepts in other partnerships.

So, why were no other cases investigated (i.e. multiple case studies)? Based on the reasons explained above, only a single case was necessary. Further research on the topic is desired. If a researcher is able to gain access to multiple case studies then this would be the next step to take. This might involve working over different locations and conducting fieldwork over extensive periods of time using a similar research framework. Although each case is in some respects ‘unique’, a case study provides a single example of a broader class of things (Denscombe, 2007). Findings can be used in other circumstances that are related by subject or discipline to highlight similar themes or concepts (Stake, 1995). Following Ellis and Hibbert (2008), the resulting insight from this thesis will attempt to provide a richer understanding of an inter-organisational arrangement between VCS organisations, which will aim to contribute to theory and also the sector (e.g. policy and practice).

Will the research be longitudinal or cross-sectional? “Longitudinal is a term used to describe a study that extends over a substantial period of time and involves studying changes as and when they happen” while “cross-sectional research simply refers to studies which take a snapshot of a situation at a point in time” (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.47). Since research has been conducted in-situ (e.g. observations of partnership meetings) and retrospectively (e.g. in-depth interviews), the research strategy in this thesis is a combination of a longitudinal and cross-sectional approach. For example, it was not possible to observe organisations at the very beginning or at every moment in

time during their partnership, which follows a cross-sectional approach. However, by observing their interactions in meetings this work was, in part, also longitudinal, in that it attempted to examine their interactions after the pilot project ended.

What about gaining access to data? Gaining access or entry within an organisation or arrangement can be a complicated and time consuming process (Gummesson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Chapter 1, 'the case study', provided some insight into how I was able to gain entry to the partnership in this thesis. As I was already working as an independent researcher to evaluate their pilot project, access to their arrangement had already been established. However, the partnership's consent was requested to conduct a further study when the pilot project ended; observation of their meetings continued and organisational members were interviewed at different points in time. While recognising this research study as a 'personal journey' (Irvine and Gaffikin, 2006), which all researchers will approach differently (e.g. from gaining entry to conducting research, analysing and interpreting data), this thesis has been designed to explore a new project initiative. It has also recommended more research on the topic, which would examine other consortium arrangements between VCOs that are set up to be a temporary project partnership.

6.5 The Case Study: Organisations in the Partnership

The case study is based on a partnership involving five voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) and a Voluntary Agency in the North East of England. It is a project arrangement that was commissioned by the Local Authority (LA) and funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). Organisations are locally-based charities that are similar in size and located in close proximity to each other. The members representing the organisations are all Project Managers, who are paid members of staff supported by a number of volunteers. The member representing the Voluntary Agency is a coordinator who reported to the LA and funding provider. A description of member organisations was provided to the voluntary agency as this was part of the contract's agreement, and also to the evaluation project to clarify who these organisations were and what they did. The following descriptions were provided by each participant in the first interview phase:

Voluntary Agency (Accountable Body: non-service delivery partner)

- **South Tyneside CVS** has been working with the voluntary sector for over 25yrs helping volunteers to get the most out of the opportunities available and assisting organisations in promoting and expanding their services. CVS is an umbrella organisation for all the charities and voluntary organisations in South Tyneside. Our activities include everything from recruiting staff and committee members to helping prepare end of year accounts.

(Participant member: **SC**)

Voluntary and Community Organisations (Service Providers)

- **Bliss=Ability** is primarily a disability information service. We provide information regarding disability issues to people with disabilities, their carers and relatives to ensure they reach their full potential. We operate a transcription service to ensure all information required is in a suitable format for each client. These formats include Braille, Audio cassette, Audio CD, DVD, and MP3. We also produce multimedia presentations. We also have an Advocacy service for adult carers of adults. This service assists those in need through all the red tape of social services etc. We now have an IT suite which allows all community groups to explore their IT skills in a fully accessible environment. We offer work placements to allow people on incapacity for work and long term sickness benefits to find their way back into work.

(Participant member: **CA**)

- **Coffee Life** is a Mental Health Matters project. As an internet café, Coffee Life offers a relaxed, de-stigmatised environment for people to utilise the IT facilities while enjoying great food and drinks. The computers support people to increase life and employability skills through Learn Direct courses, CV building and job search where there is an internet and emailing facility. People increase their catering and transferable vocational skills in the kitchen area while receiving support from an understanding Café Supervisor, who is always on hand for customers, learners, and trainees. We have an ‘Open Employment Scheme’,

which is freely accessible. Supported by an Employment Coach and an Employer Liaison Officer, users can access education, training, vocational placements, voluntary work, supported employment and open employment.

(Participant member: **PN**)

- **Shopmobility** was opened in 1999. It was started by a group of people with disabilities and mobility problems. It is very much a community initiative by people themselves with disabilities and or people who were working for organisations that supported people with disabilities. We provide manual and powered wheelchairs as well as scooters and escorts for anyone who has a mobility problem or is visually impaired. For a small charge, members of the scheme can enjoy independence and freedom in the shops, parks and seafront areas. The scooters and powered chairs are easy to use and a training and practice area is available beside the premises.

(Participant member: **GB**)

- **STCOD** or South Tyneside Central Organisation on Disabilities is a small registered charity. We act as an advice and information service for disabled people, carers, representatives, and anybody that has an interest in disability. We provide information to the public, to students, and to people working in the care sector etc. The organisation has been going strong for 21yrs. We are only two employees but they are a borough wide organisation so anybody can access their services. Apart from giving advice and information, they also get involved in other issues that affect disabled people, such as transport issues and design of health centres ensure they are fully accessible.

(Participant member: **MS**)

- **St Simons Community Project** was opened in 1993. The centre was set up to provide a job search facility for local unemployed residents who could use it as a drop-in for their needs, CV production, and telephone facilities etc. The project provides a place for people to meet, read the local newspapers, and to continue their search for employment with the assistance of staff, who provide their service on a voluntary basis. The project has ten members of staff. The centre

itself has undergone many changes since opening, e.g. the addition of rooms to create an ICT suite with modern equipment, a training/conference room and offices on the upper floor, and more recently an ICT suite on the ground floor, which has been re-equipped and re-designed to be more disability friendly.

(Participant member: **AH**)

- **TEN / Jobsmart** - South Tyneside Training & Enterprise Network (TEN) is the leading independent agency in the Borough of South Tyneside providing job search and related vocational and ‘employability’ skills to unemployed people. It is a not-for-profit organisation, a registered charity and Company Limited by Guarantee. Providing support from the first day of unemployment, South Tyneside TEN provides an extensive and effective ‘safety net’ of provision for unemployed people who are unable or unwilling to access provision that requires people to have either a qualifying period of unemployment or meet other specific criteria, before becoming eligible for support from public agencies. TEN is also a delivery agency in the Tyne & Wear Nextstep Information, Advice and Guidance Network. The Jobsmart project is about ‘employer engagement’. This is a recruitment agency which is free of charge. This organisation looks at the links between employers and clients, and how they encourage employers to recruit clients that they can support.

(Participant member: **CW & EF**)

Prior to this arrangement, there is no history of these organisations having worked together as a group or in a formal arrangement. The partnership is a ‘pilot project’, which means this was a new initiative for all parties concerned. The aim of the project was to deliver employment and training services to people with disabilities and mental health illnesses. Organisations were contracted to deliver five outputs, these included:

- Supported Employment
- Unsupported Employment
- Basic Skills Training
- Learning Work Placements

- Work Related Training

The numbers of outputs each organisation had to achieve were individually set by each provider and agreed with the coordinator. These would establish the targets that organisations had to achieve over four quarters during a one year period.

6.6 Context, Identity and Character of Subject

According to Maxwell (2005, p.5), “the goals of your study should be informed by current theory and knowledge, while your decisions about what theory and knowledge are relevant depend on your goals and questions”. He identifies four main sources when constructing a conceptual framework and conducting a study. This involves (i) experiential knowledge, (ii) existing theory and research, (iii) pilot and exploratory research, and (iv) thought experiments. Three of these sources are of interest to this thesis:

1. *Experiential knowledge*: What does the researcher know about the topic? What are the researcher’s intentions? What is the study aiming to understand or explain? Maxwell (1998) refers to this source as identifying and translating the researcher’s position and preconceptions of the subject they are to study. Though I have previously worked with small businesses, I had never worked with charitable organisations. After an evaluation study took place, a research/knowledge gap was identified in the literature. The case study therefore became an exploratory investigation, which requires an understanding of the research context (Stake, 1995) and the main issues and debates surrounding the research topic. Consequently, a considerable amount of time was spent reviewing literature and developing my knowledge of collaboration between organisations in the VCS (see Chapters 2 and 3).

The purpose of this thesis is to understand and interpret a shared experience of a project partnership. Maxwell (2005, p.94) notes that “generating an interpretation of someone’s perspective is inherently a matter of inference from descriptions of that person’s behaviour” “whether the data are derived from observations, interviews or some other source such as written documents”. How researchers should do this and how they bracket their assumptions to draw on

the experiences of actors is an important process in qualitative research (Carter and Little, 2007). Finlay (2002) sees this as an activity that involves reflexivity (see Chapter 5). “Reflexivity refers to active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation” (Horsburgh, 2003, p.308). Horsburgh (2003, p.309) points out that “whilst readers may not share the author’s interpretation, they should nonetheless be able to discern the means by which it has been reached”. Maxwell (1998) advises researchers to reflect on, and write down key aspects of experience that are potentially relevant to the study. In doing so, this develops an audit trail of the research process (Horsburgh, 2003) and also generates valuable insights that can be used to study the phenomenon that may not have been captured during conversations with participants (Finlay, 2002), e.g. an observation of their interactivity. This approach is demonstrated in Chapter 9.

2. *Existing theory and research*: These are referred to as published work and unpublished material that are directly relevant to the research question. Maxwell (1998, p.78) asserts “a useful theory helps you organise your data. Particular pieces of data that otherwise might seem unconnected or irrelevant to one another or to your research questions can be related if you can fit them into the theory. A useful theory also *illuminates* what you are seeing in your research”. Because data collection (i.e. evidence) came before a search of existing theory and research, this informed what theories, methods and frameworks would be used in this thesis. Consequently, literature was directed by data / evidence (Maxwell, 1998).

Though this study recognises existing theory on IORs, it was literature on the transformation process of collaboration, group development and temporary project arrangements that illustrated how these organisations worked together in the first phase of research. These themes are interrelated and are explained in IOR theory; however, there is no single model or framework that discusses these areas. This thesis therefore harnesses this knowledge to support theories on the subject (see Lawrence et al., 2002). This approach is supported by Becker (1986). Becker describes how existing theory and research *deformed* his research by ‘fitting’ data into an established framework, which weakened its

logic and made it harder to see more appropriate ways to frame the phenomenon (Maxwell, 1998). Becker (1986, p.79) advises that “a serious scholar ought routinely to inspect competing ways of talking about the same subject matter. However, the danger of not using existing, *priori* theory is that a researcher is looking outside his/her subject (Maxwell, 2005). On one hand, this may bring something new to the subject, on the other hand, this may not fit with what others have done (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). I was very mindful of these choices. Theory, models and frameworks were selected based on their suitability to address (i) the research question and the aims and objectives of the thesis, (ii) the nature of the inquiry, and (iii) the context of the study (Saunders et al., 2009) (see Chapters 1 to 4).

3. *Pilot and exploratory research*: These type of studies focus on issues that have not been previously been explained or are new to a subject (Myers, 2009). They aim to test a researcher’s “ideas or methods and explore their implications or to inductively develop grounded theory” (Maxwell, 1998, p.79). These studies provide researchers with an understanding of the meaning that these events have for the participants (Maxwell, 2005). The goal of this thesis then, does not aim “to test what is already known, but to discover and develop the new and to develop empirically grounded theories” (Flick, 2009, p.15). Therefore, whilst taking into account what has been previously studied and researched on IORs, this thesis explored other theories that would explain meaning. Stake (1995) refers to this as keeping an open mind to a broader set of existing theories that are relevant to the subject. “The reality, however, is that theories are a product of a specific time, place and person and will also be interpreted by those who are time and context-bound” (Horsburgh, 2003, p.309). Thus, the aim of a qualitative study “would be to construct an account which remains true to the data from participants, but is also subject to analysis and interpretation by the researcher” (Horsburgh, 2003, p.309). Stake (1995) refers to this as a process of learning about a case and is a product of a researcher’s experience.

A greater awareness of relevant theories and models, approaches and methods to explain a subject ought to lead to an improved understanding of the possibilities and limitations of carrying out a case study (Gummesson, 2000).

6.7 Research Methods

Research methods derive from a variety of disciplines and traditions. Phenomenological or interpretive research methods and procedures offer various techniques to collect and analyse data to understand a new or complex phenomenon (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003). In order to capture the essence or underlying themes of the partners' inter-organisational relationship (IOR), in-depth interviews were conducted over different periods or points in time. These are supported by observations and other supplementary methods. The purpose of this approach is to extract as much description and insight as possible about the phenomenon from the organisations in the partnership. Denscombe (1998) advises that different methods can be used to collect data on the same thing, which allows participants to be observed using different sources but analysed in a way in which findings can enhance the validity of the data. This process therefore involves triangulation (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009). Six methods are used to explore the case study and triangulated as fieldwork is being conducted. This thesis has separated these methods into primary methods of data collection (see Section 6.7.1) and secondary methods of data collection (see Section 6.7.2).

6.7.1 Primary Methods of Data Collection

- **The Evaluation Study**

Because this thesis was originally part of a summative evaluation project (see Patton, 2002), which I was conducting as a Research Assistant, it seemed logical for observations, mainly from in-depth and semi structured interviews, a workshop exercise, and secondary data, to be included in the first phase of fieldwork. The research question emerged as data was being gathered and analysed during this study. The main objective of the evaluation study was to examine the efforts, outputs and targets of organisations working in the partnership. However, it did not specifically address how collaboration as a unit of analysis developed over the course of the project partnership. The evaluation study mainly looked at the success or failings of the partnership to meet its shared objective. This was the starting point of this research study, which helped to establish other research methods that were needed to understand collaboration between the organisations in the partnership.

- **In-depth Interviews**

The in-depth interview is usually designed as a one-to-one interview and may last several hours (Das, 1983). In-depth interviews aim to identify a respondent's attitudes, motives and behaviour by encouraging the person to talk freely and to express his/her ideas about experiences. These are times members worked together and continued to meet as a partnership. However, phenomenological interviewing is a specific type of in-depth interviewing grounded in philosophical tradition (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). In conducting interviews, the description of phenomenological interviewing proposed by Thompson et al. (1989) provided clearer direction of this research method. The goal of the phenomenological interview is to gain a first-person description of some specified domain of experience, where the course of the dialogue is set largely by the participant (Thompson et al., 1989). Additionally, as the researcher seeks to deepen his/her understanding of the phenomenon, the analysis of one interview will inform the way a subsequent one is carried out (King, 2004).

Methodologically, the phenomenological interview is idiographic. It stresses "the importance of letting one's subject unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.6). Here, the purpose is not to gain opinion or impersonal description but to encourage an explicit interpersonal dialogue where the participants provide details of their experiences (Phase 1). They can then be explored in more detail at a later point (Phases 2&3). "Seeing interviewing as an active process" (Cassell, 2005, p.176), the interview becomes an interpretive process. "The aim of which is to jointly, and actively, construct meaning" (Cassell, 2005, p.176). According to Gibson & Hanes (2003, p.192), each interview should be approached in "an open manner, allowing the participants sufficient time to develop a comfort level with the process and initially asking some general questions". In preparation for these interviews, it is recommended to design a topic guide, which the interviewer can use to facilitate and guide proceedings, and agree on a place or environment where the participant is comfortable in talking about his/her experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). In this study, all interviews took place in a participant's organisation at a time that worked best for them.

- **Non-participant Observations**

Throughout the course of the investigation, non-participant observations took place within the partnership's meetings. Observational research is particularly suited when attempting to identify subtle and otherwise hidden issues and problems in an organisation (Lancaster, 2005), e.g. interactions and behaviours that participants may not discuss in interviews. It is an ethnographic approach that involves the researcher observing individuals and can also mean participating in discussions (e.g. Action Research). "The hallmark of ethnography is fieldwork, working with people in their natural settings" (Goulding, 2005, p.299). This is something this thesis attempted to do. Like Goulding (2005, p.300), this research study aimed to capture insider [participant] and outsider [researcher] views "to provide deeper insights than would be possible by the 'native' alone". It is a method in which other sources are triangulated with this data (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009).

Because fieldwork involves a non-participant observational approach, it is recommended that the behaviours and interactions of participants are observed without the researcher actually being involved in them (Thorpe and Holt, 2008). To be able to do this, it was necessary to reveal the reasons I was there, my purpose/objective, and why I would not take part in their meetings. Lancaster (2005) advised that this may inhibit the interactive process, but to get the best results the researcher must be accepted and treated as a member of the group (Thorpe and Holt, 2008). This meant being accepted and seen as an individual in their partnership but someone who was not able to contribute to their agenda. This is something that was discussed with members before this research study commenced. As tape recording may not be possible to observe these interactions, field notes are required (Bailey, 2007), which means documenting observations soon after they happen (see Secondary Methods of Data Collection).

- **Focus Group / Workshop exercise**

Lancaster (2005) identifies that, in some areas of management research the focus group has become the most widely used form of interview technique. This method allows individuals to share their ideas, reflect on other people's opinions, and discuss certain issues with those that have also experienced them. This provides researchers with shared feedback on a topic of discussion, which might not be possible to obtain from an

interview. During these sessions, it is important for the group to discuss amongst themselves predetermined areas about a topic, but also to encourage participants to develop them. The researcher becomes a moderator in these proceedings. Therefore, it is good practice for a researcher to make preparations for the focus group exercise so that members are able to interact and discuss their views and opinions without being interrupted or coerced in any way (Saunders et al., 2009).

6.7.2 Secondary Methods of Data Collection

- **Field notes**

“If you are not writing notes then you are not conducting field research” (Bailey, 2007, p.113). Field notes contain “the description of what has been observed” (Patton, 2002, p.302), which involves “fairly detailed summaries of events and behaviour and the researcher’s initial reflections on them” (Bryman, 2008, p.417). Normally, this is something that will take place as soon as the event has occurred. Flick (2002) and Patton (2002) both agree that “there is no universal prescription about the mechanics of and procedures for taking field notes because different settings lend themselves to different ways of proceeding and the precise organisation of fieldwork is very much a matter of personal style and individual work habits” (Patton, 2002, p.302). Field notes are therefore recordings of what has occurred to allow a researcher to return to his/her thoughts and reflections at the time they were taken. “In the very act of writing them you also create data” (Bailey, 2007, p.113), which can be used as additional / supplementary evidence in a research study (Finlay, 2002).

Field note entries help researchers decide what they want to study or where there is a need for a study. They involve detailed descriptions of observations and interactions, which are often kept in chronological order (e.g. data and time of observation). But they may also illustrate things previously forgotten, analytical ideas and inferences, personal feelings, things to think about and do, and reflexive thoughts (Bailey, 2007). Because fieldwork was over an extensive period, field notes evolved into a research diary. This is a method adopted by Nadin and Cassell (2006), which would include personal feelings, assumptions, and questions when interviewing and observing participants. It would involve a systematic recording of reflections after an interview or meeting (Finlay 2002). Examining these notes provides another layer of research after the data has been

interpreted (Thorpe and Holt, 2008), e.g. what impressions occur and what questions emerge during the process (Eisenhardt, 1989). This research study identifies this approach as a reflexive process (see Section 5.7) - an approach that is used to support how a research study is conducted, to identify the researcher's role/position, behaviour and assumptions as data are being collected and analysed, and whether they have had any impact on findings.

- **Secondary Data**

Organisational documents will be collected and examined to see what issues and areas were discussed at certain periods of time. This information is mainly from meetings that have taken place during the pilot period and continuance period.

6.8 Triangulation of Observations

Different methods can be used to collect data on the same thing. Each can look at the same thing from a different angle – from its own distinctive perspective, seeing things from a different perspective...to collaborate findings to enhance the validity of the data (Denscombe, 1998, pp.84-85).

Hoggart et al. (2002) also praised a multiple method approach to enhance prospects of developing arguments with supporting evidence that convinces others. Essentially, the provision of multiple sources of converging evidence enhances the quality of findings when using a single case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). The aim is not to prove that the researcher has found a complacent model that 'fits all' scenarios, but one that just 'fits for purpose' (Seale, 2004). Seale (2004, p.297) refers to it as "combining two or more methods to address a research question in order to crosscheck results for consistency and offset any biasness of a single research method, which will bring further validity and consistency to the project but also draw on deeper measures of caution and justification". According to Downward and Mearman (2004), there are two main arguments put forward to justify triangulation. Triangulation increases the 'persuasiveness' of evidence either through enhancing the empirical reliability of quantitative measures or more generally enhancing the 'validity' or completeness of insights in a qualitative research project (Downward and Mearman, 2004). It is an approach supported by Jonsen and Jehn (2009).

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has identified and discussed the research strategy, methodology, and methods in this thesis. A single case study, which employs a qualitative methodology, was deemed the most appropriate approach to take at this time because there is limited evidence/research on the topic. It is an approach that is well used and documented in phenomenological studies. Methods of data collection involve an evaluation study, in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, field notes, and other secondary data sources. These methods will offer some form of explanation of how organisations collaborated as a partnership. By triangulating the data from these methods, this thesis will attempt to improve the validity and reliability of findings.

CHAPTER 7

THE PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

7.1 Introduction

The process of collecting and analysing data in this thesis involved exploring collaboration between organisations when they were contracted to work as a consortium and during a period after their initial objective was completed. Fieldwork was cross-sectional, a retrospective study of their shared experience was conducted at different points in time, and longitudinal, which meant observing how individuals continued interacting after the original project ended. Because there was no contractual obligation or funding for organisations to continue working together, this second period of research demonstrated what happened to their partnership, how relationships changed, and whether they continued working together to deliver a combined service. This chapter aims to clarify this process.

7.2 Data Collection

As previously mentioned, data was collected over two phases. Figure 8 illustrates these periods.

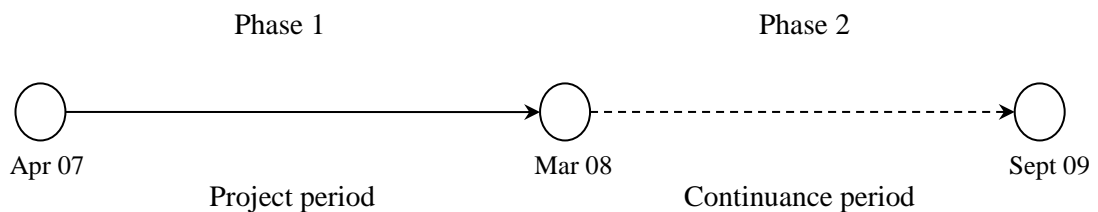


Figure 8. Periods of data collection

Findings of phase 1 [the project period] demonstrated the outcomes of the partnership, which also identified their arrangement, objectives and achievements. This information helped to inform and probe fieldwork that was conducted in the continuance period. During this second period, observations of partnership meetings continued and two further interview phases were organised, which attempted to gain a deeper understanding of how IORs developed within the partnership. Figure 9 summarises the methods used in this thesis.

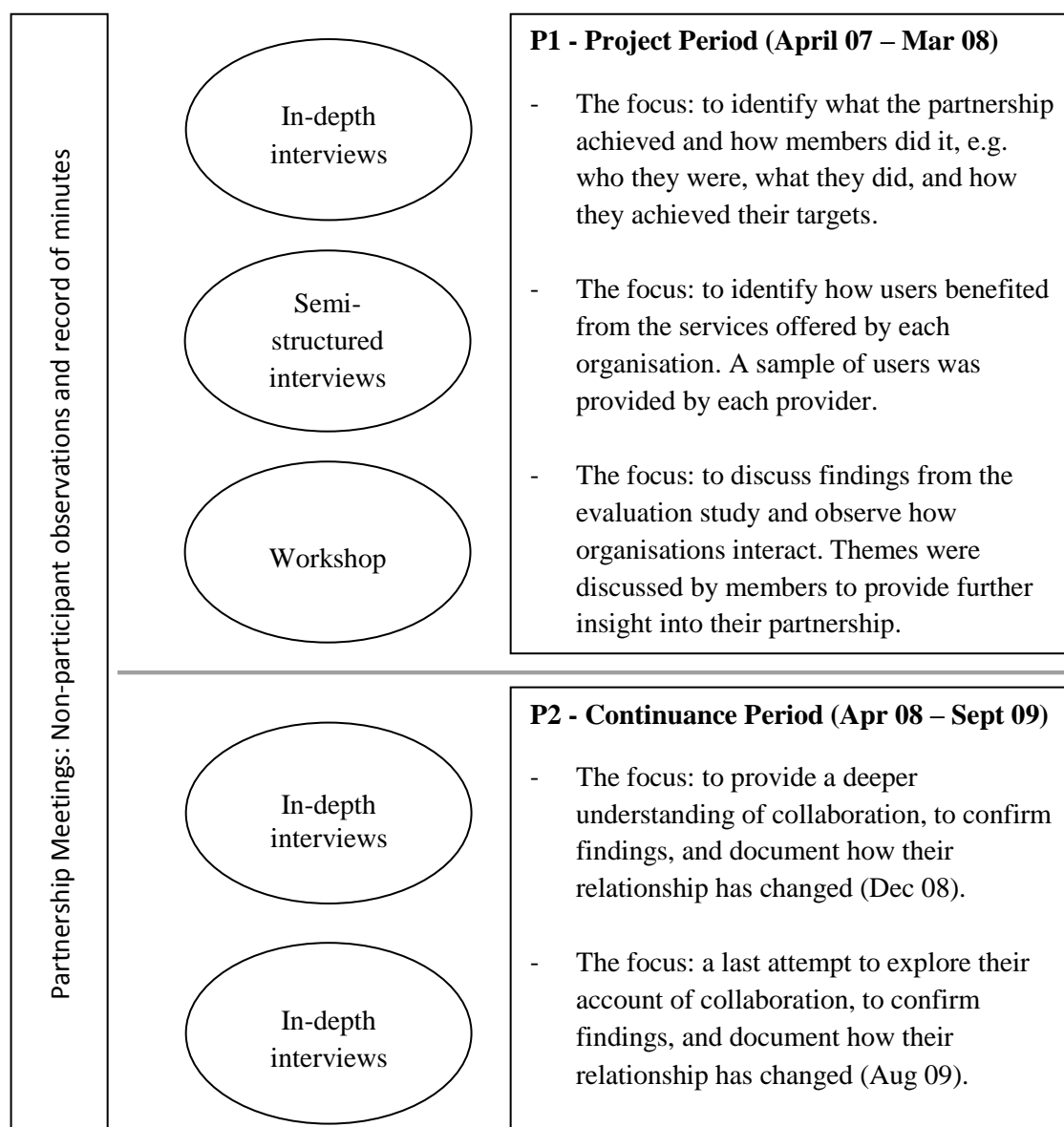


Figure 9. Methods of data collection

This figure demonstrates the methods of data collection that were carried out in the project and continuance period, as well as my intentions. Non-participant observations took place in partnership meetings. There were three interview phases with organisational members during fieldwork (see below sections). These involved one interview phase during the project period and two interview phases after the project ended. Each phase demonstrates the organisations in the partnership and their coding in this research study, and a brief description of what was involved, e.g. individual accounts being read and re-read so as to become familiar with their experience and collective sense-making, a basic analyse - familiarisation of data. This provided meanings that were unique to their shared experience (see Boyce, 1995). These accounts were then collectively analysed to identify shared meanings within the group, which

involves highlighting, labelling and organising statements to themes and categories (e.g. words, sentences and paragraphs). This is referred to as a themed analysis - coding of the data.

1. During the project – Phase 1

i. ‘Initial contact’ (7 in-depth interviews) - February/March 08

Organisation	Coding	Basic Analyse <i>Familiarisation</i>	Themed Analysis <i>Coding</i>
Bliss=ability	CA, I1	Y	Y
COD	MS, I1	Y	Y
Coffee Life	PN, I1	Y	Y
CVS	SC, I1	Y	Y
Jobs Smart / TEN	CW, I1	Y	Y
Shopmobility	GB, I1	Y	Y
St Simon’s Project (x2)	AH, I1	Y	Y

Table 8. Phase 1 In-depth Interviews

During this interview phase there were seven interviews. The interview with St Simon’s Project also included a conversation with the chairperson of the centre. Additionally, 28 informal semi-structured interviews with service users and service agents or advisers were undertaken. While data from the semi-structured interviews was mainly used for the evaluation report, it was clear that these participants were a central factor in providers working together. These interviews identified whether users have benefited from service provision but also whether they were referred to another organisation for support. These individuals are an important aspect in this research as they may have been part of a ‘referral route’. This involves an organisation sending a service user to another provider, which would have demonstrated members cooperating with other providers.

ii. ‘Workshop’ (6 organisations attended) - April 08

Attendees/representatives: Bliss=ability, Coffee Life, CVS, Shopmobility, St Simon’s Project, and South Tyneside Council (the CB)

The aim of this workshop was to discuss themes from phase 1 interviews and other areas to support the evaluation report. Members had several opportunities to discuss

how they collaborated, what they achieved, and what they wanted to do. Evidence identified insufficient levels of cooperation and collaboration between organisations because of a delay in commencing the project and individual differences. Members advised that “the sector has always made them be this way” (GB), and these “individual differences between members take time to resolve” (PN). They all agreed the partnership would only improve if they had more time and funding to do it (e.g. CA, PN, GB, AH, SC, and ND). During this exercise, there was a general interest in members continuing the partnership and applying for funding as a consortium.

2. After the project took place – Phase 2

iii. ‘Re-affirming stories from phase 1 and exploring any new developments’

(5 in-depth interviews) – November/December 08

Organisation	Coding	Basic Analysis <i>Familiarisation</i>	Themed Analysis <i>Coding</i>
Bliss=ability	CA, I2	Y	Y
Coffee Life	PN, I2	Y	Y
CVS	SC, I2	Y	Y
Shopmobility	GB, I2	Y	Y
South Tyneside Council (STC)	ND, I1	Y	Y

Table 9. Phase 2a In-depth Interviews

The STC representative was interviewed on this occasion to understand this member’s role and views of the partnership as they were not captured in the first phase of data collection. This interview provided an important account to understand how and why the partnership was created and whether members achieved the project’s objectives.

iv. ‘Re-affirming stories from i) to iii) and exploring any new developments’

(5 in-depth interviews) – August/September 09

Organisation	Coding	Basic Analysis <i>Familiarisation</i>	Themed Analysis <i>Coding</i>
Bliss=ability	CA, I3	Y	Y
COD	MS, I2	Y	Y
Coffee Life	PN, I3	Y	Y
Jobs Smart / TEN	EF, I1	Y	Y
Shopmobility	GB, I3	Y	Y

Table 10. Phase 2b In-depth Interviews

This phase captured the point of data saturation. Members were beginning to forget or not recollect events, and with the end of the project and no further funding, members ended their involvement in the partnership. There was no evidence of collaboration by the consortium to deliver services after the project period. The only development observed was a continuance of relationships and their attempts to secure a new project.

v. Non-participant observations of partnership meetings (continuous)

An important observation during phases 1 and 2 was how representation of an individual and/or their organisation in the partnership changed. After the project ended, some of the original members left their organisation for other opportunities, which resulted in fewer organisational partners. While new individuals did act as a representative for a period of time, they also eventually left their organisation (e.g. Jobs Smart). Obviously, this would affect observations after the pilot period as a new member to the partnership would not be fully aware of what had previously occurred. This would also affect the line of questions to newer members in interviews at later periods, which was something that was experienced in this research study. Rather than ask what happened before they joined the group, questions would need to look at what they are doing presently. In the continuance period it was possible to re-interview organisations that had played a central role in the partnership during the project period, and by triangulating this data, shared meaning was developed (see Figure 10). These phases have already been discussed in this section.

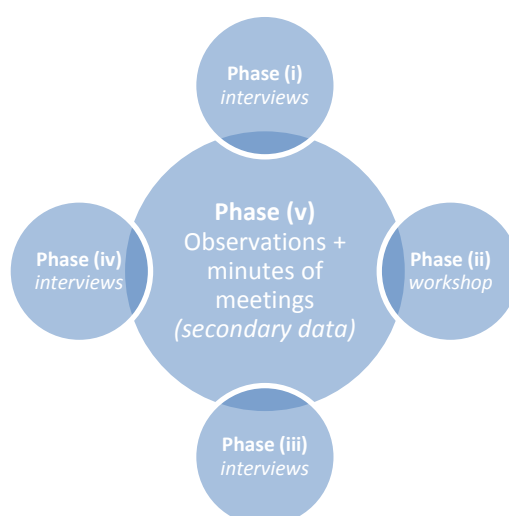


Figure 10. Triangulation of data collection

This figure demonstrates data from five phases being triangulated. This ‘data source triangulation’ looks to see “if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently” (Stake, 1995, p.112). The process involves analysing all data sources individually and then collectively at different points during fieldwork. Secondary data are also be included in this process, e.g. field notes and other data sources (Minutes from partnership meetings - see Table 11).

Meeting	Date	<u>Agenda</u>
1	May, 07 (beginning)	Partners being acquainted. Discussion of project aims, objectives, rationale, delivery proposals, payment arrangements, monitoring and reporting. Actions to be taken by partners - providers to consider their service delivery targets for next meeting.
2	May, 07 (end)	Submit targets to coordinator. A discussion of procedures and protocols (e.g. referral routes), partner’s activities / services, and pro formas for financial claims. Coordinator appointed to be the finance and monitoring officer.
3	Sept, 07	Discussion and review of targets, monitoring procedures and claiming funding, any questions and issues arising, e.g. number of outputs a provider has to achieve.
4	Dec, 07	General business: a discussion of targets, outputs and issues.
5	Feb, 08	General business: a discussion of targets, outputs and issues. What needs to be completed? Evaluation of project.
6	March, 08	Discussion of project achievements, reflection, and possible continuance of project. What has the project achieved? What is the next course of action for the partnership? Bidding for new projects.
End of pilot - <u>March 08</u>		
7+	June, 08 – Sept, 09	Continuance of partnership and new membership. Applying for new opportunities and improving how organisations go about doing it, e.g. consortium bidding. Members discontinuing ties with partnership. End of partnership.

Table 11. A summary of partnership meetings

Analysing the minutes demonstrated how frequent partners met as a group. Over Phase 1, there were six meetings. After the pilot ended, partners did continue to meet between May 2008 and September 2009 as there was an interest in developing their partnership and organisational members worked together to bid for new projects. This information provides a simple outline of the partnership’s progression but does not fully illustrate an organisation’s relationship with another partner or an individual’s behaviour to another member when they attended meetings, which as a non-participant I observed, recorded and documented in this thesis.

7.3 Phenomenological Considerations

While the study was conducted over two periods, the pilot and continuance period, there was a temporal overlap between them, which means the analysis of phase 1 took place before phase 2 data collection could go ahead. Hence, the process was systematic; findings of phase 1 will be examined first to gain insight into the structures, logic, and interrelationships of their collective account to inform and probe phase 2. Being a phenomenological approach, four phases of contemplation need to be considered (Moustakas, 1994); these are:

- *epoche* – which requires the researcher to set aside, or just be aware of his/her assumptions, viewpoints or prejudices so that the data collected are not tempered by a researcher's awareness, assumptions or beliefs on the topic under investigation;
- *phenomenological reduction* – where the component parts of the experience are considered in search for meaning. During this stage the elements and essential structures of the phenomenon are uncovered, defined, and analysed. Data can then be grouped into themes and categories, and any irrelevant data can be removed leaving only the textual meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon;
- *imaginative variation* – where the structural components are sought, the search for the conditions and essences that make the experience what it is; and lastly
- *synthesis* – which involves intuitive-reflective integration of the composite textual and composite structural descriptions to develop a synthesis of conditions and qualities of the experience to pinpoint shared meaning and the essence of the phenomenon (Becker, 1992; Giorgi, 1997; Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990).

The method adopted in this study is based on hermeneutic phenomenology (see Chapter 5). Essentially, this involves using multiple methods and, being a hermeneutic project, the process of data collection and analysis is interpretive. Van Manen (1990) suggests

four phenomenological practices for those using hermeneutic phenomenology. They include (i) turning toward lived experience, how the researcher presents and or captures his/her position, behaviour and assumptions in the study, (ii) investigating the experience as lived, choosing suitable methods to explore how the phenomenon was experienced, (iii) reflecting on essential themes, identifying and discussing meaningful expressions of the phenomenon, and (iv) writing and rewriting, which involves the systematic synthesis and reporting of findings. This phenomenological process can be summarised as follows:

Epoche	Identify and suspend researcher presuppositions and prejudices
Analytical technique	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which involves a coding of themes using a constant comparative analysis method and a hermeneutic cycle.
Reduction	Discover aspects of meaning within and between organisational members
Textual description	Capture and explore relevant phenomena or meaning
Imaginary Variation	Identify variants of perceptions
Structural description	Connect those relationships between aspects of perceptions, e.g. shared meaning between cases and a narrative structure
Synthesis	Arrive at the essence or underlying themes of the phenomenon - those themes that influenced a partner's IOR

Table 12. Underlying methods of this phenomenological inquiry

Exploring a new phenomenon, particularly a shared experience, has directed this thesis to use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith and Osborn, 2004, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Like Hayllar and Griffin (2005), the process involves collecting, analysing, and triangulating primary and secondary methods of data collection until findings are well developed or no new observations can be obtained. This approach acknowledges interpretations are “bounded by participants’ abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately and, it would follow, by the researcher’s ability to reflect and analyse” (Brocki and Wearden, 2006, p.88). This involves demonstrating a researcher’s own account or journey in the research study or the steps he/she has taken to study the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009), as well as a reflexive account of the phenomenon in addition to other findings that have been captured. As a ‘next step’, it is

necessary to move on and collect data from other case studies to examine whether these arrangements experience similar themes (Fade, 2004).

7.4 A Narrative Approach to Developing a Collective Account of Events

Narratives can be seen to provide a link between collective constructs such as the organisation, the group (Brown, 2006), and the lives of individuals (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). They can create a multiplicity of possible narratives communicated through an array of ‘micro-stories’ (Boje, 2001; Hibbert et al., 2008). Organisational researchers see narrative as a mode of communication and way of knowing and interpreting the world (Cunliffe et al., 2004). They are not just transparent renditions of social interaction but important ways of knowing and constructing reality. Riessman and Quinney (2005, p.392) refer to this as a ‘narrative turn’, which they see as a “larger turn to language in the social sciences”.

Collaboration and IORs, when viewed from a narrative perspective, have the potential to reveal much about the inner workings and dynamics involved in partnerships from the people that actually experience the event (Hibbert et al., 2008). “Narrative knowledge is based on the assumption that we make sense of our experience through integrated and sequenced accounts or stories” (Cunliffe et al., 2004, p.263). This is supported by Polkinghorne (1988) and Weick (1995). “The creation of knowledge is not an individual process, but is a result of interaction with others meaning is a product of that interaction” (Du Toit, 2003, p.27). Narrative knowledge is therefore “a means of linking objective and subjective perspectives of time” (Cunliffe et al., 2004, p.271). Du Toit’s (2003) study demonstrated knowledge as a sense-making process that is shared through narrative, something that Boje (2001) also identifies in his research.

7.4.1 What are Narratives?

Narratives are not transparent renditions of ‘truth’ but reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story (Eastmond, 2007, p.248).

“In describing the manner in which events unfold, narratives can highlight the cast of characters, capture contrasting motives and evolving relationships, and display interpersonal tensions, backstage behaviours and conflicts, as well as outcomes” (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007, p.672). Narrative has been one of the major areas of

research within linguistics but has become a multidisciplinary approach that has been used in Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, and other related disciplines. The term 'narrative' carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with 'story' (Riessman and Quinney, 2005). Whether through oral accounts or documentary literature, the telling of narratives is a fundamental human activity that allows conversations and experiences to be shared with other people. Narratives are 'social products' produced by people within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations (Lawler, 2002). They are interpretive devices through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others. A narrative will contain such things as transformation, plot line and characters, and it demonstrates the relationship between the past and the present (Boje, 2001). Humans use narrative to structure experiences, order memory, connect to other people and build a life history (Klugman, 2007).

The study of narrative had traditionally been associated with literary and linguistic traditions. This is concerned with analysing the formal structures of stories, and the formation of language and linguistic codes. However, Sociologists have been late to recognise the significance of narrative and claims that it is only now that this method has moved to centre stage in social thought (Plummer, 1995). While narrative and story are related, they are not the same. For Boje (2001), narrative comes after the story to add plot and coherence to the story line. Human beings are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It is important to acknowledge that narrative construction does not take place in isolation but how people 'make sense' of what is happening to them in relation to past events and future expectations and in relation to others actors, narratives that are interpersonally constructed (Miller, 2000). Therefore, "the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2). The Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) identifies four important characteristics of narrative research. They suggest narratives are:

- Sequential and meaningful;
- Definitively human;
- 'Re-present' experience, in the sense of reconstituting it; as well as mirroring it; and
- Display transformation or change (ESRC, 2008).

Narrative is therefore something which illustrates a temporal sequence or order.

Cunliffe et al. (2004) refer to it as ‘narrative temporality’ (NT):

Time is experienced subjectively and narratives are spontaneous acts of meaning-making that take place and interweave through many moments of discursive time and space. If we accept this is so, then narrative research takes a different form - as a negotiated, synchronic, and polyphonic process in which we experience duration and connection in moments of narrative performance (speaking, listening, and reading). In other words, narrative research is reframed as a collectively constructed process over time - fluid and dynamic, and open to the interpretations of its many participants (Cunliffe et al., 2004, p.262).

“Experience-centred research expands notions of what is temporally sequential and meaningful” (ESRC, 2008, p.17). This has been stimulated by theorists with an interest in sense-making (Weick, 1995). “Sense-making is a search for plausibility and coherence that is reasonable and memorable, embodies past experience and expectations, and maintains the self while resonating with others” (Brown et al., 2008, p.1038). It is something that can be constructed retrospectively (Golant and Sillince, 2007), yet used prospectively to identify thoughts and emotions within and between people over time.

7.4.2 The Importance of Narratives as Sense-making Devices

Sense-making involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing. Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sense-making unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances (Weick et al., 2005, p.409).

Narrative is the “basic figuration process that produces human experience of one’s own life and actions and the lives and actions of others” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.159). Through narrative, we as individuals, think (Bruner, 1986), talk to ourselves and remember events (O’Connor, 1998), compose meaning out of events (Josselson and Lieblich, 1995), and engage in sense-making (Weick, 1995). Sense-making can be referred to as those processes of interpretation and meaning production whereby people reflect on and interpret phenomena and produce inter-subjective accounts (Leiter, 1980). “To engage in sense-making is to construct, filter, frame, and create facticity and render the subjective into something more tangible” (Weick, 1995, pp.13-14).

“One way in which we collectively make sense of (or enact) our social world is through jointly negotiated narratives” (Currie and Brown, 2003, p.564). When individuals become members of a group, they come together, communicate and interact, and construct a shared account of their experience (Boyce, 1995). Shared accounts of an event therefore “constitute collective frames for understanding that integrate a group’s knowledge structures, place events in causal order, serve as mnemonics, permit inferential reasoning, and transmit and reinforce third-order controls” (Weick, 1995, p.129). However, “theorists interested in sense-making have pointed out that although people prefer to assume that they share common understandings, as a matter of fact there are often fundamental inconsistencies between the perceptions of individuals and groups” (Leiter, 1980, p.78). For a researcher to focus on sense-making is to examine and organise individual experience with those that have also experienced that situation or event (Boyce, 1995).

7.4.3 Conducting Narrative Research

As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual. Prior to collecting narratives, Murray (2003) recommends building relationships with participants as they are less likely to provide their story if they do not trust the individual that is taking note of it. Constructing a narrative that is reflective of an individual’s experience will not happen if there is any distrust or uncertainty between the participant and the researcher. While there are no specific formulae for conducting narrative research, there are guidelines and procedures (see Creswell, 2007). These identify what actions need to be taken and how a researcher should conduct himself/herself. Generally speaking, the researcher’s responsibility is to be a good listener and the interviewee is a story-teller rather than a respondent (Holloway and Jefferson, 2004). Working with narrative material requires dialogical listening (Bakhtin, 1981) to three voices:

- The voice of the narrator, as represented by the tape of the text;
- The theoretical framework, which provides the concepts and tools for interpretation; and

- A reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self-awareness of the decision process of drawing conclusions from the material (Lieblich et al., 1998, p.10).

While a narrative describes what happened and the outcomes of it, the researcher will also reflect on his/her position and interpretation of this account. Narrative practice aims to simultaneously study what people say or do and how they make it meaningful, while a researcher will focus on his/her own sense-making. Shah and Corley (2006) summarised the researcher's responsibility as:

To rigorously gather and understand these disparate interpretations and, in a systematic and informed manner, develop his/her own interpretations of the phenomenon that make sense to the informants who experienced it first hand, are plausible to uninformed others, and can be expressed in relation to current theory. By placing oneself in the context where the phenomenon is occurring and developing interpretations of the phenomenon based on personal experiences, as well as the experiences of those living it, a researcher develops insights not possible through other methods of analysis (p.1823).

To understand different landscapes that participants visit and revisit, the researcher must do so with 'new eyes' (Gabriel, 2004), which means engaging with the story and engaging with ourselves, questioning our own assumptions as we experience the narrative, "and acknowledging our desire to be tempted, to be seduced, and even to be deceived" (Gabriel, 2004, p.30). But to do this, the narrative researcher needs to collect descriptions about the subject or object of study (e.g. the individual, organisation, the process, or its systems) to have an understanding of the context and other relevant issues that affect a participant's experience.

7.4.4 The Narrative Researcher

The narrative researcher focuses on the story "as a construct that provides modes of interpretation and insight" (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007, p.681). This is supported by Riessman (1993). This involves all participants giving an account of events, e.g. how organisations collaborate with other organisations and how these relationships change. Observations and interviews are important methods to understand these issues (Feldman et al., 2004; Patton, 1990; Suh and Lee, 2006). A researcher may look at content, 'structure' (Labov, 1972) and/or the process of an experience. For example:

- *Discourse analysis*: is concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance, the interrelationships between language and society and the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication (Stubbs, 1983);
- *Narrative analysis*: is also a form of discourse analysis. It values the signs, the symbols, and the expression of feelings in language, validating how the narrator constructs meaning (Marshall and Rossman, 2006);
- *Thematic / Template analysis* (Crabtree and Miller, 1999; King, 1998): is similar to content analysis but there are, however, two crucial differences. First, the template can be revised through exposure to the data, and second the themes are interpreted qualitatively; and
- Glaser and Strauss's (1967) concept of 'grounded theory', an approach in which theory develops directly out of the data. Lieblich et al. (1998) see this as generating hypotheses and theories in a 'circular motion'. It challenges 'armchair' *a priori* theorists conducting research by suggesting that theory should emerge from data, as opposed to the testing and verification of pre-supposed theorising.

Following Alvarez and Urla (2002) and Bryant and Lasky (2007), the analysis used in this thesis can be described as a modified form of grounded theory with thematic analysis. It is grounded in that themes and plot structures unfold in the course of data analysis, however it is modified from standard grounded theory as certain theoretical orientations and perspectives are brought to the data while fieldwork is being conducted. The research process has an idiographic focus that aims to offer insights into how a person, in a given context, makes sense of their experiences of a phenomenon. This also recognises the researcher's role or position as part of this process. It draws on an individual's experience and sense-making, and a researcher's reflections, whether they have participated in the process or whether additional data is warranted to explain findings (see Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Research by Bull and Crompton (2006) supports this technique. According to Smith et al. (2009, p.105), the IPA analyst should not invoke "a specific pre-existing formal theoretical position". Essentially, meaning will be mainly organised around themes that emerge from transcripts. This is not to say

literature in the topic is ignored. Theory, models and frameworks are used to support findings but are not directed by them (Blumer, 1954), which happened in this research study. Sections 7.5 and 7.6 will look at this issue in more detail.

7.5 Data Analysis

Before analysing data, interviews and observations need to be transcribed into a format that can be used at a later period. Issues of transcribing and translating can be subtle and complex (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Transposing the spoken word from a tape recorder into a text involves translation, and there are processes and procedures to do this (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). To keep comments and observations fresh in one's mind, it is best to document notes of each session shortly after the interview and/or observation has taken place (Bailey, 2007). Transcription provides a frame, as it were, to visualise the essence of the phenomenon and a means to remove personal or subjective thoughts and feelings from the event (Elliot, 2005). Elliot (2005) recognises that it is all but impossible to produce a transcription of a research interview, or any other type of conversation, which completely captures all verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Transcribing an interview word-for-word is a time consuming process as these sessions may last several hours (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Any transcription of speech must therefore be understood as a compromise between what can and what cannot be observed. There are software programmes to help facilitate such a process, normally referred to as CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) or QDAS (qualitative data analysis software). NVivo is one of them. This computer programme was chosen over other packages primarily because of prior usage (familiarity) and its functionality.

Similar to Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh (2008), the choice of IPA as the analytic method was determined by the phenomenological approach to understand the case study, which is identified in Chapter 5. IPA is an approach that depends heavily on the ability of the researcher to 'reflect and analyse' on shared meaning, and on his/her role and position, behaviour, and assumptions during fieldwork (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Thus, IPA involves what Smith and Osborn (2008, p.53) refer to as a "two-stage interpretation process" - participants will try to make sense of their experience while the researcher will try to make sense of the participant's sense-making (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). The process involves reading and rereading a transcript (the transcribed dialogue)

iteratively to get a sense of an individual's experience, and also the groups shared experience, before interpreting findings (Giorgi, 1997). The process of data collection and analysis involved locating meaningful expressions of collaboration in words, sentences and paragraphs, and triangulating shared meaning into themes that would capture how organisations worked together (see Figure 11). This method can be referred to as a 'constant comparative analysis' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of data collection. It is an approach in which patterns are identified, data are coded, and findings are categorised (Anfara et al., 2002). "Constant comparative analysis occurs as the data are compared and categories and their properties emerge or are integrated together" (Anfara et al., 2002, p.33). "The analysis allows the researcher to make connections between previously built categories and to test and to develop the categories further" (Rantala and Hellstrom, 2001, p.87).

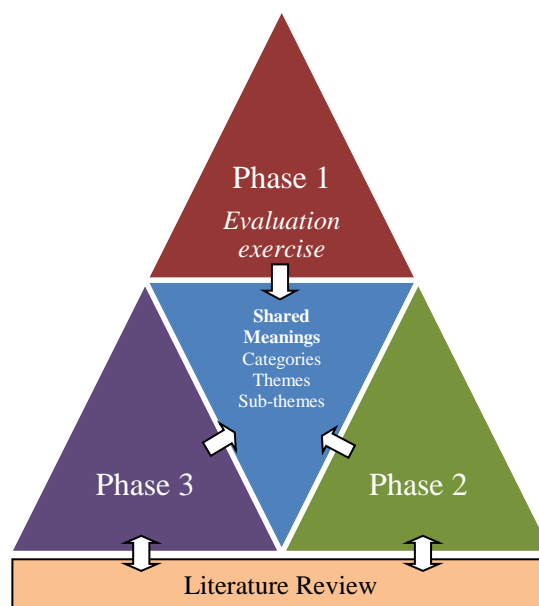


Figure 11. A triangulated model of the three phases of data collection and analysis

Since there was no intention to examine the partnership as a research study, Phase 1 is a period where there were no 'preconceptions' (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) or 'presuppositions' (Conklin, 2011) of theory or of other empirical studies that researched collaboration during data collection and analysis. Instead, it involved a process where themes can intuitively come to the mind of a researcher rather than from pre-existing theory (McAuley, 2004). According to Brannick and Coghlan (2007, p.64), "subjective interpretation is key to the research process". Basically, as transcripts were read and re-read certain concepts emerged as statements were being coded, which were then compared with other transcripts to see whether they also identified these themes.

However, during phases 2 and 3, a review of literature provided a conceptual framework that supported these findings. Like McRobbie and Tobin (1997), this research study:

.....followed a hermeneutic cycle where the assertions developed in a continuous cycle of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation and where each stage was informed by what was already known from previous studies, the research literature, interviews, and field experiences (McRobbie and Tobin, 1997, p.195).

As the process continues, data is triangulated from other observations (e.g. secondary methods of data collection) (see Section 6.7.2). For example, the focus group was a time to discuss themes that emerged from phase 1, while further interviews would either verify or refute findings, and a review of literature would help support the analysis and its interpretation. This process essentially involves the following steps:

1. Examining each individual interview to identify statements, themes and concepts about their project partnership and how organisations worked together;
2. Examining all interviews collectively to identify how the same activity was experienced by other individuals in the partnership;
3. Examining literature on the topic to find models and frameworks that correspond to findings, which will develop a final template of categories and themes;
4. Repeating the process until the point of data saturation, which happened to be the ending of the partnership, and
5. Interpreting findings and results (i.e. writing up)

An example of this analysis process is demonstrated below. Three distinct levels of analysis were conducted (Cope, 2005). The first level consisted of a full transcription of the interview and initial analysis of each transcript. “This first stage of analysis can be described as a personal sense-making process, which involved ‘getting to know’ each participant” (Cope, 2005, p.178). The next stage of analysis “concerned cross-case comparison or ‘detective work’, the purpose being to seek out both what is common and what is particular about the case” (Cope, 2005, p.178). The final analysis stage involved “‘clustering’ together evidence that confirmed emergent relationships” and integrating “enfolding literature” (Cope, 2005, p.179).

- Analysing data: an example of how interview transcripts were coded - PN II

Transcript Extract	Specific data	Codes: (themes/ categories)
<p>“The project has safeguarded what we presently offer. Being in a partnership has ensured that we don’t lose part of our service and has extended the service that we offer. To do this, we had to change the way we did things during the project but in doing so it has introduced and strengthened links with other organisations and our services with disability. Had it started sooner, it would have been good but there was a lag in the start-up. I also think the late start up made it more difficult. It squeezed things a little bit tighter. When we talk about journeys [of a service user] they take time and don’t happen in a month. For some people it can but for users we deal with it’s a much longer journey. I would hope that anybody who makes contact with Coffee Life or the Employment Service gains something, whether that something is advice or a signpost to move to other services. We’re busy working in our own ways and maybe being a little silo so things weren’t always clear. I didn’t really know what other providers were doing or how they were going to work with us at the beginning of the project. If more time could have been invested building up the partnership, there might have been potential for more joint working. We’ll never know now, but that might have also supported more outputs”.</p>	<p>“The project has safeguarded what we presently offer. Being in a partnership has ensured that we don’t lose part of our service and has extended the service that we offer. To do this, we had to change the way we did things during the project but in doing so it has introduced and strengthened links with other organisations and our services with disability”.</p>	<p><i>Themes:</i> Sustainability/Security # Service provision # Building capacity # Collaboration # Value</p> <p><i>Category:</i> Process – Development Stage (Building capacity)</p>
	<p>“Had it started sooner, it would have been good but there was a lag in the start-up. I also think the late start up made it more difficult. It squeezed things a little bit tighter. When we talk about journeys [of a service user] they take time and don’t happen in a month. For some people it can but for users we deal with it’s a much longer journey”.</p>	<p><i>Themes:</i> Time # Inertia # Conflict # Orientation of Task # Process of collaboration # Delivering services</p> <p><i>Category:</i> Process – Development Stage (Orientation of task)</p>
	<p>“I would hope that anybody who makes contact with Coffee Life or the Employment Service gains something, whether that something is advice or a signpost to move to other services”.</p>	<p><i>Themes:</i> Service provision # Partnership # Outcome of services</p> <p><i>Category:</i> Process – Performance Stage (Outcome of service)</p>
	<p>“We’re busy working in our own ways and maybe being a little silo so things weren’t always clear. I didn’t really know what other providers were doing or how they were going to work with us at the beginning of the project”.</p>	<p><i>Themes:</i> Independent working # Orientation of task # Ambiguity # Conflict</p> <p><i>Category:</i> Process – Development Stage (Ambiguity and Classification)</p>
<p>“If more time could have been invested building up the partnership, there might have been potential for more joint working. We’ll never know now, but that might have also supported more outputs”.</p>	<p><i>Themes:</i> Hindsight # Time # Building relationships # Collaboration # Service provision # Completion of project</p> <p><i>Category:</i> Process – Termination Stage (Hindsight)</p>	

Figure 12. Analysing data: an example of how interview transcripts were coded

The coding of transcripts started after the first set of interviews was conducted. Full interview transcripts are not included in this thesis due to the amount of description

these sources contain, some of which may not be directly relevant to the research question. Data that were inadmissible were those things that were not related to the ‘unit of analysis’, i.e. how organisations collaborated in the partnership project. Examples include data/conversation related to other projects and other relationships that had no relevance to how members worked together in this partnership. This process was repeated when coding transcripts in other phases. Seventeen interview transcripts were analysed. The first phase of data collection and analysis involved *capturing* specific themes (Table 13), while the second and third phase of data collection and analysis involved *exploring* these themes in transcripts from interviews conducted at a later period (Table 14).

- Phase 1 of Data Collection and Analysis - Capturing theme: ‘Building Capacity’

Participant	Description (Extract)	Theme	Category
PN	“The project has safeguarded what we presently offer. Being in a partnership has ensured that we don’t lose part of our service and has extended the service that we offer. To do this, we had to change the way we did things during the project but in doing so it has introduced and strengthened links with other organisations and our services with disability”.	Building capacity	<u>Process:</u> Development stage
GB	“The partnership has grown in a manageable way with other providers, rather than something that starts with too much, it’s grown in a way at its own pace. We’re just currently looking at outreach and outreach provision something that happened to land on my desk when I was talking to, well it was another provider anyways. We’re now looking to extend our services”.	Building capacity	<u>Process:</u> Development stage
AH	“For St Simons, this project has brought in a lot more people that wouldn’t normally use the centre. So for us as a business, it has increased numbers through the door, not dramatically, as we are only working with 20 people, but it’s 20 more people that are using the centre. It has enabled us to help people that we wouldn’t normally been able to help because we wouldn’t be able to give that one to one attention”.	Building capacity	<u>Process:</u> Development stage
CA	“I kept pretty much the same approach, but I’ve had to develop some skills because I’m doing a number of placements now. It’s trying to standardise some of the initial meetings and exercises specific to the individual. It’s about developing the rest of the organisation as-well because individuals don’t just work with me, they work with other members of staff, so I need to be able to educate them and say look this is what you need to cope with!”.	Building capacity	<u>Process:</u> Development stage

Table 13. Phase 1 of data collection and analysis - capturing theme: ‘Building Capacity’

Statements were extracted from interview transcripts which captured specific themes. They were then placed / coded into a category. The next step of the analysis process involved exploring these themes and categories from Phase 1 interviews transcripts in

Phases 2&3 interviews transcripts. During these phases, a literature search was also conducted.

- Phase 2&3 of Data Collection and Analysis - Exploring theme: 'Building Capacity'

Participant	Description (Extract)	Coding (Phase 1)	Notes	Literature
ND (I1)	"This joint initiative involved extending or adapting their core provision to accommodate the five outputs, working with other providers, and to develop what they were already providing to their user group"	<i>Theme:</i> Building Capacity	Evidence captured this theme after the formation of the project and before members delivered their services.	In review of theory, Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) 'norming stage' category coincided with how the group developed.
PN (I2)	"From a personal perspective, the finance ensured that we could develop our services and gave us more time to plan how we went about delivering services with other providers. It allowed us to capture and support people much earlier on, a sort of wellness continuum. As a group, we initially needed to assess what service users needed and how we were going to go about doing it before we did anything".	<i>Category:</i> Process - Development Stage	This stage involved change and building relationships with other partners in the project partnership.	Building capacity was categorised as a 'group norming' theme in the project partnership. In addition, Wilson and Charlton's (1997) framework also identified similar features in this process category (Stages 1, 2 and 3 Development Model of Partnership).
GB (I2)	"Though we were delivering more services and we had more users, we should have spent a little more time on, how can I say, firming up the partnership and getting to know each other more rather than meeting up periodically and delivering our targets. Though we did work together, we needed to build our relationships at the beginning".			
MS (I2)	"A good thing about it [the partnership] is that I wasn't made to feel like a small player. People all realised the strengths and the capabilities of each other's organisation and how much time and expertise they had. I don't think I had the expertise like some of the other organisations and their staff but I've learned that even a small organisation like ourselves can help at least one or two people to improve their lives".			

Table 14. Phase 2&3 of data collection and analysis - exploring theme: 'Building Capacity'

This approach was repeated for all themes. By doing so, I was able to develop findings inductively through clustering insights over different periods of time to demonstrate

how these organisations collaborated during the pilot project. Even though it was a time consuming process, the analysis allowed shared meaning to be organised into relevant stages. Similar to Goulding (1999, p.868), the analysis involved “scrutinising the text for narrative structures or meaning ‘units’ which describe the central aspects of the experience”. Figure 13 summarises this process. These findings will then be “synthesised to provide a general description of the ‘whole’” (Goulding, 1999, p.868).

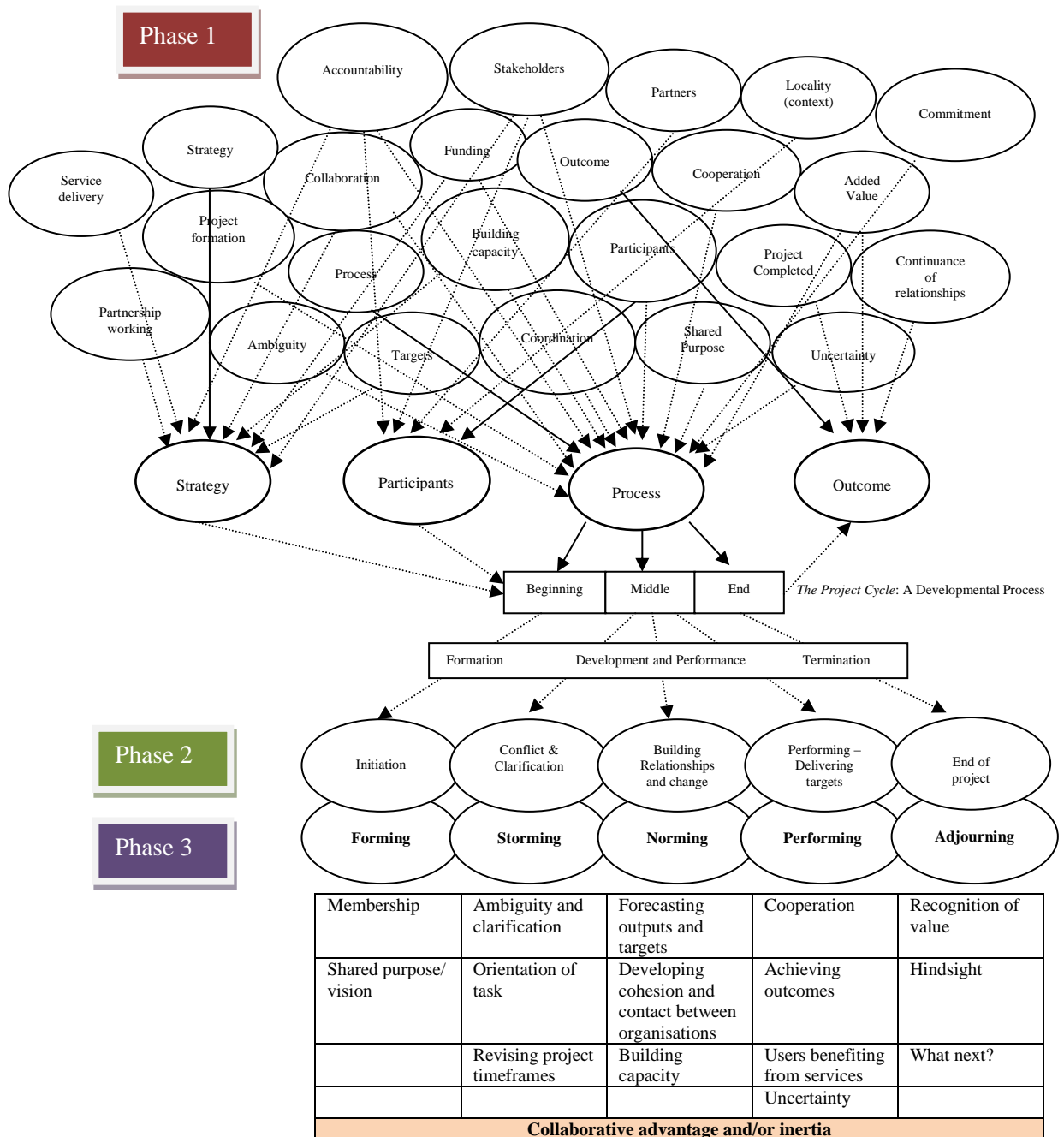


Figure 13. Categories and themes captured during the analysis process

This figure illustrates themes being organised into four main categories in Phase 1. This involved there being a strategy, participants, process, and an outcome in the project partnership, which also revealed a developmental process of collaboration. Phases 2&3 enabled more data to be collected on this phenomenon, which helped arrange shared meaning to specific stages. These are stages organisational members encountered during the project to the time it was completed. During these periods a literature search was conducted and a conceptual framework was identified that would explain how a group of organisations worked together (e.g. Austin & Worchel, 1979; Gray, 1985, 1989; Huxham and Vangen, 1996, 2005; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Schopler, 1987; Wood and Gray, 1991) and the different stages partners will experience to achieve a shared objective (e.g. Butterfoss et al., 1993; Downey et al., 2008; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977; Wilson and Charlton, 1997). Themes from the conceptual framework were used to support findings. This involved a set of general concepts that would help with the organisation of themes to develop, rather than limit, ideas and analysis (Blumer, 1954). Essentially, there was a ‘life-cycle explanation’ to an organisation’s IOR in the partnership. This included:

1. The formation of the group at the beginning of the project;
2. Ambiguity and clarification, orientation of task to achieve outputs, and revising targets after the group formed;
3. Building relationships and contact as organisations continued to meet;
4. Performing and delivering targets during the project; and
5. Ending the project where targets were achieved and the contract came to an end.

These findings were consistent with literature examined in this thesis (see Chapter 4, section 4.4). Basically, there was a formation stage [beginning period], a development and performance stage [middle period], and a termination stage [end period].

Collaboration involved a ‘developmental process’ (Gray, 1985, 1989; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Wood and Gray, 1991). Members experienced specific stages as they interacted until the project was completed. Rantala and Hellstrom (2001, p.88) note the use of comparative analysis “requires, more or less, moving from parts to a whole and back to parts again until a satisfactory understanding of the data is reached”. When a researcher has completed his/her analysis, the next step involves writing up findings.

7.6 Writing Up Findings

Constructing a collective account of the partnership's journey involved a process of 'writing and rewriting' (Van Manen, 1990), a "dialectical approach that involves 'reflecting on themes' and categories, and 'working' the text" (Hayllar and Griffin, 2005, p.519). This meant writing a synthesis of the composites (Moustakas, 1994). Benner (1994) summed up these steps as: (i) isolating cases, (ii) identifying repetitious themes for within and between cases, and (iii) selecting exemplary quotes to illustrate themes. This is an approach supported by Crabtree and Miller (1999) and King (1998). But as this thesis uses Smith and Osborn's (2004, 2008) interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) technique, the analysis went beyond a thematic appreciation to produce themes that are portrayed through a narrative account. This identifies a "movement from description to interpretation" (Brocki and Wearden, 2006, p.89). Goulding (1999) summed up this 'hermeneutic endeavour' as an:

.....an interactive back and forth process which attempts to relate a part of the text to the whole. Interpretations are continually revised as more of the text is grasped by the researcher. It is the text that provides the focus for interpretation and the analysts must show where participants' descriptions support the thematic interpretation. Interpretive patterns should be visible and comprehensible to other readers (p.865).

Furthermore, the narrative paradigm assumes that meaning is interpreted and enacted in a temporal, progressive form (Bryant and Lasky, 2007; Heath, 1994). This is supported by Czarniawska (1997), in that, narrating involves organising a shared experience but one that still requires thematic attention. I therefore became a narrator, I interpreted the shared experience using exemplary quotes to illustrate themes (Benner, 1994), which also meant re-examining transcripts and other data sources that were triangulated over the three phases of fieldwork to coherently bring together shared meaning (see Boyce, 1995; Brocki and Wearden, 2006; Brown et al., 2008). This involves a researcher revisiting his/her data and analysis to illustrate meaningful expressions of a phenomenon, which reflect a respondents' shared experiences (Bowl, 2008). The aim is to produce "a 'meta-narrative' outlining events as seen by a particular group" (Hopkinson, 2003, p.1944). Similar to Brown et al. (2008), respondent validation was sought during interviews and a workshop exercise to identify whether themes and categories, and my interpretation, reflected their partnership journey. Consequently, the analysis involves a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith et al., 2009), whereby "a meaningful

narrative is co-constructed between the participant's phenomenological account and the researcher's interpretations of that account" (Hamill et al., 2010, p.731). This involves an iterative process that continues throughout fieldwork and even in the writing up stage (Hamill et al., 2010). "A researcher's task is thus to 'reconstruct order of the told' in a kind of hermeneutic circle" (Ylijoki, 2005, p.562).

7.7 Rigour, Generalizability, and Ethical Encounters

Carrying out a qualitative case study over a period of time is influenced and shaped by a number of factors, particularly how events have transpired over the course of the research (Millward, 2006). Examining how research has been carried out and reported attempts to assess the validity and reliability of a research study (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009). Hence, it is essential for a researcher to make clear the philosophical, methodological and theoretical framework of his/her research (Saunders et al., 2009). This is instrumental in justifying new knowledge within the discipline to which a research study is aligned. Rigour, transparency, and openness in the presentation of results allow the reader to understand what choices and judgements were made, and consider for themselves whether these were appropriate when judging the quality of research (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005).

Generalizability involves the extent to which the researcher can make some form of wider claim on the basis of their research and analysis, rather than simply stating that the analysis is entirely idiosyncratic and particular (Mason, 2002). From qualitative inquiry, such as IPA, a researcher takes concepts or themes that may be applicable elsewhere and in other situations (Conrad, 1990), which this thesis advises to do as a 'next step' in examining other partnerships. It could be argued that in focusing only upon generalizability, the research is actually narrowing the scope of scientific enquiry (Hale et al., 2007). Though this research study is based on a single case, it provides a framework to examine other arrangements, which other researchers can follow or may choose to do differently.

Informed consent to partake in the research is important and will be approved at the beginning of the project. This allows informants to know or to realise what is being studied, what is required of them, and to reassure their participation is voluntary and that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any time (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

This hopefully provides an open and honest account and dialogue between a researcher and those participants in the study. From a briefing and debriefing exercise, the participants were informed about the purpose and objectives of the research project (see Willig and Rogers, 2008), e.g. my intentions in conducting this research study. The same applies to the recording of interviews and subsequent storage and management of information. Researchers must follow these rules to protect human subjects and their rights when disclosing material of participants or case study subjects, e.g. those who are named in a research project, to reduce any ethical and moral implications. This provides assurances of the confidentiality of data, the anonymity of respondents, and the management and documentation of findings (Saunders et al., 2009).

Has the investigation been designed in such a way as to explain methodological rigour? Because I have taken the time to detail the process and phenomenological conditions in this study, there is no reason why other researchers cannot replicate this research framework. The methodology is justified in terms of originality and to seek out new knowledge using the most appropriate methods to answer the research question. Additionally, Ohman (2005) found ethical considerations are of great importance in qualitative methodology because informants are few and researchers come very close to the participants' personal lives. Singleton & Straits (1999, p.533) characterised ethical considerations into three groups; "the ethics of data collection and analysis, the ethics of the treatment of human subjects, and the ethics of responsibility to society". They provide guiding principles and or codes of practice to aid researchers. Researchers should generally approach data collection in a rigorous and ethical manner. They should attempt to gain access to information or data to bring new insight into or knowledge of a topic.

Being a phenomenological approach, there is a dichotomy between the ethical imperatives of self and other, which is often interpreted through a language of spatial containers (Crang and Thrift, 2000). Researchers need to think about the ethics of encounters – the efforts to formulate the right and wrong modes of behaviour (Pryke et al., 2003). Miller (2000) found the role of the researcher as both catalyst and interpreter requiring continual monitoring of decisions taken. Because the study involves a number of methods, the triangulation of concepts and themes can enhance the validity of research (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009). Methods that are complementary can also improve outcomes by addressing a problem in ways to pull together findings (Denscombe,

1998). This thesis has used primary and secondary data collection methods to do just that. McNabb (2008) identified four ethical principles to research conducted in Public Administration and Non Profit Management that are relevant to this research study. They involve trustfulness, thoroughness, objectivity, and relevance. Trustfulness means that it is unethical for researchers to purposely lie, deceive, or in any way employ fraud. Thoroughness demands that the researcher be methodologically thorough and not 'cut corners' in their research designs. Objectivity refers to the need for a researcher to remain objective and impartial through all aspects of the study, while relevance means that a research study should never be done for frivolous, wasteful, or irrelevant purposes (Myers, 2009). I attempted to adhere to these principles and aimed to ensure openness throughout data collection, analysis, and the documentation of findings and results, and maintained confidentiality at all times, as requested by the participants in this study. All things considered, I was aware of ethical issues and considerations throughout this research study.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has identified and discussed the process of data collection and analysis in this thesis. Because fieldwork was conducted over two phases (a project period and continuance period), the research process was designed to be unfolding and iterative. Interview transcripts were systematically examined and coded into themes and categories using a constant comparative analysis method and a hermeneutic cycle, which captured and explored meaningful expressions of collaboration. An interpretive, narrative approach was chosen to write up these findings. This demonstrates the partnership's journey to achieve a shared objective. Lastly, this section has discussed how rigour, generalizability, and ethical encounters have been considered in carrying out and completing this research.

PART FOUR
FINDINGS & RESULTS

CHAPTER 8

A COLLECTIVE ACCOUNT OF THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

8.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to identify and discuss how organisations worked together during the project partnership. From the analysis process in Chapter 7, a final template or thematic structure was developed. This template summarises the main themes and categories when interview transcripts were individually and collectively examined. To explain how members collaborated to complete the project, a collective account of the partnership's journey was constructed. By organising and reporting findings this way, this thesis has attempted to illustrate how the partnership achieved its objective in a temporal sequence using a narrative approach (Cunliffe et al., 2004). My aim was to qualitatively describe the partnership's journey, and how its elements (shared meaning) interrelate and function together (Smith and Osborn, 2004, 2008).

8.2 The Evaluation Study: Summary of Main Findings

Conclusions from the 'summative evaluation' (Patton, 2002) identified all providers successfully achieving the partnership's objective in delivering their services within the project timeframe. The purpose of the partnership was to bring together a group of organisations from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to deliver employment and training services to a disadvantaged user group. Organisations fulfilled the conditions of the agreement, including the monitoring and evaluation of their efforts. The process of measuring targets, however, did not give a full account of their achievements and experiences as there are significant challenges and barriers in engaging this user group, which requires time, resources, and individual care/support. The project allowed partners to:

1. Continue offering their existing services. Organisations only had to make a few adjustments to their core provision, and
2. Provide new services to what they normally did. Thus, the partnership widened an organisation's scope, capability and/or function.

To be able to examine the overall impact, outcomes and targets, the evaluation examined a service users 'journey' or 'pathway' to employment. From the interviews with providers and users, the evaluation found two main indicators of an individual's experience, which were soft and hard outcomes. The soft outcomes can be described as an increase in:

- Confidence or assertiveness
- Motivation
- Communication
- Social and life based skills
- Work-based skills (e.g. writing applications, interview techniques, IT skills, CV building, first aid, health and safety, food hygiene and preparation, filing and administration work)

The hard outputs identified the number of users moving into employment or taking further steps into training or education. A higher proportion of users achieved those softer skills rather than harder outputs. To assess, support, and find employment for each individual takes time, especially when "the borough has high unemployment to begin with" (GB, I1) and when "some employers would rather employ someone that is physically able to do the job than a person who is continuing to experience a health related problem" (CW, I1). However, "to develop the skills of a service user is an important starting point when working with individuals that have a disability or mental health issue who have been out of employment for a long period" (AH, I1) or who "have never had a job to begin with" (GB, I1).

For the majority of organisational members in the partnership, service delivery by contract was something they had never done before and "to reach a total of 248 users over a twelve month period is a real achievement" (ND, I1). With the exception of Jobsmart, who tasked Advisors to deal with service users, all Project Managers personally dealt with their service users. "All organisations were very committed to the project" (SC, I1), in so far as "creating a positive relationship with other organisations and their service users to achieve their targets" (SC, I1). This organisational member who was the coordinator of the project also advised that "each organisation brought something unique to the group", and made others "think differently about what they were doing and how they were doing it" (SC, I1). Drawing on evidence from the

evaluation period, and in consultation with partners, the arrangement of organisations in the partnership could be illustrated thus (see Figure 14):

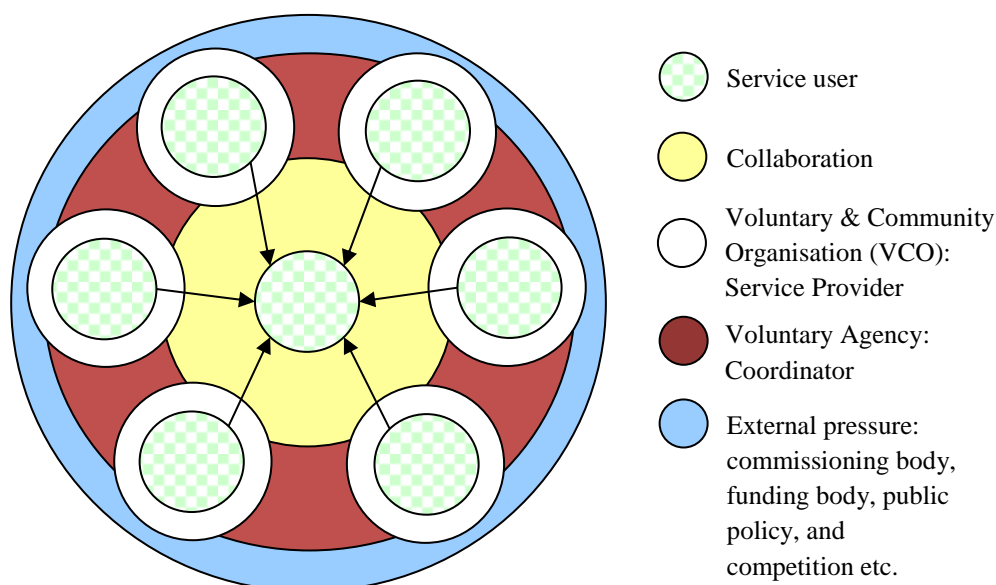


Figure 14. The arrangement of the partnership

This diagram demonstrates the service user as the central component of each organisation and the partnership, while collaborative working, their inter-organisational arrangement, and stakeholders involved in the project form the adjoining circles. Coordination by the voluntary agency was quite significant in keeping these organisations together and making sure they met their targets. Lastly, external pressure represents organisations and policies they experience in their environment.

There were five outputs the partnership had to achieve, which included unsupported employment, supported employment, learning work placements, basic skills training, and work related training. A summary of project deliverables can be seen in table 15.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Forecasts Agreed	Variance
Supported Employment	1	3	4	9	17	44.5	-27.5
Unsupported Employment	9	12	6	9	36	15.5	20.5
Basic Skills Training	14	8	9	11	42	35	7
Learning Work Placements	5	13	10	23	51	60	-9
Work Related Training	14	15	45	28	102	42	60
TOTAL	43	51	74	80	248	197	51

Table 15. Summary of project deliverables by quarter

As the table illustrates, this project has involved and worked with 248 service users. The forecasted target was 197 service users, which means the project worked with an additional 51 service users. This outcome surpassed their expectations. Work related training was the highest output, particularly in Quarter 3, and overall these organisations demonstrated a positive variance of 51 service users. Supported employment was the lowest deliverable (-27.5 variance), but as this required individuals to be in employment, it was the most challenging one to achieve. “Though we have been successful, it takes time for a person to be ready for employment and if there are no jobs in the market, particularly with organisations that need to be more supportive to individuals with certain needs, this output has been a difficult one for us to target” (AH, I1).

Though findings from the evaluation project were positive, there were not enough data or evidence that would identify how organisations collaborated during the project, e.g. how inter-organisational relationships (IORs) changed and developed over the project. Evaluation research is normally used to measure the effectiveness or success of different aspects of practice (Patton, 2002), such as an initiative, project, and policy, or, in this case, a partnership. While not directly criticising the way evaluation reporting is conducted, theoretical explorations and examinations require more time, resources, and effort to understand phenomena, and the debates and literature surrounding them. Additionally, more fieldwork was needed to explore collaboration as the unit of analysis (see Chapter 4). This meant examining each partner’s account of events to capture shared meaning (i.e. a collective sense) of the partnership’s journey (see Boyce, 1995). By analysing their shared experience, this thesis has attempted to understand how all providers working in the consortium experienced collaboration during the project partnership.

8.3 Shared Meaning amongst the Organisations in the Partnership

While the analysis of interview transcripts was systematic, wherein phase 1 helped inform and probe phases 2 and 3, understanding how organisations worked together was an iterative process. This involved data being triangulated and literature being examined concurrently to develop a final template of themes that would capture how organisations collaborated in this case study. Employing phenomenological techniques such as

reductionism and epoche (see Chapter 6), and by intuitively locating meanings within individual accounts (McAuley, 2004), the following template was constructed:

Final Template			
Themes captured and explored during fieldwork			
First level	Second level	Third level	
Strategy	Service provision and targets	-	
	Collaboration	-	
Participants	VCS, locality and local authority	-	
	The organisation, agent (representative) and service user	-	
Process	Coordination	Forming ~ Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership • Shared purpose/vision • Funding and accountability
		Storming ~ Conflict & Clarification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambiguity and clarification • Orientation of task • Revising project timeframes
		Norming ~ Building Relationships and Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecasting outputs and targets • Developing cohesion and contact between organisations • Building capacity
		Performing ~ Delivery of outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation • Achieving outcomes • Users benefiting from services • Uncertainty
		Adjourning ~ Disengagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of value • Hindsight • What next?
Outcome	Completion of project	-	
	Collaborative inertia	-	
	Continuance of partnership (re-forming)	-	

Table 16. The final template of meaningful expressions of collaboration

This final template consists of three levels. The first level illustrates the main themes that were identified in the first phase of interviews and observations during the evaluation exercise. The second and third level also identify themes that were captured from the first phase of research; however, further interview phases in the continuation period were designed to confirm and develop themes from data collected in phase 1 of fieldwork. While *a posteriori* sub-themes emerged from the first phase of data collection and analysis, which is consistent with phenomenological, qualitative studies, *a priori* themes were identified from a literature search during the second and third phases of data collection and analysis. These *a priori* themes identified how collaboration develops in specific stages that a group will experience in a temporary project arrangement. These findings coincided with Wilson and Charlton's (1997) 'five-

stage model' of partnership working, and Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) group development framework. They included:

- i. An initiation or formation period where organisations joined the partnership [forming stage],
- ii. A period where there was ambiguity, conflict, an orientation of task, and revising project timeframes [storming stage],
- iii. Organisations building relationships, periods of target setting by organisational members, and organisations changing their approach to a more formal relationship [norming stage]
- iv. An extensive period of delivering outcomes where organisations set out to achieve their targets. During this stage, members shared experiences and knowledge in partnership meetings, and delivered their services over four quarters [performing stage]; and
- v. Finally, an ending of the project. This demonstrated members disengaging, reviewing what they had achieved, and discussing the possibility of their relationship continuing after the project period [adjourning stage].

This type of inter-organisational relationship (IOR) is an area of research that has been examined by Schopler (1987), who looked at 'inter-organisational groups', and more recently by Aronoff & Bailey (2005), Gajda (2004), Huzzard et al. (2010), and Morrison and Glenny (2012). The partners' IOR was based on a 'functioning group' (Schopler, 1987), a 'task-orientated IOR' where members individually or organisationally delivered targets. Schopler (1987, p.703) defines these inter-organisational groups as members "who meet periodically to make decisions relevant to their common concerns, and whose behavior is regulated by a common set of expectations". Members are "interdependent and regulated by common norms", who "meet face-to-face and engage in relationships that endure and change over time" (Austin & Worchel, 1979, pp.8-9). However, toward the end of the project, the partnership demonstrated a 'relationship-orientated IOR'. Members began to see each other in their organisations; they worked more cooperatively to meet targets and they explored new opportunities. An example of this was when they attempted to bid for a new project as a consortium, and when they continued to meet voluntarily after the pilot project ended.

How organisations worked with each other was down to the individuals in the partnership and time constraints (Gersick, 1988). These individuals basically influenced their organisations' IOR as they were the main contact or representative for their organisation. Relationships only developed as and when they met as a partnership, which was every four to six weeks. If they did not attend meetings, relationships did not develop. These individuals shaped the collaborative process, in terms of the time, effort and resources they individually put into the project partnership, and how interactivity developed when they met as a group. In part, the process involved "a social interaction occurring between people working together to accomplish a certain, intersubjectively determined task" (Packendorff, 1995, p.328). These collaborative interactions among participating parties played an important part in relationships evolving or in some cases for them to be inactive as at times there was no interactivity between individuals (Cicmil and Marshall, 2005).

As a result, the *depth* of interactions was shallow, interactions were restricted to the project manager and, in some cases, by his/her counterpart; the *scope* of their interactions was narrow, organisations only communicated with other members (Hardy et al., 2003); and the *frequency* of group interactions was limited. The project demanded targets and outputs to be achieved in a shorter completion timeframe so their behaviour was focused on completing the task. Most of a member's time was spent on service delivery and supporting users, so developing relationships was slow and not a key priority. In part, this was due to how the partnership started and how each organisation managed its commitments, but over time relationships did gradually grow stronger. A partner's account (i.e. their shared experience) of the project partnership identified the consortium as:

1. A success, and now I know what we need to do as a partnership I think we'll be able to do it again but better (PN, I1).
2. A journey that made us look at what we did....Yes mistakes were made, and yes we could have done things differently but we achieved our objectives (GB, I1).
3. A learning experience....I've really enjoyed working with the other organisations and hope we can do it again. Then again, who knows where we will be in two or three months' time (AH, I1).

The descriptions were shared with other members of the consortium. The following section aims to discuss this partnership and how members worked together to achieve their objectives. Names and certain details were changed to maintain anonymity and clarify certain passages, e.g. [name] was changed to [representative of organisation].

8.4 The Collective Account of the Pilot Project Partnership

The Disability Employment Group (DEG) is a pilot project created to resolve tensions between the efficiency review and the Third Sector. The hub, in this case South Tyneside CVS, manages the contract; they collate the information and report to the monitoring team. The service delivery partners deliver the services and report their figures to South Tyneside CVS.

(MOM, 05)

This partnership commenced on March 31st, 2007. It was a pilot project designed for twelve months. The intention to deliver services as a group was driven by an efficiency principle. It was a contract-based project and was commissioned by the Local Authority (LA), who was the Commissioning Body (CB) of the project. “It was [LA representative] and [Voluntary agency representative] who were the prime movers about it” (GB, I3). [LA representative] was the senior manager of the CB, while the [Voluntary agency representative] was the Director of the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). I did not get the chance to meet the original Voluntary agency representative as roles switched to another colleague, who would become the project coordinator. She is referred to as SC in the study. She became my main point of contact for this organisation. I was however able to interview the LA representative after the pilot project in Phase 2. He expressed the initial conception of the project as something that was “drawn on a packet of cigarettes” (ND, I1). Voluntary organisations are increasingly subject to ‘influencing agents’, both internal and external, that can drive strategic change (Hay et al., 2001). Such relationships have been documented in Leach and Wilson (1998). In this case, a pilot project partnership was commissioned by the LA and funded by the local government from an idea that came from an individual during a leisurely moment.

The project was ‘innovative’ (ND, I1) as there was “nothing similar to it in the region” (SC, I1). If partners successfully worked together to deliver joint services “the impact of their work would be greater, in terms of its overall effect, than if one organisation was

doing it alone” (SC, I1). This captured the synergistic argument in partnership working (Huxham, 1993, 2003; Lasker et al., 2001; Weiss et al., 2002). It initially involved a meeting between various organisations and stakeholders to discuss the project’s objectives, service provision, and targets. This also provided a time to “flush out any problems with agreements” (ND, I1). Of those invited to the first meeting, only one service delivery partner was absent. The first meeting provided an ‘Overview of the Contract’ and its rationale.

The Commissioning Bodies (CBs), in particular the Council and the PCT, are being driven towards fewer, larger contracts, which means larger regional, sub-regional and national organisations have an advantage over small, local organisations which – by and large – do not have the capacity to compete

To try to safeguard local organisations there are several options which were put to the CBs – to their credit – they have been very supportive.

The options are to establish a consortium to bid for contracts (which will be appropriate in some cases) or to contract with a single agency who will manage the contract and which will sub-contract with delivery partners to deliver the targets and services. The reason for bringing the group together was that the CVS has been asked to manage a relatively small contract as a pilot to see whether this way of working is feasible.

The CVS will be the lead agency and manage the contract but has sought to bring partners, which from previous experience, it knows will deliver the targets. CVS will provide the ‘bathroom’ support and deal with funding arrangement and monitoring.

(MOM, 01)

The second meeting followed soon after. This meeting allowed organisational members to discuss the ‘protocols’ of the partnership, which also clearly stated the coordinator’s role - “CVS would manage the contract and finances of the project and the partners in service delivery” (SC, I1). “The ‘hub’, or non-delivery partner, is a central component of the delivery framework to co-ordinate the delivery of service by each partner. Their job is to identify problems, manage progression, and monitor performance” (ND, I1). This document was circulated and signed off by members. There were two absences in this meeting. Targets, delivery proposals, payment arrangements, monitoring and reporting were issues discussed. CVS was the Accountable Body (AB) of the project, which meant they would coordinate and monitor the project throughout its duration, providing updates to the CB and funding body (e.g. progress reports). As the AB was a non-service delivery partner, it was critical to make clear that “the employability agenda

is not a priority for CVS so there is no conflict with other organisations for which it is a primary aim” (MOM, 02), which was later confirmed by SC in the first interview with this representative. This individual’s main objective was to coordinate and manage the organisations in the partnership, and to reassure all service providers that they would not be delivering targets.

8.4.1 Theme 1 - Strategy

The strategy of the partnership was designed to create a joint working arrangement between voluntary organisations that are located in the area. I had not really experienced anything like it. It was new to me but it was also a new concept to the organisations in the partnership. Project managers had to work hard to achieve their targets, and collaboration played an important part of it. The evaluation results showed the strategy was successful. By working together and learning from each other, the project allowed organisations to see what others were doing and how they were doing it. Everyone benefited from this partnership.

(SC, I2)

There were two key objectives in this partnership, the first involved “providing employment and training to people with disabilities or mental health illnesses as a combined service” (SC, I1). The second objective involved “the joint delivery of services by collaborating with other providers” (SC, I1). The desired outcome was “for these providers to deliver targets and establish a new form of working by doing something that they had not done before” (ND, I1). The initial incentive for organisations to work together was down to funding. It was something discussed by all partners, which meant “providers were now accountable to their targets” (ND, I1), as well as “how they would work with another provider to deliver their services” (SC, I1). The strategy of the project was described as being ‘well-suited to each provider’s capabilities’ (ND, I1) and one that could “develop them into new avenues” (SC, I1).

From this first theme two sub-themes emerged:

- Service Provision and Targets
- Collaboration

Service Provision and Targets

While some organisations adapted their core provision, for others it meant offering something new. The delivery of targets was set by each organisation as this was how funding would be allocated. If they could not deliver their targets then funding would be given to another provider.

It is everyone's responsibility to make sure that they deliver what they have accepted as their targets. If not, then this should be brought to the attention of the group who may then have the option to reallocate monies to organisations which are able to deliver more targets.

(MOM, 01)

Funding was allocated based on the number of outputs to be achieved but "the AB and earlier meetings were not overly prescriptive to how providers would go about doing this" (PN, I1). Individuals representing their organisation had a high level of experience and expertise in delivering these types of services and working with the individuals they were supporting, so it seems it was left to organisational members to decide what they could deliver and how they should go about doing so. For this to happen, commitment to this project was critical, as it was the necessity for each organisation to be signed up to it.

It was important for us as an organisation that we delivered on this because often we're accountable, internally accountable but not really externally accountable. It keeps you on your toes and makes you deliver.

(GB, I1)

Accountability made organisations not only change how they worked together but also how they perceived external forces/pressures. As organisations were already dealing with a challenging group of users with a diverse range of health related difficulties or impairments, "the project required them to report this information in a way that would reflect the number of people they would help, and also when or how they would do this" (SC, I1). Providers had been working with their user group for quite some time, so they did not have to change much to manage their caseload, e.g. "like allocating more resources to employees" (CW, I1) or how they went about "working with an individual" (PN, I1). But they did have to "present their targets more formally" (GB, I1). As these organisations were already established, they either had a membership system already in-

place or enough service users using their facilities. Organisations submitted their targets to CVS at the beginning of the project. However, in review of their meeting minutes, these targets were still being reviewed during a later stage. This was the first sign of an issue not being resolved. Delivery partners also had a number of questions around service provision and targets that needed clarification from the CB. While communication was mainly through the coordinator and feedback was discussed in a subsequent meeting, it was a “slow process to resolve issues as meetings were the only time we met as a group to discuss what we did or needed to do” (PN, I1).

In the evaluation of their service provision and targets, the AB requested both “qualitative and quantitative measures and perhaps particular anecdotal ‘good news’ stories” (MOM, 02), which Gilchrist (2006) recognises as measuring accountability. This involved those with delegated responsibility giving an account of how resources had been deployed and to what effect. This type of reporting would aim to identify “how service users benefited from service provision and whether providers were meeting their obligations” (ND, I1). This project was therefore “not just about numbers but an understanding of how services impacted individuals, how services benefited their user group” (SC, I1). This is something “the evaluation exercise demonstrated” (PN, I1) that “helped us [service providers] understand what we were doing” (GB, I1) and “showed others what we could do as a consortium” (CA, I1).

Collaboration

The whole point of the project was to meet those targets, improve the service delivery to the individuals themselves and get the partners working better together, and get a better understanding of what these providers do.

(SC, I1)

There is some overlap from the first theme as collaboration was a central component to the project’s remit in how organisations worked together to deliver services. For organisations to complete the project, they had to provide services and deliver their targets, and, in doing so, they had to share information, knowledge and resources. The partnership basically was said to be a:

....project that consisted of a combined service. Prior to this arrangement, it was different organisations all over the place. Although they were doing a very good job, it wasn’t necessarily right for the individuals because it’s with people with

various disabilities and mental health issues. One organisation is not necessarily the best one to deal with them through every stage.

(SC, I1)

This meant “providers supporting each other to meet their targets” (SC, I1). As a step towards this, ‘referral routes’ were discussed. “If a provider was unable to deal with a service user they would be sent to another organisation that would be in a better position to help and support them” (SC, I1). In a later meeting, this point had to be repeated.

All partners agreed that they would signpost an individual to the most suitable organisation to meet the individual’s needs as this work is all about the long-term aims of the individual.

(MOM, 04)

Collaboration would therefore lead to better service provision between partners. One approach to this was to create “a referral route system” (SC, I1). Quarterly meetings were arranged to talk about this issue, which also allowed members to set a time to talk about their work, progress, and any concerns they may need to bring to the attention of other partners. These meetings would be held at the AB. However, how organisations would collaborate or improve their relationships was not well documented. As the project was a shared initiative, it was important that organisations were “signed up to the partnership” (GB, I1), where “they would deliver outputs, meet their targets, and share knowledge and expertise as a group” (SC, I1) “through regular meetings” (SC, I2). Providers were left to their own devices without too many administrative ties so they could provide their services. In doing so, “their autonomy would not be compromised” (SC, I1) so “we [service providers] could get on with what we normally do” (PN, I1).

8.4.2 Theme 2 - The Participants

If I was to describe the project managers in the partnership, I would say they are enthusiastic, committed and supportive. Service providers were complementary, and each manager has a range of skills and experiences that others could take advantage of. That was one of the benefits of this partnership. We all worked well together. While I was responsible in coordinating the project, I always felt part of the group. The voluntary sector is a dynamic sector. You never know what to expect. Funding is being squeezed and this is having an impact on the sector. Tougher decisions are being made and organisations are struggling because of it.

(SC, I2)

The VCS consists of a wide range of organisations and people from many different backgrounds and walks of life. These participants are essentially “paid members of staff who have worked in the sector for several years” (SC, I1). Service providers working in the sector may be referred to as not-for-profit organisations, registered charities, or voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). They are small and locally-based that aim to help and support local people and the community. It is a sector that has been supported by government grants and other funding bodies. “With new policies and strategies being introduced by local government, there is now a turn to contracts and contracting to deliver public services. Organisations have to change how they operate; otherwise, they will be in a difficult position” (ND, I1). While funding from the partnership offered a brief period of financial security, working with other providers in the partnership meant individuals had to “work across organisational borders and share resources” (ND, I1). “While this was a new way of working for all of these service providers, I had no doubts about the project failing” (SC, I1). “Partners knew what they had to do. I have a lot of experience in mental health while some of the other organisations have experience in disability provision. We all connected and this made the project easier” (PN, I2).

Given the scale of the problems facing the sector in the region, it has become increasingly recognised that these types of pilot initiatives are innovative (Glendinning, 2002). “These projects create opportunities for VCOs to work with other providers, and is a means for the organisation to see what changes need to be made” (ND, I1). However, organisations enjoyed and relished those days when ‘pots of money’ (CB, I1) had been easy to come by. “But these financial avenues that we have previously used do not now exist so we are struggling” (MS, I1). “This pilot was an initiative that could help these organisations work together” (ND, I1), “where they would work towards common aims and objectives” (SC, I1). It involved “building relationships with other providers, improving their channels of communication and removing duplication” (ND, I1). The important thing for this partnership for it to work was that these providers had to be “complementary” (SC, I1). In that, the pilot project would “enhance what they were already doing” (ND, I1) by “combining their efforts to do something differently” (SC, I1). This view was supported by all partners in the partnership.

From this second theme, two sub-themes emerged:

- Working in the VCS, Locality, and the Local Authority
- The Organisation, Agent (Representative), and Service User

Working in the VCS, Locality, and the Local Authority

The VCS consists of a wide range of organisations and people from many different backgrounds and walks of life (Kelly, 2007). They are small and locally-based charities that aim to help local people in their community. Organisations working in the sector may also be referred to as not-for-profit organisations, faith-based groups, voluntary organisations, community centres, or social enterprises. They have been referred to as VCOs in this study as partners prefer this definition to others.

Third sector? Personally, no I don't like it. I don't know if a lot of organisations like it. We like the voluntary sector and that's what we are. The third sector seems a poor definition and I think it's a real unfortunate term. Maybe it's the way I think – 'you always come third and never top'.

(MS, I2)

The VCS is a sector that has been supported by government grants and other external funding streams for many years. This has made organisations dependent on public funding and handouts, and it has also isolated them from other providers. "The problem, particularly in South Tyneside, is that there are so many organisations fighting for the same clients and there's so much competition out there" (CW, I1). "There's a kind of insularity and the funding regime has historically made you like that" (GB, I2). In a later interview, this provider advised that this insularity is more regional:

Shields [South Shields] is often described as a big pit village and there is still a great strength of insularity in being close together. But it's a suffocating thing as well. You don't get that mix of seeing people from other areas. It's a factor of South Tyneside out of all the boroughs I've worked in.

(GB, I3)

The idea of the pilot came from strategic agents who have worked in the sector for many years. These stakeholders are aware of how government policy and the sector are changing, particularly in the Borough of South Tyneside. Even though they did not attend partnership meetings, the coordinator did provide them with updates on a regular basis. This pilot presented local service providers with a new opportunity to form a

consortium arrangement between service delivery organisations in a sector that was describe as “a little unstable” (PN, I2). The project was described as a “new initiative to encourage local providers to develop a new way of working” (ND, I1).

It all started because the Council is gearing toward fewer larger contracts. However, the Voluntary Sector is struggling with that. There was a threat that we may not be able to compete with businesses that could deliver the larger projects. This project helped us see whether a few organisations could get together and compete, if you like with the private sector, to be able to deliver those type of projects and have more sustainable funding.

(SC, I1)

In an earlier statement this organisation acknowledged the difficulties of charities working in the sector, which was supported by other service providers. “It wasn’t just us that were facing difficulty, it was a very difficult time for everybody” (GB, I1). All the organisations have a strong knowledge and or account of the sector but funding was becoming a real problem. “Funding is central to organisations providing services but there’s not enough of it to go around” (SC, I1). “With a reduction of funding streams, these organisations now need to become more open to new ways of working, which the pilot project provided” (ND, I1). Providers were now able to work with other providers to “do something that we would not normally do” (MS, I1) and to “work with people that we would not normally work with” (AH, I1). This was something also supported by other members (e.g. GB, I1; PN, I1).

The Organisation, Agent (Representative), and Service User

“These organisations have distinctive values and qualities that make them excellent providers of services and effective advocates in the sector for their clients” (ND, I1). It is also recognised that some VCOs offer specialist services for certain sections of the community - those individuals with learning disabilities, mobility problems, and mental health illnesses (e.g. AH, I1; CA, I1; CW, I1; GB, I1; PN, I1). It also seems to be a very rewarding profession as project managers identified “great pleasure in helping and supporting individuals” (CA, I1) “that have different and more challenging needs and requirements than others” (AH, I1). When asked to talk about their organisation in the first interview phase, their responses were very client centred and driven.

We tend to operate in the community as a whole. We offer everything from an old fashioned job recruitment place, except we are very laid back. It's more client based, but we offer all the services as job recruitment, help with CVs, fax, and photocopying services.

(AH, I1)

We have become quite a significant provider of placements for training organisations and also opportunities for volunteers to a range of things they get from volunteering, to promoting confidence, self-esteem, and employability skills. It's now a whole range of things, from providing mobility support to providing social and recreation activities. We do trips, we have talks, raffles, social evenings, and training courses. We give advice and information on a range of disabilities issues or concerns. As I said, we provide volunteer opportunities, placement opportunities for people on New Deal and other schemes.

(GB, I1)

Bliss=ability is primarily a disability and information service so a person with a disability, carer, family member, friend who is looking for some information we can help. That information could be what service they need and can access, am I employable if I'm on benefits, what technology is out there and what technology can be used to do what they do. So primarily we do the research to find some of those answers to point these people in the right direction.

(CA, I1)

I manage the Jobsmart project with TEN. We're about employer engagement. We look at the links between employers and our clients. Our main clients are people that are job-ready. We tend to be a recruitment agency. We are now, because our clients are different, we now work with employers to recruit clients that may not have everything that they are looking for but we can support. Now because of the clients we're dealing with we tend to do outreach engagement work. It's not necessarily about getting people into jobs. It's about getting them out the house and getting them on a course that could help them in some way.

(CW, I1)

Given the scale of the problems facing the region, all providers recognised that these types of pilot projects create opportunities, e.g. "the possibility of change" (GB, I1), "efficiencies and improved services" (PN, I1), and "by working more closely with individuals you learn something new" (MS, I1). Even though they have worked independently, a member's behaviour was quite focused on partnership working (e.g. AH, I1; CA, I1; CW, I1; GB, I1; PN, I1). For example, "I've always had a cooperative partnership approach to things. I was aware that we as a project needed to be in a partnership; we're in lots of little, loose partnerships, but to have a partnership that had objectives and to establish a partnership we could do business, in a way, made us think differently" (GB, I3). Other partners also had this feeling.

Partnership working, I guess as an individual or employee, I've always been keen and supported by Mental Health Matters as an organisation to further partnership working. The majority of the successes we've had are with statutory organisations. With the rest of the voluntary and community sector, there have been degrees of success.

(PN, I2)

Managers representing their organisation in the partnership have had previous experience with partnerships but “not where there were formal measurements” (GB, I1) (i.e. output and target-oriented approaches), or where they have to work with similar providers to do it (e.g. AH, I1; MS, I1; PN, I1). Before this pilot, none of the partners had ever worked in a consortium arrangement. These “service providers are independent organisations” (SC, I1), who “tend to look out for themselves as it's the only way to survive in the sector” (GB, I2). This was also agreed by other members (e.g. AH, I1; CA, I1; PN, I1). This partnership was an initiative that was designed “not to compromise what they were doing” (SC, I1) but “encourage organisations to think how they could collaboratively improve what they did” (ND, I1).

8.4.3 Theme 3 - The Process

When I look back at how we collaborated as a partnership, I think it's fair to say that we all made a conscious effort to deliver our targets and to collaborate. The funding had a huge impact on my work. As the project manager for Coffee Life, I have always looked at developing relationships with other organisations so that we can improve our service. At the beginning of the partnership we were all doing our own thing with various degrees of success. My main focus was achieving targets that I set at the beginning of the project. When I started delivering targets it kind of just came together after that. I guess there were some issues that were not dealt with but they never really changed my approach. Project meetings allowed us to talk about our issues and success stories. Though we did share ideas and resources with other organisations, it would have been good to have seen relationships developing more effectively. The process was not well managed but I think we are all to blame for this. The project was completed on time and I'm happy of how this turned out.

(PN, I3)

From the analysis process in Chapter 7, how the partnership was experienced demonstrated a beginning (formation stage), a middle (development and performance stage), and an end (termination stage). A review of literature, however, helped to distinguish stages into themes that reflected their partnership journey. This demonstrated a developmental process, of which there were five distinct stages:

forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. This process was confirmed by interview descriptions (see Example above: PN, I3) and when data were triangulated with other sources (e.g. the partnership's meeting minutes, see Table 17).

Meeting	Date	Agenda	Stage
1	May, 07 (beginning)	Partners being acquainted. Discussion of project aims, objectives, rationale, delivery proposals, payment arrangements, monitoring and reporting. Actions to be taken by partners: providers to consider their service delivery targets for next meeting.	Forming
2	May, 07 (end)	Submit targets to coordinator. A discussion of procedures and protocols (e.g. referral routes), partner's activities / services, and pro formas for financial claims. Coordinator appointed to be the finance and monitoring officer.	Forming & Storming
3	Sept, 07	Discussion and review of targets, monitoring procedures and claiming funding, any questions and issues arising, e.g. number of outputs a provider has to achieve.	Storming, Norming & Performing
4	Dec, 07	General business: a discussion of targets, outputs and issues.	Norming & Performing
5	Feb, 08	General business: a discussion of targets, outputs and issues. What needs to be completed? Evaluation of project.	Performing
6	March, 08	Discussion of project achievements, reflection and possible continuance of project. What has the project achieved? What is the next course of action for the partnership? Bidding for new projects.	Performing & Adjourning
End of pilot - <u>March 08</u>			

Table 17. A developmental sequence of the project partnership meetings

The beginning of the project identified the formation of the partnership, and the end identified the closing stages of the contract and possible future courses of action. However, during the development and performance period of the partnership, between May 2007 and February 2008, there were three main stages that demonstrated collaboration transforming. They involved times when there was ambiguity, conflict, and a revision of project timeframes. There was a period when organisations started to build relationships, share expertise and develop a referral route system/procedure with other organisations. There was also a lengthy period when providers were performing, which demonstrated cooperation, service delivery separated into four quarters, and uncertainty about their future and what do next after the project was completed.

While Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) linear model fitted with the development of collaboration within this case study, there was also evidence of inertia and sudden change, which corresponds to Gersick's (1988, 1989) punctuated equilibrium model. The process demonstrated periods when members reverted back to earlier points in time due to targets and timeframes being revised, terminology being defined, and referral routes being developed. Therefore, the process could be modified to take into account

emerging, cyclical and non-linear eventualities that occurred during the pilot partnership as members delivered their targets (see Section 8.5). This suggested that the project progressed through different development and performance stages but change was conditional on a number of individual, organisational and environmental factors.

Although time within a stage may vary, and the progression from one stage to the next was examined in retrospect of the event happening, relationships changed according to when organisations interacted (Thomson and Perry, 2006). By this definition, collaboration can be referred to “as the evolution of a negotiated order” (Gray, 2004, p.251), an interactive process between individuals working in partnership (Gray and Wood, 1991). The subsequent sections aim to discuss this collaborative process.

❖ *Stage 1 - Forming*

In this first stage, there were three emerging sub-themes:

- i. Membership
- ii. Shared Purpose or Vision
- iii. Funding and Accountability

The Forming stage brings individuals together and orientates them to their task. However, due to an ‘unforeseen emergence’ (Rowe and Hogarth, 2005), the partnership was delayed. This gave providers “a shorter timeframe to complete agreed targets” (SC, I1). This is something that has been experienced with similar projects in the VCS (see NCVO, 2010), which identified an initial delay in handover of the project from the primary care trust (PCT). It was a “frustrating time for providers” (SC, I1) “as it had to do with something that was beyond our control” (GB, I1). Providers now had only nine months to complete the project. These concerns were noted in September’s and December’s meeting minutes.

Membership

“Having the ‘right’ people involved means both having the most suitable individuals and having representatives from the appropriate organisations and interest groups” (Brown et al., 2006, p.173). Gray (1985) describes this as ‘problem-setting’, involving

an identification of relevant stakeholders within an area. Partnership formation is not a single act or event. It is a process of assessing the most suitable individuals and agencies to complete a shared objective (McMurray and Cheater, 2003). When partners were asked how they became a member of the partnership, there were different responses.

We were introduced by [Voluntary agency representative], who is Director of CVS. She's been in the job longer than I have. She knows voluntary organisations and basically she knew we were connected with disability. So there would be our organisation, Shopmobility, Bliss=ability etc. Of course she would know the other organisations, what kind of training they give people or how they directed people. So that's how we were contacted. Centrally we're a disability organisation and we were doing what she was looking for.

(MS, I1)

I think initially I had some discussion with [LA representative] from the Local Authority. [LA representative] was at the meeting. We talked about life after lottery funding, and we were getting funding from Northern Rock, getting some funding from Lloyds TSB, that kind of thing - a patchwork of funding. We talked about the work we do with volunteers and the work we did with trainees on placement and that work was not recognised in any way, other than its value to the volunteers themselves and the organisations they were involved in. We were looking at ways, in a sense, to how we could benefit financially from the work we did. It linked obviously to the employability agenda. We felt we had something to offer and by talking to [LA representative] I was able to see how we could tap into resources, possibly funds for that purpose.

(GB, I1)

Basically, we were invited by CVS to join the partnership and they selected x number of partners who they thought did a good service in the community and who actually made a difference. We were invited as one of those partners.

(AH, I1)

While other partners could not recall these early events, "I don't know how it arrived at us actually" (CA, I1), these individuals were not involved with the project at the beginning. This partner, however, introduced the idea to another organisation, who later became a partner.

Through conversations with [Bliss=Ability representative], who is the lead officer from Bliss=Ability, the idea came to us. [Bliss=Ability representative] was the first person who supported me within my role from another organisation. He was very forthcoming with information sharing and networking in South Tyneside. He was just very forthcoming. He was the first person, the first organisation that took a placement onboard and facilitated a placement for somebody. So this

relationship was in place for some time. [Bliss=Ability representative] explained that maybe there was another opportunity coming up to look at disability and employment. And obviously once we clarified how disability was being defined, it could be an opportunity that we could be involved in, and I guess from then on I pestered [Bliss=Ability representative] to see what was happening and when it would start.

(PN, I1)

It seems that this organisation was not part of the original selection of organisations. Their presence was only indicated in the September, 2007, partnership meeting minutes. In consultation with the CB, the voluntary agency had the task to select partners, but because of a switch of roles at the beginning it was not clear how it all came about by the coordinator.

To be honest, a lot of it was before my time. What I know of it is that it involves organisations that are very well established in South Tyneside and are known for what they do. If you like, it was the cream of the crop that was picked to come together. As far as I'm aware, they are the only organisations in South Tyneside that work with people with disabilities.

(SC, I1)

Those early days identified a lot of switching of roles between different members of staff that would later represent an organisation in the partnership. However, it was important that “providers were complementary” (SC, I1). The identification of legitimate stakeholders is the process in which relevant partners are identified on the basis of several factors (Wilson and Charlton, 1997). These could be their power or presence in the sector, their service provision and what they could bring to the table, their expressed interest to join the partnership, or a mutual recognition of an important step to change (Whetten, 1981). The organisations that would become delivery providers all had a vast interest in the project. However, “people generally say they are for partnership working but like anything else you need a sweetener in a way” (CB, I1). In this project, this was mainly funding that partners received to be a member of the partnership, which allowed organisations “to continue operating for another year at least” (MS, I1). Other members supported this description (e.g. CB, I1; PN, I1).

Shared Purpose or Vision

Due to the size of organisations and their resources, the Project Manager was the main representative in the partnership and, with one exception, personally dealt with their

user group. As “there was a lot of common ground between the organisations in the partnership” (GB, I2) in supporting their service users, their shared purpose or vision was orientated around their users. “There was unity amongst providers” (PN, I1).

The other organisations I knew existed but I didn’t know them personally. I didn’t know their schemes very well. I did realise of course that we were all singing from the same hymn sheet as it were. We were all interested in getting people employed, getting them self-sufficient, getting them more confident, getting them a workplace and that’s what we were all about. So I knew of their work. Basically, we met, discussed the possibility of how we could work together, how could we actually engage and support users, and help train and support them with a view of getting them employed in the long-term.

(MS, I2)

If you look at the organisations involved, they are all very much at the social end of the spectrum as far as delivering services to people. And we’re all very much people orientated services. By not looking at pounds on people’s heads I think probably helped the partnership. Not having to fight over pennies between ourselves. To not view the work we could do with an individual with a pound that could be gained by it. We were able to focus on the individuals because the money was almost guaranteed. There was an initial claw back but from then on it wasn’t the case ‘if you don’t meet certain targets there will be no claw back’. From a risk point of view, this was taken out of the equation, which gave us an opportunity to focus on the people, which is what we were all good at. This is the strength of all the organisations. That’s certainly what we put on to the table.

(PN, I2)

However, even after the delayed start there were ongoing problems with definitions and terminology of outputs.

In the very first meeting, the Steering Group got bogged down in talking about disabilities and what we termed as a disability. Then it was ‘what do you class as supportive employment?’ Just the fact you’ve got someone to report to or is it the fact you’re buying equipment so that a disabled person can access a job? I think the upshot of this was that it was kept sort of deliberately woolly because we did things differently.

(CW, I1)

Lots and lots of meetings went on in the early stages to try to really identify what everybody else did. I think it was one of those things where everybody knew what to do but didn’t know what everybody else did exactly and how we could, without duplication, support each other.

(AH, I1)

The notion of a shared vision and purpose meant understanding and resolving differences at an early stage to avoid problems at a later point. These organisations did try to minimise duplication and misunderstandings in meetings but this did take time because of different assumptions and views that were held by partners.

Funding and Accountability

Different stakeholders were involved at this stage to clarify their expectations of the project and its objectives. Rules and procedures could then be formalised. Early discussions by the partnership were quite clear in how funding would be distributed. It provided these organisations with an opportunity to improve what they currently offer by working with other providers. According to the coordinator, “funding from this project enables them [service providers] to go out and do things that they wouldn’t necessarily do and enhance the services they already have” (SC, I1). To further clarify this, she identified how funding was set:

The funding was used to provide the service rather than a ‘payment by output’ award as this project was never meant to put the service providers in competition with each other.

(SC, I2)

Funding provided partners with “a degree of security in an uncertain time and to develop their services” (PN, I1). This was agreed with other providers. “There was a need to really show a partnership to secure the funding. That was absolutely central to what we were about and that people were signed up to that” (GB, I2). There was a unanimous agreement by participants that funding brought them together. With a delay in the project, funding was not allocated until certain issues were resolved, which held up organisations forming relations and developing a collaborative practice.

If the funding came to us sooner, maybe we could have allocated it better, maybe look at what we could deliver with other providers and improve the ways we worked together. The council took a long time to sort this out so our delivery time was reduced.

(AH, I1)

Organisations realised they had to achieve outputs for there to be funding. This suggests that funding is, in part, about financing an organisation to deliver specified targets and a

means to measure its capability to perform. While relations of confidence, particularly on the part of funders, depend on the efficiency of organisations in delivering certain services in a narrower institutional or procedural sense (Tonkiss and Passey, 1999), a shorter timeframe to achieve targets hindered organisations developing relationships at an early stage in the project partnership.

Stage 1: Key Findings of Forming Stage

Theme: Initiation

Behaviour: Members meet each other for the first time. There is a shared or common interest in working together. Members plan how they will deliver their targets and what they need to do to make it happen. Issues did arise at this stage in defining terminology and procedures. While funding is being authorised, organisations familiarise themselves with their task and with other providers that have been selected to complete the project.

Table 18. Stage 1: key findings of forming stage

❖ *Stage 2 – Storming*

In this second stage, there were three emerging themes:

- i. Ambiguity and Clarification
- ii. Orientation of Task
- iii. Revising Project Timeframes

The Storming stage is when disagreements, frustrations, and questions about the pilot project surfaced. During this period many questions were still unanswered. Things such as terminology and number of outputs were still being discussed in later meetings. Therefore, there was some overlap between the Forming stage and this new stage.

Ambiguity and Clarification

During the beginning of the project, the partnership experienced a delayed start and ambiguity of certain issues or criteria. In September 2007, several questions were put to the coordinator to resolve. Most of them were minor, but as this representative was not part of early talks they needed clarification.

I think the way it started and the ambiguity over what you could claim, what you couldn't claim, who you could enrol and who you couldn't, people tended to question what they needed to do. For example, I've got this bunch of clients and I can put them in my organisation as I don't want to lose that bit of funding, so we ultimately didn't think we needed to send users to another provider. That's always going to be an issue in a charitable provider. There is a certain limit on funds and you've got to get what you can to keep your organisation afloat. I think if that had been clearer at the start, people would have shared their users a lot more.

(CA, I3)

This came back to an earlier point that this participant made. "I think if we had known sooner what the criteria was we could have targeted things better and the group could have worked on targeting them better; it could have really worked" (CA, I2). Other providers stated definitions were purposely kept 'woolly' so not to 'step on people's toes' (e.g. CW, I1; PN, I1). However, this led to multiple and conflicting interpretations:

Definitions weren't always clear. What was meant as mental health disability, basic skills, learning, and work placement was unclear. Is a learning placement one where they had to be accredited? There was some looseness in the definitions and other criteria that could have been tightened up a bit. [SC], to be fair, did try to clarify this but it should have been better clarified from the outset. But as ever, some of these things do take time to clarify. Because we all have been doing this for such a long time, it might not always be easy to reach an agreement.

(GB, I1)

When asked whether these issues were resolved, one provider said "it was sort of down to whether a person considers themselves to have a disability and whether a provider has those facilities to help this person" (CW, I1). It seemed organisations only communicated through the CB and not really amongst other members of the group so decision-making was very slow. From these meetings, there were clear signs of problems in communication and clarification. Outside of these meetings, members very rarely communicated with one another and there was no urgency to resolve issues. The coordinator did try to intervene, but for the most part, they also focused on meeting the project's targets rather than building bridges between the organisations in the partnership. "We weren't that involved in meetings, and although we chaired them, it wasn't really us putting that much in" (SC, I2).

One of the biggest problems was insufficient understanding of each partner and knowing exactly what they did because members "did not know" (CA, I1; PN, I1). December's meeting did note some organisations sending documentation to the

coordinator about their organisation. “I requested information from each provider about who they were and what they did, but this was at a later stage in the project, nearly eight months after the project started” (SC, I1). This was due to a number of reasons, including absence from meetings and ill-health - “unfortunately I haven’t had the opportunity to meet with them as often as I would like, but that’s because of personal commitments and health problems I’ve had” (MS, I1), and generally limited communication between partners beyond group meetings. One partner commented on this:

I was aware COD was in the partnership, but because of illness that happened within COD they were almost an absent partner through no fault of their own. I guess at first I was thinking ‘who are COD and what are COD bringing to this at that point of time?’ If somebody is absent for a long period of time within an organisation, who has only two full-time members of staff that’s half their capacity, then building relationships is going to be pretty difficult. Because in those early days, well I’m saying those early days, the majority of communication was only once a month and we never talked outside of our meetings. It means if somebody is not getting to those meeting you don’t have a chance to build any rapport or know what is happening with other partners.

(PN, I2)

By not attending partnership meetings, it seemed interactions between partners were limited, which made relationships difficult to develop. “You didn’t know their resources and what they were putting in” (CA, I3) and “what they were exactly doing” (AH, I1; CW, I1). “We’re busy working in our own ways and maybe being a little silo so things weren’t always clear. I didn’t really know what other providers were doing or how they were going to work with us at the beginning of the project” (PN, I1). This was confirmed by another partner. “You get too involved in your own projects. It’s one of those things that we all do in the sector” (MS, I1). In the absence of formal documentation and procedures to build relationships, as well as poor communication and information sharing between service delivery providers, a period of ambiguity evolved. It was something that was not planned; providers were simply not building their IORs in the partnership.

Orientation of Task

There was much debate about whether organisations were complementary or in competition with each other because of the task orientation of project. When asked

whether they found themselves competing with other members, they agreed they would complement other providers as they all did similar things. “I do feel we complement each other” (GB, I1; MS, I1). “It’s about recognising what we are and what we’re not, and how we could work with each other” (PN, I1). However, each organisation set out to deliver targets, instead of working together to jointly deliver them. “They mostly went about providing services as they would normally do” (SC, I1) as this was “how the project was orientated” (SC, I2). This, however, might have developed a competitive behaviour within the group.

If I was to be honest, there probably has been a little element of competition. That natural human instinct to compete has probably prevented a partnership developing. Partnership working is the way forward and to really achieve a seamless system if we start to work in partnership. We all understand a little bit more in how the sector works and how different organisations work. We all aimed to stop people falling between gaps or get lost as they move through different systems. There’s a natural reluctance for partnership working because a natural competitive edge comes in and it’s like most of what they do, we do as well. It’s about recognising what we are and what we’re not, and how we do things together.

(PN, I1)

“It’s part of the culture in our sector as so many organisations have been funded to do similar things. It’s difficult not to be competitive when each organisation has their own speciality and there is a push to achieve targets” (CW, I1). This was confirmed by another partner.

We’re currently participating in a beauty contest to get money from opportunities for service users, so the whole history of organisations is largely that they’re set up to compete with other organisations for a small amount of money. It’s that kind of individual focus on getting the money in to survive, which has always been deeply rooted within organisations.

(GB, I2)

This perception of the sector did conflict with their ability to develop relationships, share users, and collaborate, but it was not raised in meetings at any point. The conflicts that occur in groups are usually complex, and are often based on members’ differing beliefs and values (Elwyn et al., 2001). Their partnership became more task-orientated as opposed to the group facilitating collaboration in delivering services. Group dynamics did vary but there was still a “shared understanding between providers” (SC, I1). Because of the size of the partnership and the interest of funding there was clear

unity in their beliefs and values, and how organisations tailor their services to users. While there was no struggle with leadership, power or structure, because of the way the group was informally orientated, organisations were left to their own devices as “delivering targets was central for a provider to have funding” (SC, I1).

Revising Project Timeframes

Due to the lapse in time, the allocation of funding and delivery of services were affected by this. “It started off pretty slow because there was a delayed start to the project. But since then, it’s just been a mountain of work” (SC, I1). This was confirmed by other partners.

Had it started sooner, it would have been good but there was a lag in the start-up. I also think the late start up made it more difficult. It squeezed things a little bit tighter. When we talk about journeys [of a service user] they take time and don’t happen in a month. For some people it can but for the users we deal with it’s a much longer journey.

(PN, I1)

One provider said “the partnership is scarcely six months old and it didn’t come to any form till August, September time” (GB, I1). Asking them whether this caused any problems, two organisations advised “it’s been the usual pressures of getting the numbers right” (GB, I1) and “you’re automatically counting down, which takes your mind off other things to get it finished” (AH, I1). All organisations were in agreement about the effect of the late start, how they worked independently, and how they had to revise timeframes to manage and complete their targets. But instead of planning their next step as a group, organisations continued to individually deliver their services. Members did “meet every four to six weeks” (SC, I1), but that was all. Delivering was the most important thing on their minds, which resulted in a lack of attention or time in building relationships at this stage of the project. Any communication was mainly in reference to outputs and not collaboration. Roles, rules, and common values were informally established.

All organisations were very keen to start the project and deliver services and that is what happened but without any pressure to build IORs with other providers. In hindsight, literature advises addressing some of these issues more formally to stop them reappearing at a later period (Shaw and Allen, 2006). In meetings, “it seemed we were

always discussing targets” (CW, I1), and “we didn’t really talk much about partnership working in those early days but what we could deliver as an organisation” (PN, I1). Recognizing and agreeing on ways of working together would have strengthened their IOR between providers and gradually collaboration may have become part of the agenda. But this is not to say that they did a bad thing or that they were ineffective as they did not know any different, and as the project was task-orientated this is what they had to do. It was in the coordinator’s hands to resolve problems and manage members, which they did do in meetings as and when things needed to be addressed.

Stage 2: Key Findings of Storming Stage

Theme: Conflict and clarification

Behaviour: individuals tended to exhibit less conformity with other providers due to problems not being resolved. Organisations have moved past the early forming stages and are now encountering uncertainty, ambiguity, and conflict. Individuals need to find more effective ways to manage and resolve their differences; otherwise, this may hinder interdependent working with others at a later stage. Coordination is important to maintain balance and focus between members of the group.

Table 19. Stage 2: key findings of storming stage

❖ *Stage 3 – Norming*

In this third stage, there were three emerging themes:

- i. Forecasting and Setting Targets
- ii. Developing Cohesion and Contact between Organisations
- iii. Building Capacity

Again, there was some overlap between the Storming and Norming stage in the group’s development. These organisations had been working on this project for several months by this point, so they should have started to become interdependent with other organisations in the partnership (Wilson and Charlton, 1997). It seems, however, that because of the projects task orientation and a reduction in time to complete the project, this never fully happened. Individuals did become more engaged with other members, but only in partnership meetings. It also seems that during this stage there was a sudden change in their behaviour (Gersick, 1988), e.g. members had to revise their targets to the

CB. Providers now needed to understand “what they could provide with other organisations”, rather than “what they just could have done on their own” (SC, I2). This created a period when there was pressure to demonstrate their accountability and providers had to work more closely for it to happen. “If they could not do this, funding would be reallocated to another partner” (SC, I1). Wilson and Charlton (1997) and Tuckman and Jensen (1977) recognise cooperation and cohesion between members in this stage of development.

Forecasting and Setting Targets

At the beginning of the project, organisations were asked to provide targets that they could achieve. It seems because of the period where organisations were not working together, these targets did not materialise until the Norming stage. When organisations were asked to consider and review their prior estimates, there was a degree of uncertainty among all providers regarding what they could achieve. “I set them low because not having had the experience of training people or the contacts to do this I was a little uncertain” (MS, I1). This was agreed by other members. “We had some historic data to work from because we kept records on lots of these areas but some of it was a bit of a stab in the dark” (GB, I1). “Some of the areas that we were working towards were very grey” (AH, I1).

I’m not sure about the other organisations but I sometimes think, especially when we were talking about the numbers, we didn’t want to go overboard because we didn’t want to take away what another organisation might be able to get funding. And, I think, probably not wanting to be seen as taking anything away from the whole thing. But I don’t think we have.

(CW, I1)

Forecasting and setting targets was something new to these organisations. As a result, there was ambiguity in what they and others could achieve. The pressure to give a desired number of targets was necessary for each organisation to be sufficiently funded. Members did communicate with the coordinator to identify what they could achieve, which was then reported to the CB. Discussions with the coordinator during meetings distinguished the need for members to “reconsider their targets” (SC, I1) so that they matched the size of the funding being awarded and the time that they had to complete the project. Again, members did not initially consult with other partners to do this exercise but they did “gradually share ideas with other partners” (PN, I1).

Developing Cohesion and Contact between Organisations

Relationship building is probably the most daunting and time-consuming challenge faced in the process of developing collaborative partnerships (Brown et al., 2006; Lasker et al., 2001). From their partnership meetings, a ‘common purpose’ to complete the project was captured (Casey, 2008). However, the connectivity and interdependence of participants was obscured by the task orientation of the project. The coordinator advised that “the project has enabled them [service providers] to work together and bring together all of their people [the volunteers in the organisation]” (SC, I1). She also said in a later interview that “the project has enabled providers to achieve a common aim and objective rather than something that was based upon well-defined procedures, which allowed members to resolve organisational issues informally” (SC, I2). This was agreed by other organisations, e.g. “the project allowed us to develop informal ways of practice and formal ways of working” (GB, I1), and “even though there were deadlines, there was no one looking over our shoulder” (PN, I1).

Evidence identified the project gradually developing cohesion - “providers were becoming more aware of each other and communicating their efforts in meetings” (SC, I1). For some providers it meant “knowing more about other individuals and organisations” (GB, I2), as they were “not aware of what they did” (GB, I2). For others it was an opportunity to share knowledge and expertise.

It has made other organisations dealing with disability more aware of what TEN does as a lot of people still think we only help those on job seekers allowance. I’ve known most of the other organisations but not in great detail. I didn’t exactly know that Coffee Life dealt with people with mental health issues, and I knew that Shopmobility dealt mainly with people with disabilities. But until this project, I didn’t realise what other organisations were doing.

(CW, I1)

We would bounce ideas off each other but we don’t tend to work very closely, unless there is a placement or somebody has some skills they want to develop. There’s a couple we are looking to put into Coffee Life because they’ve got some catering background. We do steer people on with a particular skill, but I don’t think anybody has steered people onto us. But again, I don’t think everybody knows 100% about what we do. One of the things we talked about early on in this pilot scheme was all putting a brief of what we do so we could share ideas and possible resources. I did suggest spending a day visiting each other’s projects.

This would have been really beneficial. However, finding the time to get people together just never happened.

(CA, I1)

The relationship with Bliss=ability has continued to strengthen and continue to develop. I've met one of the guys [CA, representative of Bliss=ability] is supporting. We're looking at helping some of Bliss=ability's placements with IT training. That person is comfortable with the Cafe and the next step is a placement. That is building up of that relationship. I'm now more aware of what other groups [service providers] offer. What this pilot scheme has done has cemented that recognition that we're actually working together and what we are doing is a lot closer than what we originally thought. The need to work closer is important. I certainly find a lot more telephone calls from TEN and I certainly support a lot more people to access TEN.

(PN, I1)

There was a lot of common ground between us. Obviously, we have a closer working relationship with COD as [MS] is the chair of this organisation.

(GB, I2)

It is evident from these extracts that the process of developing a relationship and forming trust was always going to be slow and challenging. The minutes did confirm this observation, something that should have been dealt with at an earlier point in the partnership. Developing cohesion was limited due to a shorter timeframe to complete the project and lack of ability to formalise procedures in the formation period. An opportunity was also missed to visit each partner's business because of time constraints. The project did allow organisational members "to see what others were doing and how they did it" (SC, I2). In hindsight, this exercise might have helped organisations develop stronger ties because it was something that did later bring partners together (e.g. CA, I2; GB, I2; PN, I2) (see Stage 5 – Adjourning).

Building Capacity

Building capacity is essentially about change (HM Treasury, 2002). For organisations in the partnership, it meant "extending or adapting their core provision to accommodate the five outputs, working with other providers, and to develop what they were already providing to their user group" (ND, I1). One provider said "the project has safeguarded what we presently offer. Being in a partnership has ensured that we don't lose part of our service and has extended the service that we offer. To do this, we had to change the way we did things during the project, but in doing so it has introduced and strengthened

links with other organisations and our services with disability” (PN, I1). As targets were largely about numbers, the numbers of people accessing services increased, as did the caseload, which involved more work for the Project Manager.

It’s made us focus more on what we’re doing. We’ve always been doing this but it’s given us more structure. It’s kind of encouraged us to get accredited training, not that we didn’t keep records, but to keep better records to do more evaluation and to do more follow up. It’s basically encouraged us, in a way, to be more professional about how we approach working with volunteers.

(GB, I1)

I’ve already done some placements before this scheme took off the ground. Really it was just saying here’s something coming up and see what they can actually physically do in a normal environment. Pushing the boundaries to find what career path they might want to take. For me it was a fantastic challenge to see people with different disabilities coming here and not being rammed in narrow channels, but to see what they are capable of and stretch their horizons.

I kept pretty much the same approach, but I’ve had to develop some skills because I’m doing a number of placements now. It’s trying to standardise some of the initial meetings and exercises specific to the individual. It’s about developing the rest of the organisation as-well because individuals don’t just work with me; they work with other members of staff, so I need to be able to educate them and say ‘look, this is what you need to cope with!’

(CA, I1)

For St Simons, it has brought in a lot more people that wouldn’t normally use the centre. For us as a business, it has increased numbers through the door, not dramatically, as we are only working with 20 people, but it’s 20 more people that are using the centre. It has enabled us to help people that we wouldn’t normally be able to help because we wouldn’t be able to give that one to one attention.

(AH, I1)

People all realised the strengths and the capabilities of each other’s organisation and how much time and expertise they had. I don’t think I had the expertise like some of the other organisations and their staff but I’ve learned that even a small organisation like ourselves can help at least one or two people to improve their lives.

(MS, I2)

Another organisation was considering contracting an Employment Coach to manage their service users as part of their organisation, but due to the project being delayed “this hindered our plans” (PN, I1). Capacity building was seen as a way to strengthen an organisation’s internal infrastructure in order to support service users more effectively.

New training courses were provided; the scope of services was widened; increased usage was demonstrated, and expertise was made to be more accessible. The partnership was said to have “grown in a manageable way with other providers rather than something that starts with too much. It has grown in a way at its own pace” (GB, I1). Apart from being dependant on the individuals that manage their organisation, other factors, such as available resources, the time allocated to manage projects, and the balancing of priorities, may hinder collaborative practice (e.g. CA, I2; GB, I2; PN, I2).

Stage 3: Key Findings of Norming Stage

Theme: Building Relationships and Change

Behaviour: Organisations become more aware of others; they learn to co-operate, build referral routes, and nurture informal relationships in meetings. Individuals demonstrate an improved ability to work with other partners. They discuss problems, communicate, and resolve issues. Individuals learn to engage more with one another and share organisational problems with others in the group, and they change/adapt their services to a new way of working.

Table 20. Stage 3: key findings of norming stage

❖ *Stage 4 - Performing*

In this fourth stage, there were four emerging themes:

- i. Cooperation
- ii. Achieving Outcomes
- iii. Users Benefiting from Services
- iv. Uncertainty

Based on Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) framework, it is assumed that the group has progressed through the stages of forming, storming and norming, and has now reached the stage of performing. This is stage four of the development process (Wilson and Charlton, 1997). At this point, collaboration should be maximised, efforts are turned into something tangible, performance is monitored and measured, and organisations work together to achieve their targets. As some themes from earlier stages were not fully achieved, they continued into the Performing stage, which affected the group’s

approach, e.g. “how they cooperated and how they performed as a combined service” (SC, I1). Again, there was evidence of sudden change (Gersick, 1988) during this period; providers had to revise their targets and re-adjust their next quarterly forecasts if they had not been able to meet them in previous quarters. Most providers had to do this because they were dealing with a shorter completion timeframe but this now meant “organisations working towards their targets rather than finding ways to build relationships” (SC, I2).

Cooperation

With a shared commitment to the project, organisations set out to achieve their targets, which involved having “a shared belief in the partnership to support individuals who lived in the area” (GB, I1). Partners became more willing to listen, learn, and share best practice with other providers. To do this, support from other partners was vital.

We got quite a lot of support from Coffee Life, not in respect to referring clients but from advice. I’ve been able to ask him [PN] about this guy that I’m helping who is a recovering alcoholic and whether he’s dealt with these issues before. From a support point of view he has been helpful. [CB, representative of Shopmobility] was also supportive, as-well-as Bliss=ability, and [SC, coordinator of voluntary agency] from CVS.

(AH, I1)

However, such referrals were between certain members and not the whole group. “This was due to there not being an official system for referring individuals to other organisations” (MS, I1). All partners had a common reason for being involved in the project, but to do so meant being more cooperative with other organisations, which meant sending “a service user to an organisation through a referral route” (SC, I1). To achieve this goal, individuals had to deliver their organisational targets. The way this was initiated did not fully optimise a referral route system and this was demonstrated in the Norming stage. Additionally, in order to facilitate collaborative practice with service delivery, partners had to meet on a regular basis. The coordinator also “emailed the partners quite a lot, possibly on a fortnightly basis, to see how they were getting on and if there’s anything I could do to help them as some were unable to attend meetings” (SC, I1).

They had meetings roundabout every six weeks and between those meetings I emailed partners. If they had concerns or problems, they could email, ring or call me or whoever was the monitoring person at the time and we could feed down to the partners. If there was a question that could benefit the other partners, we made sure it was circulated so everybody was in the loop. Towards the middle or end of the project, they did start to contact each other without me being involved.

(SC, I2)

Though there was a strong sense of accountability and commitment to achieve targets, developing collaborative practice between providers was slow to take shape. This could be because relationships outside of meetings were not being developed or that targets were set by the organisation. Providers maintained their independence to achieve their targets but interdependent working was gradually emerging. “We were talking about best practice and referral routes at one point but we just kind of lost our way at the beginning” (PN, I1). “It was only when we started meeting more the project gained momentum. We needed to put out heads together and that’s what we eventually did” (PN, I2).

Achieving Outcomes

A service user’s experience was an important factor in organisations achieving their outcomes. It was said that services were “tailored to each individual” (CA, I1). This extract was a shared view by the group (e.g. AH, I1; CB, I1; CW, I1; MS, I1; PN, I1). “All organisations had their own way to deal with their service users” (SC, I1), and were said to be “uniquely located in the area to provide services” (ND, I1). This partnership presented members with “a collaborative project that suited each provider and their needs” (PN, I2).

By working with other providers I think it has allowed us to improve what we offered and more time to deal with people with certain problems. We’ll help them and do our best to give them what they need, but you don’t always have that specific window for everybody. Every organisation is tailored to this and they are very different to how it is done.

(AH, I1)

Every provider had a large case load to manage. But because of limited resources and time constraints to deal with all users, providers identified that they did their best to cope with demand. This was confirmed by another user.

We tend not to get out and about to promote ourselves a great deal because the traffic that comes through is sufficient to stretch present capacity. I'm quite sure when we get the opportunity to increase capacity we can meet it because the demand is there. I would like to see us employing an Employability Coach to help manage this demand as it can be quite time consuming.

(PN, I1)

Most providers were 'oversubscribed' (AH, I1), but others had "raised the bar too high in certain outputs as it takes time to get the numbers right" (PN, I1). Other providers agreed with this comment (e.g. GB, I2; CA, I2). There was only one exception of an organisation advertising their services (e.g. St Simons Project).

When the project started, there were only a few people being trained or supported because people were still finding their feet, so the outputs weren't very high at all. But just by the second quarter, with that bit of extra time to get on their feet to know what they were doing, I think it trebled.

(SC, I1)

Providing services and generating outputs involving a specific user group with a health-related disability or illness was not a straightforward task. Consequently, achieving a high number of targets at the beginning of the project was challenging. For example, "basic skills was an output that could be started immediately, while supportive employment was an output that needed more time" (AH, I1). It dawned on organisations that some outputs were harder to achieve than others as more time was needed to "build trust with users to have employment or training support" (PN, I1). This was identified by the coordinator after the first quarter and was discussed at great lengths to be resolved. Organisations reassured that this would change and targets would be achieved as the project progressed. Partly, this was due to a delayed start in the project, but another contributory factor was "the effort to individually assess and manage the number of service users, which took time" (AH, I1).

Users Benefiting from Services

I would hope that anybody who makes contact with Coffee Life or our Employment Service partnership gains something, whether that something is advice or a signpost to move to other services.

(PN, I1)

Individuals have benefited; we have helped them the best we could and those that have worked with them have gained confidence and practical skills without it affecting our organisation. Because there are only two of us employed it's difficult to support a large group. Few is good. My worry is that without funding we would be taken away from something what we have done for years.

(MS, I1)

“The project has enabled organisations to help hundreds of individuals to transform their lives” (ND, I1). This has taken two forms, which include softer outcomes and harder outcomes (see Section 8.2). Collectively, the group reported the achievement of hard outcomes, the placement of an individual into employment, and soft outcomes, which involved “building skills and personal competencies so users would be more employable or ready for employment” (PN, I1). It was agreed that these softer outcomes were difficult to quantify in targets as the project was not designed to record such description (e.g. personal journeys or experiences), but were no less important in assessing the benefits they bring to service users. For example, many service users who accessed an organisations service benefited and valued considerably in gaining confidence, increased self-esteem and motivation. Achieving these softer outcomes represents positive progress for many of the individuals in this client group. “It's not just about numbers, you're dealing with people” (CW, I1).

You need to be more compassionate to the individual rather than thinking well that's just another individual. You've got to think well that's an individual with a special need or special condition, which you've got to manage.

(PN, I1)

From the interviews with service users, it appears that health related issues or the effect of previous experiences of becoming employed, have been extremely challenging. It was agreed that the data collected from these harder outcomes did not adequately reflect their work or time spent on individuals. “Providers in the partnership are working with groups that may be some distance to being employed because of various conditions that a person may be experiencing, which is very difficult to record on paper” (SC, I1). Understanding and managing these problems is “challenging and time consuming” (PN, I1). “New types of provision will take time to develop as it would mean gaining trust from service users for them to be on these courses and complete the training within a specified time” (AH, I1). “The process is not as easy as it sounds, but the outcomes are amazing” (PN, I1). “We definitely help to change lives but our lives are also changed as-well” (PN, I2).

Uncertainty

My fear, like a lot of the people in the partnership, is when the funding ends, what happens to these people? Do they go back to sitting in the house? And who's going to continue to build them up in ways that we are doing? I'm hoping they will still come into the centre, but if I'm not around, what happens to them? That's my only concern, 'what happens at the end of the project?' The more I do this job and the more I get involved, the more I worry. I suppose worry is the wrong word. What happens to people when I'm gone? Do we do more harm than good? That's one of the questions I start to ask myself. Do we build peoples' aspirations then say 'bye?'

(AH, I1)

There was fear and anxiety at this stage as organisational members were uncertain about their future as a partnership and the future of their users, e.g. those that needed more time to support. It slowly dawned on organisations that, without more funding they would be unable to provide the same level of service. Information about whether the project would continue was vague so organisations were unsure what was going to happen. Uncertainty over funding means a lack of security for each organisation. There is "a constant need to seek out and apply for new funding streams" (MS, I1), which diverts a lot of time and effort away from the partnership to other individual projects and to the procurement process (NCVO, 2010). "These organisations have similar priorities and without new funding, maintaining a partnership would always be a challenge" (SC, I1).

Stage 4: Key Findings of Performing Stage

Theme: Delivery of outputs

Behaviour: Organisations start to deliver their targets and share best practice while the coordinator monitors efforts and reports to the commissioning body. Interdependence gradually emerges. Organisations assess their achievements and progress, and explore potential funding avenues to maintain service delivery.

Table 21. Stage 4: key findings of performing stage

❖ *Stage 5 – Adjourning*

In this final stage, there were three emerging themes:

- i. Recognition of Value
- ii. Hindsight
- iii. What next?

This stage is about completion and the disengagement of an organisation from the partnership (Wilson and Charlton, 1997). As participants were contracted for a period of time, organisations should have completed their forecasted estimates. They begin to disengage or terminate their involvement. This is conditional on the organisations meeting their objectives in Stage 4. A planned conclusion usually includes recognition of achievement and an opportunity for members to remove themselves from the project or to continue working together (Gajda, 2004). Group members either end their membership of the partnership or they prepare for a continuance if there are other opportunities. Within this stage, members demonstrated reflection towards their experiences and journey, and how their partnership could have been better.

Recognition of Value

All organisations agreed that they benefited from being in the partnership with a ‘yes’ or ‘definitely’, specifically:

The experience was really worthwhile from our organisation (MS, I2). It’s proved to be a success for everybody that’s been involved with it (CA, I1). It has also highlighted what we are doing is a lot closer than we originally thought (PN, I1). The project made other providers in the partnership focus more on what we’re doing. It’s made our approach in how we work with service users more professional, more focused, and more targeted (GB, I1). I think it has improved the relationship with the CVS and the service providers (SC, I1). The project has given us a head start for when grants do finish and contracts start, to become more prominent in that sort of working and to understand what to expect (SC, I2).

The value or advantage gained from the project was not only demonstrated from the completion of their targets and the project but from organisational members recognising and exploring how they could work together to improve the services they provided to their users. The partnership allowed individuals to develop a relationship with other organisations. Members stated that this made them more professional or business-like in their approach, and improved how they worked with their own volunteers and their non-paid employees (e.g. CA, I2; GB, I1; PN, I1). However, there was ample evidence that this arrangement did not fully collaborate because organisational members were more

task-orientated in their approach to achieving targets. All members were aware of this and they reflected on how the partnership could have been better.

Hindsight

With recognition of the value gained from collaboration, members looked at how relationships could have been improved.

Looking back at it now, the only thing I would change would be getting the partners working together at the start of the project. Had they started the project when it was meant to start it might have given organisations more flexibility, but it seems it has come to the last six months, maybe the last quarter of the project for it to really come together. I would do it all again. They are brilliant people to work with.

(SC, I2)

It has been a fantastic project. The outcomes showed it, the report showed it, and everybody was very positive about it. But it looks as though we didn't have the right criteria to carry it on and that was a real shame. I think if we had known sooner what the criteria was we could have targeted things better and the group could have worked on targeting them better. It needed somebody who wasn't in the charities that could have worked a hundred miles an hour to help keep things funded. It needed an independent person to be the hub to drive it forward.

(CA, I2)

Now that members had this new knowledge of collaborative working, organisations started realising how they could have improved the way they worked together in review of what they achieved and how they did it with other providers. There were three main areas considered, which involved maximising time to build relationships, teambuilding activity, and representation and contact between partners.

Maximising time to build relationships identifies how members utilised their time and how they could have improved the way they worked together.

I think we just needed to spend more time understanding our strengths and weaknesses. The project was too short. We didn't have a chance to really get to know the rest of the group. We had to deliver our targets and that's what we did. There was no time for anything else.

(AH, I1)

Maybe in those early days would have been a prime time to be having those inductions or introductions.

If more time could have been invested building up the partnership, there might have been potential for more joint working. We'll never know now, but that might have also supported more outputs.

(PN, I1)

With more time we could've sat down together to work these things out. Maybe have a mini-training session on budgets, how to fill in the paperwork, or ways to build better relations with each other.

(SC, I1)

Having a teambuilding activity identifies how organisational members could have worked together more effectively, mainly during the beginning of the project.

If we could have known more about each other's organisation, I think that would have built a closer relationship. Hopefully it still will. We need to be a team. It might be that we need to do some team building activity to show what we have done or what we can do. We might have something that another organisation needs or something that they can do, which we never thought about approaching in that way. That core team of providers need to see each other's strengths and how we can share them in the partnership.

(CA, I1)

How can you do partnership when you've not really even been in the building to have a look at what they're doing? So I said 'right we need to do a tour of the partnership!' It was only a day but there was humour and it was fun. We were really getting to know each other. We had a laugh and people found we had things in common, and that to me was a high point. So that should have been done much earlier on as it was a high point that everyone benefited from.

(GB, I2)

Had we done the 'happy bus' at the very beginning to see each other's organisations would have made such a difference. People were actually talking to each other about all kinds of things.

(PN, I2)

Representation and contact between partners identifies improving attendance in partnership meetings. Whether it was due to illness or the workload of members, attendance at meetings by some organisations was poor. As this was the only time they got together as a group, it was vital for there to be representation in meetings.

I think I've been present in two meetings and have probably missed one in the middle and may have missed some in the early days as I wasn't aware they were happening. In saying that, the need to work closer is important. This might have been missed in those early days.

(PN, I1)

Other than the regular meetings and contacts between each other, I think collaboration of any significance is still growing. It took a long time for that to happen. We need to meet together and we need to talk to each other more. I've never missed a meeting but other people did. It didn't really bother me then but now I come to think about it, people could have made more effort.

(GB, I3)

I think what I could have done better was maybe been prepared for unforeseen circumstances, like illness, which really came out of the blue. But other partners have to remind themselves that these things can happen and that they will affect how smaller organisations work together.

(MS, I2)

When asked if organisations have benefited from the partnership despite these problems, there was an overall agreement that being in the partnership had done them good. It was a 'learning experience' (e.g. AH, I1; CA, I1; GB, I1; PN, I1). The project improved the provision of their services and made them think more about building their capacity with others, and continuing their momentum into a new project.

What next?

It seemed quite logical to assume that there would be an ending to the partnership as funding was only commissioned for twelve months. But evidence revealed something quite different, e.g. members did not want to disengage but to continue the partnership and apply for further opportunities as a consortium. However, there were new challenges ahead, mainly due to "lack of procurement opportunities in the sector for similar projects" (ND, I1), which the Institute for Voluntary Action Research also found across the VCS (IVAR, 2011). Now that these organisations had more awareness and appreciation of their interdependence with others to procure contracts, questions and concerns were growing towards what they might do next and what was going to become of their users if they were unable to secure another funded project (e.g. AH, I1). This questions their 'exit strategy' (NCVO, 2006a; Wilson and Charlton, 1997). As evidence

suggested, their future was unclear; however, even without a plan or strategy, their view was always optimistic of a continuance.

It's difficult because we're in a situation that we don't know whether we're going to have funding for the following year so it's really difficult to plan ahead, but I'm sure it will work out.

(MS, I1)

I think there'll be a desire to hopefully continue some kind of partnership, even it isn't around a pot of money. Hopefully, we can develop it some way because this partnership is good for all of us.

(GB, I1)

What we probably go on to do is maybe get all the organisations to work together on another project. I imagine it will go on.

(CW, I1)

If there is no pot of money then the way we could help each other is to continue the work we are doing and increase capacity through volunteers. It would be a real shame if we didn't do this.

(PN, I1)

Organisations agreed they wanted to pursue further opportunities as a consortium. It was generally acknowledged from all organisations that there were significant benefits to be gained from a long-term relationship between other providers because "there was nothing like it in the borough" (SC, I1). However, projects or contracts they would be applying for would always be short-term (NCVO, 2010). To tender for these projects would be their next test and something that created unease between providers. They "did not have experience in bidding for a new project as a partnership" (GB, I1). They would now have to compete with bigger national providers who have more resources than they did. "It's difficult to compete with the bigger organisations, like Learning Links and WISE, who tend to be nationwide, who also apply for the same pots of money" (AH, I1). If they were successful, collaboration would take on a renewed phase of development, a Reformation stage, and the project cycle would start again.

Stage 5: Key Findings of Adjourning Stage

Theme: Disengagement - end of project

Behaviour: Organisations complete their targets and report what is remaining to the coordinator, e.g. those targets achieved and those still outstanding. Providers reflect on the partnership and decide whether they will end or continue their relationship with other partners. There are discussions to apply for funding as a consortium. Members demonstrate an interest in continuing their partnership as the project is ending. Some members disengage from the partnership while others continue to meet.

Table 22. Stage 5: key findings of adjourning stage

8.4.4 Theme 4 - The Outcome

Despite how we worked together, we completed the project and that's all that mattered. It didn't start well but we got there in the end.

(CA, I3)

The outcome of this partnership succumbed to what Huxham (1993, 2003) refers to as 'collaborative inertia'. It was a theme identified throughout the project. The project was completed in the agreed timeframe and there was advantage (successes) from their arrangement in that organisations planned to continue their partnership meetings and procure other financial projects as a group. However, it seemed that the short-term nature of the project hindered the way the organisations worked together, and building relationships, communication, and cooperation were overshadowed by the group's drive to achieve their targets.

Most providers agreed that collaboration was starting to develop more towards the end of the project, but by this time it was too late for synergy to be fully realised because there were insufficient formalities and steps taken by organisations to cooperate with one another (see Lasker et al., 2001). One obvious limitation of the project was not setting aside enough time or resources to cooperate with other organisational members outside of partnership meetings, but this could be because there was a late start to the project and its task orientation. Their delivery of services in helping and supporting individuals did bring camaraderie, a collective purpose, and shared knowledge. Benefits of user satisfaction were reported by all project managers. An outcome-orientated success was crucial in achieving the project's objectives (Dowling et al., 2004; Lindsay et al., 2007), but this overshadowed the collaborative process, e.g. building and nurturing relationships.

From this theme, there were three sub-themes emerging from their shared experience:

- Completion of Project
- Collaborative Inertia
- Continuance and Discontinuance of Relationships

Completion of Project

Findings from the evaluation study demonstrated that the project had met its aim to assist/support a number of individuals with employment and training needs. The project had five outputs, for each of which partners had to agree their targets. Performance was measured in terms of the number of targets achieved, i.e. the number of beneficiaries that a provider supported. Organisations set out to achieve outputs over four quarters, documenting the benefits they had on service users. Several organisations commented on the impact of their work and how it enabled them to define the difference they could make alongside other providers (e.g. AH, I1; CA, I1; GB, I1; PN, I1). Benefits of working as a consortium were reported by all Project Managers that were involved in this project.

Various possible bases for collaborative working have been identified in this study. Firstly, organisations felt the need to act independently to achieve their targets, but later they became more collaborative as time moved forward. This included “signposting users to other providers” (CA, I2), “sharing knowledge and expertise” (AH, I1), and “combining efforts to support a service user” (PN, I2). Secondly, despite the problems the partnership encountered at the very beginning and the lack of formality, organisations worked towards the project’s objectives. Interviewing partners at different points during and after the project ended captured how their interactions and behaviours changed. In partnership meetings, “members often talked about success stories of users overcoming personal barriers, and this was a good thing because members could share their achievements with others in the group. We all benefited from this and it changed the mood of meetings because we often got wrapped up in financial issues” (SC, I1).

The experience of being in a partnership with other providers helped organisations recognise a balance between providing and developing services to users and making a collective effort to collaborate, but this only emerged at a later period as they were delivering services. While service provision was quite central, forms of collaborative

practice were gradually developing. Because it was a new experience, “this pilot project provided important lessons to be learnt by members working in the partnership” (PN, I1), which was identified by providers themselves and in the evaluation study. “While the project has led organisations to pursue joint projects and bids” (SC, I1), collaborative working is still something that they wanted to continue doing and develop in a new project. Evidence suggests organisations were managing and delivering an excessive number of targets while working on other projects. The project partnership was therefore not the only initiative each provider was working on. At the end of the project, the partnership did become more central to their activities and the way organisational members conducted themselves to build relationships.

Collaborative Inertia

When organisations working in partnership pursue collaboration, for there to be synergistic value, the whole has to be greater than the sum of its parts. It is argued that something has to be achieved that could not have been attained by any of the organisations acting alone (Huxham and Vangen, 2005), developing effective synergies (Lasker et al., 2001) or ‘collaborative advantage’ (Huxham, 1993, 2003; Huxham and MacDonald, 1992; Huxham and Vangen, 2004; Kanter, 1994). It is not uncommon, however, for people to argue that the positive outputs have happened despite the partnership rather than because of it (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Huxham (1993) refers to this as ‘collaborative inertia’. Collaborative inertia was something experienced throughout the project, which affected the process and outcome of the partnership. Their collective account highlights the obstacles and issues that prevented the effective development of collaborative practice.

The journey in the partnership really, I felt, started the wrong way round. We were sort of thrown together with targets and objectives to meet. Whereas, looking back on the project, it would have been better to get to know the partners first, to get to know what everybody could bring to the partnership, and then look at what people could do, which we did in total reverse at the end of the project.

It was such a short pilot that by the time you learned the lesson that you needed to, funding ran out, and while other funding streams were coming up priorities shifted, and consequently you lost a lot of momentum that was built up.

(CA, I3)

In an earlier statement this individual believed:

We haven't had a great deal of relationships because I'm unsure what other organisations do. We would bounce ideas off each other but we don't tend to work very close unless there is a placement or somebody has some skills they want to develop that doesn't fit in here.

(CA, I1)

This was reaffirmed in a later interview by the same person.

One of the big failing from the previous project is that we didn't all get to see each other's projects [organisations] early on and know how we could bounce ideas off each other.

(CA, I2)

Building relationships was a problem as providers had no knowledge or previous relationships with other partners. These issues mainly centred around the nature of these organisations. Individuals have always worked independently in the sector as they had not needed to collaborate with another provider until this point.

Overcoming the competitive nature of our work has often prevented collaboration and partnership working. It's something that I am learning to do better and probably the other organisations are also doing the same. We are all new at this.

(PN, I2)

Other obstacles these organisations were facing were mainly due to the time organisations had to complete the project and the task orientation of the project. The project "seemed to happen quite quickly" (GB, I3), and it was 'a matter of what we could deliver and when' (PN, I2). Even the coordinator confirmed this point. "Because it was a contract, it was a matter of targets and outputs so we were really pushing that" (SC, I1). These were comments agreed by other partners.

I feel that the process we went through was much more output orientated and the value being placed on an output. It was almost the way things appear to be moving as we would be paid in accordance to the service we delivered and not how we were building relationships.

(PN, I1)

The project demonstrated organisations achieving their objectives by working with other organisations to make it happen (e.g. SC, I1). Funding granted providers sustainability for a brief period. The coordinator, who was a non-delivery partner, was

important in this arrangement. There did appear to be a number of significant tangible benefits to be gained from local providers working with other local providers in a consortium arrangement. To move forward, literature asserts that a number of practical constraints in how organisations work together need to be overcome (Huxham, 1993). More formal structures and procedures seem necessary to align organisations to be more interdependent. “For it to continue, it needs someone to be at the centre of it, to take it forward and to lead the partnership on funding projects” (CA, I1). “We have the aspirations, but unless there’s someone there to manage it, what do we do?” (GB, I2). This was agreed by another provider. “[SC] was there to monitor and administer the project, but it also needed somebody else to drive it forward” (CA, I2).

While considering a requirement to develop leadership (Nowella and Harrison, 2011), another big limitation of the project was building relationships between providers. Maybe the reason behind this was that the project was only short-term and did not provide assurances of long-term value or gains, so there may have been a fear of organisations just “doing what they needed to do and move on without a care for others in the partnership” (CW, I1). However, the delivery of services in supporting a challenging user group did bring some camaraderie, e.g. “valuing what other partners were doing” (PN, I1). Other providers agreed with this comment (e.g. GB, I2; CA, I2). While an outcome-orientated success (Dowling et al., 2004; Lindsay et al., 2007) was important to demonstrate their achievements and successes, this did seem to overshadow how organisations developed relationships with each other during the course of the pilot project.

Continuance or Discontinuance of Relationships

The meetings we have now are just there to keep the partnership going, to talk about contracts, which other people attend to give advice. They do work together better, but project-wise we’re stuck in a rut. Most of the contracts are not till January anyway so I feel we’re sitting in a rut in meetings. Even the bigger organisations in South Tyneside are having problems. Funding is a real problem. It is frustrating but it’s happening everywhere.

(SC, I2)

Even though there was no contingency plan when it was time to end the partnership, organisations continued to meet in the hope that something would materialise. During this time, some project managers moved to other positions or organisations, or decided a

change in career was needed. New representatives did take their place at the end of the project, which added a fresh dynamic to the group. These new members worked with original members to bid for new contracts. Consequently, there was a possibility to reform the partnership to deliver services, which would have offered a new project cycle. “There was a chance to renew our relationship and take forward what we had accomplished” (PN, I2). This was called the ‘Headway project’. All organisations were in good spirits about this. Although this was documented after the pilot project, it was recognised as an initiative that would reform their partnership, an outcome from their pilot project. Unfortunately, the contract was given to a single, national organisation, which came as a disappointment but also a relief to partners.

Headway wasn’t the right opportunity for the partnership. It was a very different beast or animal. It was handing over staff to be managed in a completely different way. To me, making Headway wasn’t really collaboration between organisations or sectors depending on how you want to look at it.

(PN, I2)

A number of the partners went for the Headway project with TEN being the leading organisation. This was an example of a continuation, but was massively problematic. We were trying to fit into something that wasn’t right for us. It was always going to be difficult to fit our needs with Headway’s structure for us to really get something out of it. It did show life after the partnership and we certainly needed the funding, but unfortunately it didn’t work out.

(GB, I2)

Making Headway was not an easy bid to put together because on one hand what people wanted out of it, what was available, and what was needed. They are different things and trying to get the truth out of people, what they need and what they can deliver was two different things. For example, we had a small organisation in the partnership that had two workers and they wanted everything funded but they were only going to deliver a tiny number of outputs. Trying to find that balance was difficult as everyone was coming in at different angles.

(EF, I1)

While the Local Authority recognised “opportunities for them have been somewhat limited” (ND, I1), relationships between organisations weakened as momentum and interest in their shared purpose began to end. The toll of the project began to show and long periods of stagnation developed. Without “more funding organisations were becoming unstable and representation in meetings began to breakdown” (SC, I2). Organisations closed or members left their organisation due to financial issues, e.g. “there wasn’t enough funding to keep my role going so I took early redundancy” (GB,

I3). Members still continued to meet fifteen months after the pilot ended. During these times, they sought advice and resources to bid for new contracts. Meetings continued as and when they were organised by the coordinator. The partnership became a voluntary arrangement until new funding could be secured.

8.5 The Process of Collaboration

In review of findings, evidence identified a developmental sequence to the partnership's journey. However, how organisations worked together and when organisations delivered their targets changed according to issues emerging from their environment and also from internal factors as they were building their capacity to be more interdependent. Collaboration transformed over time according to what needed to be achieved. At the beginning of the project the IOR was task-orientated; organisations independently delivered targets. However, as time went on, their behaviour and approach became more relationship-orientated. Their shared experience identified a process in which periods of stability were affected by emerging change (Gersick, 1988, 1989), and because of a shorter timeframe and previous issues not being dealt with, how members collaborated became a cyclical process (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994), which demonstrated an overlap between stages. Table 23 summarises these findings.

Gersick's (1988, p.32) model proposes "a framework of behavioural patterns and assumptions through which a group approaches its project emerges in its first meeting, and the group stays with that framework through the first half of its life. Teams may show little visible progress during this time because members may be unable to perceive a use for the information they are generating until they revise the initial framework. At their calendar midpoints, groups experience transitions – paradigmatic shifts in their approaches to their work – enabling them to capitalize on the gradual learning they have done and make significant advances. The transition is a powerful opportunity for a group to alter the course of its life midstream. But the transition must be used well, for once it is past a team is unlikely to alter its basic plans again. A second period of inertia movement, takes its direction from plans crystallized during the transition". A group of organisations will progress because of members' awareness of time and deadlines.

Ring and Van de Ven (1994, p.96), view IORs as "social contrived mechanisms", which are continually "shaped and restructured" by the actors in the process. They suggest that

the process of collaboration is influenced by the sequence of events and interactions among the participants in the partnership. These stages consist of the negotiation of joint expectations, commitment to future courses of action, and the execution of stages. Assessment and sensemaking occur through these stages (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). This characterises a cyclical process, in which stages are repeated and relationships developed until the partnership terminates.

Stage	Theme	Tuckman & Jensen (1977)	Gersick (1988, 1989)	Ring and Van de Ven (1994)		
				1	2	3
1	Initiation	Form	A delay in commencing the project resulted in a shorter completion timeframe. There was a sudden need to start the project when funding was approved by the commissioning body.	Beginning		
2	Conflict & Clarification	Storm	Partners had less time to consider their target forecasts and the terminology of their activities was not clear. The commissioning body requested members to review their forecasts and provide new estimates. Task priorities were established.			
3	Building Relationships and Change	Norm	There was little time to build and develop relationships. Organisations had to change their approach and ways of working to reflect a combined service. More formal methods of recording targets were needed, as-well-as referral routes and how they should report their outcomes.		Midpoint	
4	Delivery of outputs	Perform	Partners had to deliver their targets for each quarter in a timeframe that was shorter than expected. Organisations had to report their outcomes to the coordinator and re-adjust their forecasts and caseloads during the four quarters of service delivery. Evidence of this was in Quarter 1 - the coordinator reported nothing much happened in the beginning but gradually the project gained momentum. Forecasted targets were amended.			
5	Disengagement – End of Project	Adjourn	Members were still delivering their targets as they were ending the project. There was a teambuilding exercise to improve relationships. Though no exit strategy was planned, members decided to continue their relationships after the project. It was a decision considered as they were delivering their 4 th quarter targets. Members discussed how they could work together in a new project.			End
+	Continuance or discontinuance of relationships	Reform	Members would continue to meet voluntarily. New representatives joining the group to replace those who would be leaving. Support and application of new projects.			

Table 23. The process of collaboration

This table provides an integrated framework/approach of the partnership journey to complete the project (see Chang et al., 2003; Dennis et al., 2008; Michinov and Michinov, 2007). It identifies five stages of development and another stage after the project ended. When the project was completed, members did decide to continue their partnership on a voluntary basis. This period in their arrangement has been illustrated in the table as it is evidence of their future intentions after the project adjourned. Change that was unplanned or emerging affected how organisations worked with other members in the partnership. Because time to complete the project was reduced, the partnership was focused on the task. As a result, each organisation developed their own unique way of working to achieve the project's objectives (Gersick, 1988). Van de Ven and Poole's (1995) life-cycle and teleological approach of change and development support this view. There were three main transition points. These included a beginning, midpoint and an end. From these findings, the developmental sequence was modified (see Figure 15).

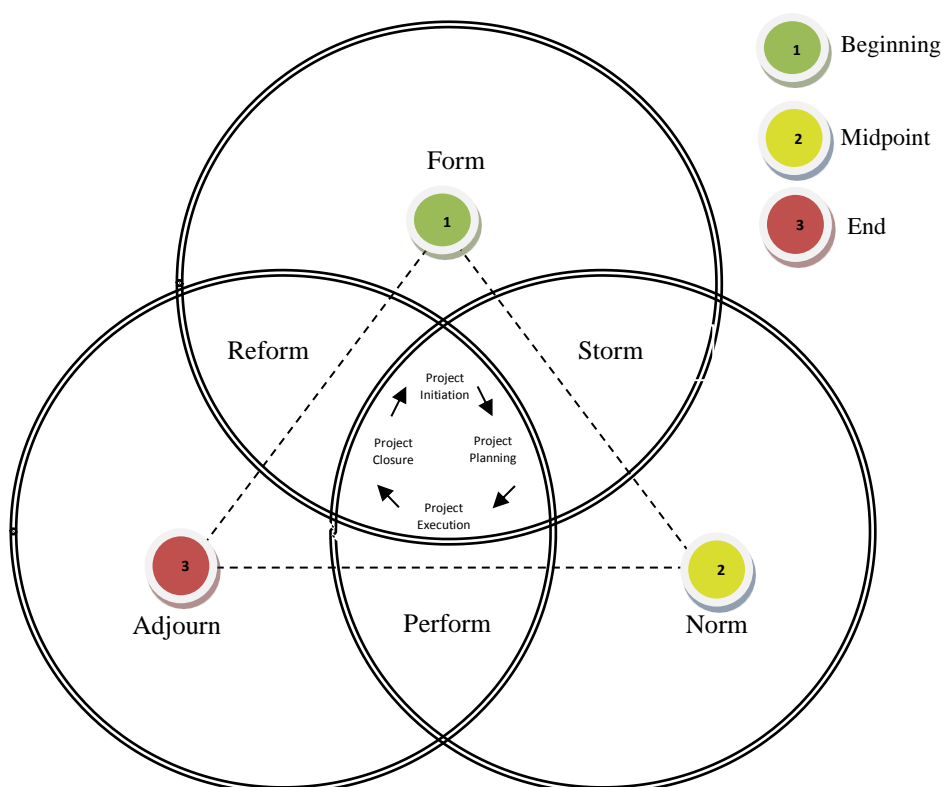


Figure 15. A cyclical model of the stages of collaboration

This cyclical model identifies the five stages in the process category but now demonstrates an overlap between stages as a result of how the project started, its task orientation, and how collaboration formed, developed and ended over the pilot project.

During this partnership, there were three periods when stages overlapped: (i) Forming and Storming stage [Beginning period], (ii) Storming stage to the Performing stage [Midpoint period], and (iii) Performing and Adjourning stage [End period]. Cycling between stages is “warranted when situation and experiential variables change member expectations” (Karriker, 2005, p.62). For example, this resulted from an assessment of a new service user or the procedure to refer a user to a more suitable partner, or when deadlines were imminent. In review of the different stages, project initiation identified the formation of the partnership, which involved changing the way organisations delivered services and how they would do it. Project planning took place when the partnership formed until the norming stage. Project execution was demonstrated in the performing stage, and project closure ended their arrangement. However, members did continue to meet after the pilot project, which demonstrates an intention to reform and start a new project cycle. Project closure therefore identified what would happen next.

8.6 A Summary of the Main Themes

Figure 16 illustrates the main themes identified in this chapter.

This diagram identifies those categories and themes that have been captured from the analysis process in Chapter 7, which were used in Chapter 8 to construct a collective account of the partnership’s journey to achieve a shared objective. The outcomes of those stages demonstrate either collaborative advantage and/or inertia up to the point when the project ended. After the pilot period, there was either a continuance or discontinuance of relationships. Some members chose to remain with the partnership by bidding for new projects, but gradually individuals and organisations left the partnership due to personal reasons (e.g. job opportunities and redundancies), no funded project materialising, or organisations closing because of insufficient funds. With limited opportunities, the partnership came to an end. This is something that will be explained further in Chapter 9 as the main aim of this chapter was to discuss what happened during the period of the project.

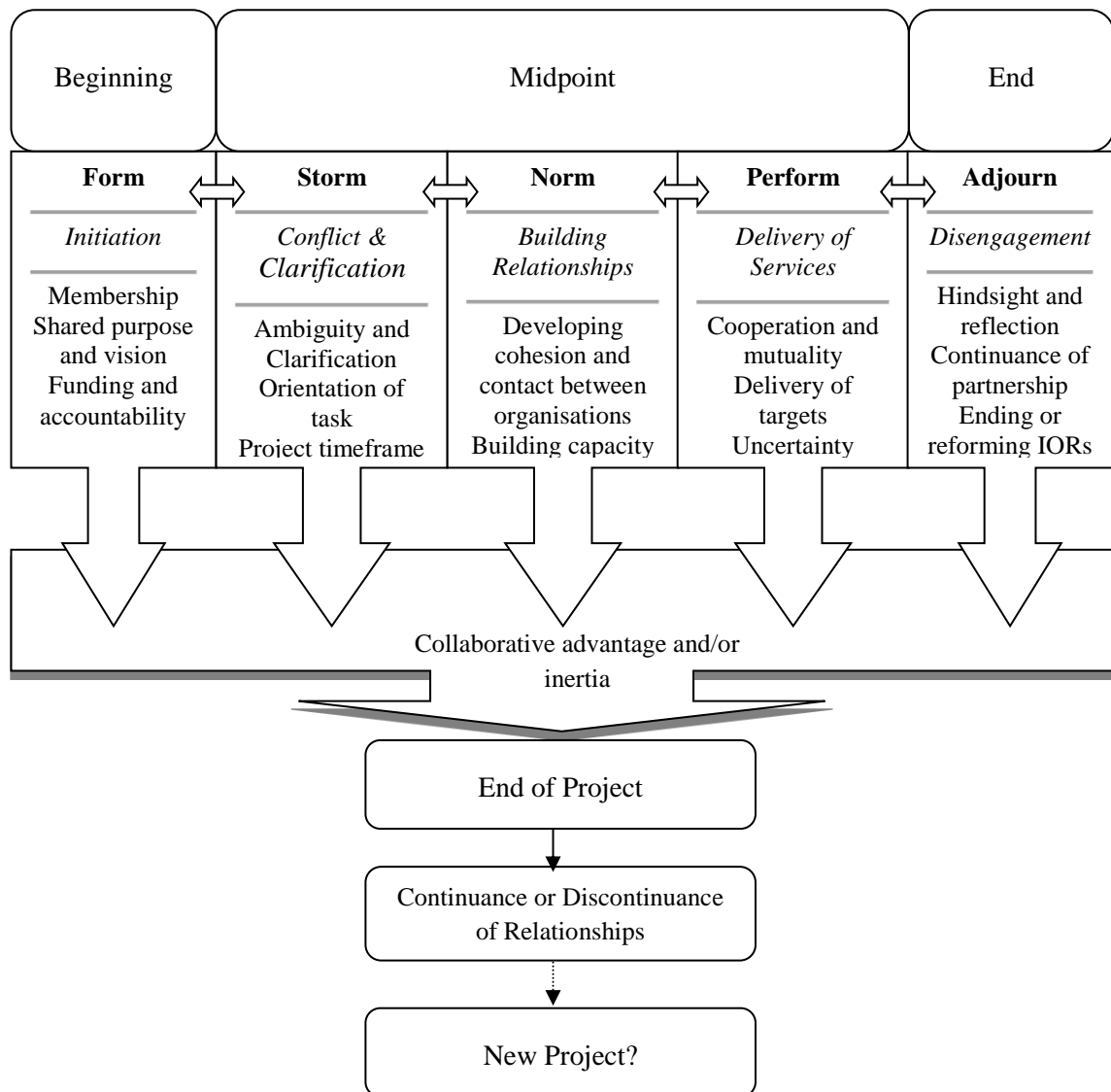


Figure 16. A summary of the main themes of the pilot project partnership

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how shared meaning from the participants in the partnership was used to construct a collective account of collaboration. There were four main categories that captured how members worked together in the project partnership. This involved there being a strategy, participants, process, and an outcome. A final template was developed from two further interview phases. While triangulating and organising meaningful expressions of collaboration into categories and themes, a conceptual framework that corresponds to the five stages in the process category was identified. However, this was modified to incorporate change that was not planned but emerging. Because the partnership did not start as planned, the development process

was not entirely sequential (Wilson and Charlton, 1997). Consequently, collaboration between organisations in the partnership demonstrated overlapping stages. Their shared experiences identified a cyclical process between the beginning, midpoint and end of the project.

In the next chapter, this thesis draws on interviews and observations to demonstrate my reflections and reflexivity as data was being collected and analysed. This provides further evidence of how organisations collaborated as well as to illustrate how the research process evolved. By doing so, findings are re-examined to identify underlying themes of the phenomenon being studied (Hayllar and Griffin, 2005); what influenced organisations to collaborate the way they did.

PART FIVE
REFLECTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

CHAPTER 9

OBSERVATIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND REFLEXIVITY

9.1 Introduction

Having established categories and themes of collaboration in the pilot project, and constructed a collective account from these findings in Chapter 8, this chapter aims to discuss the researcher's observations and reflections of the partnership's journey. It is supplementary evidence that adds further insight to this research study. In doing so, this chapter will also demonstrate the researcher's reflexivity during the project period and continuance period. This involves examining my position/role, behaviours, assumptions, thoughts and feelings, how the research process evolved, and what other data were captured that could explain how the organisations in the partnership collaborated. In the same way as Hibbert et al. (2010), this thesis regards reflexivity as a process of exposing or questioning research, which involves "a complexification of thinking and experience, or thinking about experience" (Hibbert et al., 2010, p.48).

Reflexivity in research has been discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.7. It is an interpretive practice based on the interactions between participants and the interpretations of the researcher (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). Therefore, knowledge is socially constructed, subjective, and influenced by social interaction (Gray, 2004). Collaboration is thus a product of interaction but also interpretation. By collectively centring a partnership's sense making (see Boyce, 1995), this thesis attempted to capture how individuals interpret collaboration and construct shared meaning (see Chapter 8). My approach is ideographic, I seek an understanding of the ways in which people create, modify and interpret their shared experience. How reflexivity was conducted in this research, in part, follows Finlay's (2002) approach whereby a researcher briefly documents his/her experience at a particular time, and summarises their observations. This will demonstrate four parts to my reflexivity; it involves examining (i) my observations, (ii) the research process, (iii) the application and implications of theory, and (iv) the analytical approach during different periods of fieldwork. This section will also discuss the developmental process of collaboration, which will examine the timelines when data were collected, analysed and interpreted.

Taking a reflexive approach has allowed this research study “to go further” (Finlay, 2002, p.544), that is, to understand the ‘essence of the phenomenon’ (Giorgi, 1997; Husserl, 1970; Van Manen, 1997). Giorgi (1997, p.242) describes the essence as “the most invariant meaning for a context, a fundamental meaning without which the phenomenon could not present itself as it is”. This will demonstrate ‘underlying themes’ (Gibson & Hanes, 2003) that have influenced the partners’ IOR. The procedure for this involved looking back and re-examining everything that had taken place (Sköldberg, 2000). Chapter 8 and field notes were pertinent in this process.

9.2 Observations, Reflections and Reflexivity during the Pilot Project and Continuance Period

The first part of this chapter will begin by describing my initial role and thoughts/reflections in being a Research Assistant during the evaluation of the pilot project partnership. At that time, my research focus specialised in small business management and entrepreneurial behaviour in the North East of England. Though this research area was not similar to that of the evaluation study, my extensive experience in conducting an examination of small organisations and presenting this material as a report was relevant and of value to this study. The second part will discuss events subsequent to the pilot project, and whether behaviours and relationships changed when the project ended.

9.2.1 Phase 1 – The Project Period

My first encounter with the partnership was on the 8th February, 2008, when I was invited as the representative from the centre for Knowledge, Innovation, Technology and Enterprise (KITE) to attend a meeting with the partnership to discuss an evaluation exercise that would take place over a two month period. During this meeting, I became acquainted with organisational members in the partnership. They seemed a positive and enthusiastic group. I advised them who I was and my purpose in being there, and that I, as part of a small team from Newcastle University who had been contracted by the Local Authority, would conduct an independent evaluation of their partnership. I also advised organisational members what this would involve. These are my observations:

Most of the talking was by NB, who was the Local Authority representative. He gave a detailed account of the partnership as it was originally his idea, e.g. what it was designed to do and what needed to be done by the organisations in the partnership. Members discussed some of the success stories that they had had with their service users. GB explained the challenges the Borough had faced and which it continues to face. Historically, there was an organisation called STRIDE that represented organisations such as these, but it ended. This was a disappointment to some members in the meeting. PN, CA and AH talked about what they had been doing in the partnership. When my turn came to speak, I outlined who I was and my intentions over the next few months. I advised the group briefly that I would be seeing each organisation in the following weeks and would interview them and a sample of their service users. At the end of the meeting, contact details were exchanged. Members were quick to leave, with only a few staying behind to talk about other projects they were working on. I left soon after these discussions.

(BR Research Diary: 5th February, 2008)

I felt the first encounter went well. There were no questions or objections about what I was doing and why I was there. All partners seemed happy that I would be talking to them. My next step would involve interviewing individuals in the partnership, e.g. managers, advisers/case workers, and their service users. At the time, I felt in-depth interviews with managers would give a good account of their experience, while semi-structured interviews with advisers/case workers and users would give shorter responses to whether they had benefited from services. Because the evaluation project was time-constrained, only a qualitative approach would be conducted. The project would also require me to analyse the partnership's targets per quarter. Additionally, because of the nature of this study, there was no real need to draw upon theory in the topic. In review of the project's objectives, I set out to design 'topic guides' for each interview, which would be reviewed by project management. The following are observations and reflections from interviews with organisational members:

- **Interview 1 - SC (Coordinator)**

She was very upbeat about the project and with the organisations working in the partnership. She did not have anything bad to say about them. She had worked with some organisations before so she was aware of the individuals and what they did. She was not with the partnership at the beginning, but was given the position as Coordinator after it had commenced. Her previous role was a Financial Officer; though she still maintained these responsibilities she now worked with organisations directly. Her responses were short and I often had to ask further questions about specific issues. She had a positive outlook on targets being achieved and the project being completed on time. It seemed organisations were centrally organised. If members had a problem or question, she would be the main contact.

- **Interview 2 - GB (Service Provider)**

This individual had worked in the area and with charities for a number of years. He seemed very passionate about his organisation. He spoke a lot about the area and the demise of STRIDE. He did not seem to know the individuals and organisations very well, referring to Coffee Live as Coffee Light, until corrected. He had a close relationship with MS from COD as she was part of the commissioning body for a Shopmobility scheme in the South Tyneside Borough. I was concerned that there was no relationship or co-operation with other providers because he did not refer to the partnership in any detail. Indeed, it seemed that they met their objectives without cooperation with other providers. When asked about how they had collaborated, he had very little to say about the partners in the partnership, though it was something he wanted to address if they continued working together after the project.

- **Interview 3 - CA (Service Provider)**

He had not been with the partnership in the early discussions. Previous communication was with another colleague in the organisation. The role as representative was passed to him soon after the project commenced. This was another example of an individual that had not been there at the beginning. This led to my impression that there was a lot of a 'switching of roles' within the partnership when the project started. CA was another individual who spoke highly of his organisation and what they were trying to achieve. He was originally an Engineer, which was a great asset to this organisation as the type of services they provided were mainly IT based. He referred to himself as a person that liked to tinker with gadgets to make them work for people. There was some reference to other organisations from the partnership but not a great deal (e.g. referral routes). Again, how much have these providers been collaborating and when did this happen? This was the second time I had become suspicious about their arrangement. How were they able to achieve what they did without working with another provider? Was this common in the VCS?

- **Interview 4 - MA (Service Provider)**

This individual had been with the organisation for over twenty years. She was an older lady who was very calm and collected when she spoke. Unfortunately, because she had been unwell during the project, she was not able to say much about the partnership. She was absent from meetings, which she said was a very crucial time for organisations to get together and talk about issues. She did work with GB's organisation. Referral routes had also been made to TEN. Her targets were smaller than those of the others because she had limited resources; there were only two members of staff working in the organisation. There were some signs of collaboration. Because she had not attended meetings, I was curious how much involvement she had had with the partnership and how this affected the IOR with other providers. Was this addressed at any time? What is the outcome of a partner's lack of involvement in the partnership? I'm curious to see whether other members had any thoughts about this.

- **Interview 5 - PN (Service Provider)**

While offering a unique internet café service that provided training to users, this organisation provided IT training and support to people with mental health issues. I had a very long discussion with this provider and several cups of coffee. This partner was initially brought in to the partnership by another provider. They had previously worked together. He talked more about partnership working than the other providers prior to this interview, which did make me see that they had been collaborating. Though he advised that their relationship could have been better, this was due to circumstances beyond their control, e.g. it started late, there were disagreements with terminology, and there was continuous pressure to meet targets because of a shorter completion timeframe. Though this interview identified the occurrence of collaboration, I was still unclear how it happened over the project. How did IORs develop over the project life-cycle? This is something the evaluation exercise did not require but I believed could be worth investigating to get a better understanding of the partners' IOR over the project and what it all meant to individuals. I found PN to be a very interesting person who had a lot to say. He was very active in his work.

- **Interview 6 – AH (Service Provider)**

This provider was not like the other organisations in the partnership. It was a community centre that offered employment services outside of the town centre. The building was close to the metro [train service] and bus routes. The people who worked in the organisation had done so for many years. I interviewed AH as well as the Chairperson. There was some indication that the organisation worked with other providers but not with the whole group. Because the project was about numbers and not working with individuals over a longer timeframe, this organisation questioned whether 'they were doing more harm than good' (AH, I1). This is something she felt strongly against. AH was very considerate and compassionate and spoke positively about the project and what it did for service users. She was very concerned with funding and what would happen after the project. These issues had not been addressed by management. Surely there had been discussions about this? But it did not sound that there had been. During this meeting, I also had the chance to talk to the chairperson about her relationship with other providers. She had worked with other members in the past but not recently. She agreed with what AH had said and was also concerned about her organisation as funding was becoming more difficult to obtain.

- **Interview 7 – CW (Service Provider)**

When walking into the building of this provider, it was evident that there were more resources here due to the number of advisors there were to support people into employment. There were employment notices on boards and information on desks so people could walk in and see the job opportunities they had. CW indicated that they had worked with other providers but she was not aware of the referral system they used or whether the partnership had one in-place. She had been involved with other providers in the past; however, she did not talk about other partners in any detail. She talked about her own organisation and what they had achieved, what they were doing to retain its users and outreaching to those that were unable to get to the organisation. However, later in the interview, she did discuss collaboration and what they had been doing with one or two partners.

Again, there was limited evidence of cooperation from this interview. What have these organisations been doing together? This is something that I needed to address with all partners.

(BR Research Diary: 13th February to 14th March, 2008)

All interviews demonstrated minimal interaction between providers outside of partnership meetings, which was difficult to understand since, for there to be a partnership to deliver a combined service, there must be some cooperation involved. All interviewees confirmed that the purpose of the project was initially to be awarded with funding so they could continue to meet their objectives without compromising who they were and their independence. However, there was insufficient experience of the organisation members in working in this type of partnership or in how to go about developing relationships with other providers. Interviews 2, 3, 5 and 6 clearly stated the idea to be more collaborative did not really occur until they were delivering their targets. During this time, members started to share knowledge and expertise, and their users, so that they could be trained by another organisation which had those facilities.

Interviews 2 and 3 identified the partnership being treated as a project and, in doing so, mutuality or interdependence was limited. This was confirmed in interviews 4 and 7. However, there were some referral routes. Sub-group relationships developed wherein individuals felt more comfortable working with some partners than with others because they had worked with them in the past. All interviewees did not talk much about other partners, e.g. what they were doing together or their relationship with them, until I asked them to do so. When they did, it was very brief. There was definitely a lack of understanding and formality in their arrangement. The time they had to complete the project was reduced, so before they knew it they had to deliver their targets. In doing so, the time spent on building IORs with other providers was reduced. Interview 1 spoke of service providers to be left to their own devices to deliver targets. Consequently, there was limited communication outside of partnership meetings.

All participants openly discussed their experiences and were friendly. I felt in-depth interviews generated an adequate amount of data to understand how the partnership functioned. These interviews lasted one to two hours, and it was necessary to interject at times to probe certain areas of discussion (e.g. Interviews 1, 4 and 7). By interviewing individuals at their organisation, it became apparent who they were and what they were

about. All interviewees gave me a tour of their premises, and I was able to speak to some of their advisers and volunteers. When analysing data from these interviews, there were four main themes identified from an organisation's shared experience of partnership working; they were the strategy, participants, process, and outcome (see Chapter 8, section 8.3). A developmental sequence of events in the process category was demonstrated. There was a formation stage, development and performance stage, and an ending stage to their project partnership. For example, themes identified periods when the project started, activities that were going on during the project, and activities that were going on to complete the project. However, I could not ascertain clear stages in the first phase of fieldwork. I felt another round of interviewing was needed to capture this process, which would allow organisations to reflect more on how they had collaborated with other providers. After the first round of interviews, a workshop exercise was arranged with all partners to discuss findings. The workshop was held at the voluntary agency premises and brought all partners together. The following are notes made after the workshop:

When all members arrived and were seated, I presented my findings using PowerPoint. I then asked members to discuss these points. Further insight and knowledge was obtained from individuals. It was clear that helping a person with a disability and/or mental health issue needed more time than could be provided by a project with a twelve month timeframe. Organisations did not need to advertise their activities as they had already reached capacity and there were enough service users who visited each organisation on a regular basis. Project managers could see how they had worked together, their accomplishments over the past year, and what they needed to do if they wanted to keep working as a partnership. When they were asked to reflect on their relationship with other providers it was clear they needed to improve the way they worked together. This group based activity went well and allowed members to talk amongst themselves on issues that affected their relationship.

One of the topics discussed that was helpful to me was whether there was a developmental process during the project's life-cycle. Members acknowledged periods when they formed a relationship, a time when they worked out terminology and definitions, when they performed and cooperated, and when there was an ending period in the project. They were now looking to reform, to work on other projects together and continue being a partnership. As they had not done this before, there was a lot of uncertainty. For the partnership to move forward, it needed more funding and an organisation with experience to lead providers.

With no exit strategy, only an idea that there would be a possible extension, which was then rejected during the workshop by ND, the LA representative and commissioning body, there was no clear plan of a continuance. An individual's decision to stay in the organisation was thus determined by whether there would be funding. It was also not clear where their future may lie because of changes to

policy, strategy and funding regimes in the borough that were affecting all organisations. This was a worrying time for all providers. However, despite these issues, individuals learned a lot from this experience. Partners accomplished a difficult project in a short timeframe, which was something they expressed an interest in doing again, though members were unsure whether this would happen.

(BR Research Diary: 23rd April, 2008)

This workshop allowed partners to connect with other members, and discuss the achievements and challenges they had faced. They were beginning to understand what they had done and how they had set about doing it. There was a unanimous agreement that they needed to work harder to build relationships with other providers, which was something that they felt they could do in a new project. The presentation at the beginning of the workshop enabled members to think about their experiences, while individual and group based activities allowed members to reflect on the project partnership as a group. These activities were insightful. Members had not worked together as a group before so I was unsure how it would turn out. However, all members reacted positively. These activities demonstrated how they were able to deal with situations collectively, their decision-making process, and what steps they would need to take to achieve their goals. They spoke about a task-orientated IOR at the beginning of the project as something that gradually changed into a relationship-orientated IOR. These were times members delivered their targets but also times when they cooperated and supported each other. I was unsure whether there were other arrangements that demonstrated this behaviour as a literature review had not been conducted. These findings were not documented in the evaluation report but were something I was interested in pursuing. Table 24 summarises my reflexivity during this period of fieldwork.

Observations	Members were very positive and enthusiastic. I did not find any issues or conflict between partners, or from my presence, that would have affected their ability to achieve their targets. Though their shared objective was attained, findings demonstrated an arrangement that was focused on the task rather than building a relationship. For most of the time, it did seem they worked independently and not cooperatively to deliver services. However, observations were not strong enough or conclusive in determining how they did this, and it was not possible to pursue this during the evaluation study. Moreover, because I had not conducted a literature research, I was unsure whether this was normal. The main objective of the evaluation study was to identify whether
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	<p>organisations achieved what they were contracted to do and whether service users benefited from this project. This is something I did find from this research; however to understand how the partners collaborated and how relationships developed would require further observations.</p>
The research process	<p>Research methods for the evaluation exercise were effective and successful. There were no issues or difficulties in collecting data and organisations were cooperative. In depth interviews with organisational members provided descriptive accounts of their experiences in working together to deliver a combined service. Semi-structured interviews with volunteers and service users demonstrated how individuals had benefited from the project. There were enough data to examine different perspectives of the partnership (e.g. from the coordinator, service providers, volunteers and service users). All interviews went well. My presence did not conflict with their arrangement (e.g. they continued delivering their services as I was collecting data) and interviews actually made members think about what they were doing. The workshop exercise confirmed this and helped members to see what they needed to do in order to develop their relationships. These approaches were complementary, which made it easier for me to understand their arrangement.</p>
Application and implications of theory	<p>I did not review any theory during this evaluation period as this was not required of me. However, at the end of this evaluation exercise, I did review literature on the topic as I was curious to see whether there was evidence of similar arrangements and whether, the partnership might continue. In doing so, I found limited empirical studies that examined consortia in the VCS. This was an interesting find and something I wanted to explore further as a research study. There were no life-cycle models that demonstrated how IORs developed over time (see Cropper and Palmer, 2008), specifically ones that demonstrated a VCS arrangement. I therefore considered at great length how a research study exploring this consortium would provide new insight into and knowledge of collaborative theory. This motivated me to study this partnership more comprehensively and thus necessitated more research and review of literature on the topic.</p>
Analytical approach	<p>Though an analysis was conducted to identify different themes of collaboration from interview transcripts, it was unclear how the partnership and relationships between partners had developed from the beginning of the project to its end. The main focus of the evaluation study was to examine how members delivered their services, rather than how they developed collaboration. On closer</p>

	inspection, there were not enough data to identify specific stages of development. To understand this phenomenon would require further interviews and observations (Patton, 1990). Additionally, if I were able to continue researching this partnership my analytical approach would need to take into account additional data, theory, models and frameworks on collaboration. A longer timeframe was needed to understand the way they worked together to deliver a combined service.
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Table 24. Period 1 Reflexivity

My next step involved approaching the partnership to enquire whether I could re-interview providers and whether it was possible to continue observing their relationship for a research study. All members were happy with this. This formed a second phase of research, which captured the partnership's journey after the pilot project ended.

9.2.2 Phase 2 – The Continuance Period

All organisations consented to being observed and re-interviewed during a continuance period. During this time, members met voluntarily until another funded project could be secured. Here are some of my observations from their partnership meetings:

- **October 2008 Meeting**

Only a few months had passed from the pilot project ending and there were several announcements of people leaving their respective organisations. I felt that this would automatically affect the dynamic of the partnership. During the previous twelve months or so, they had slowly created a bond with other individuals but now this would soon end. There was the question of whether these individuals would be replaced; however, this could not be confirmed in this meeting. Another big announcement was Coffee Life closing and another provider following the same path. This came as a surprise to the group. Nobody, not even I, expected this would happen because it seemed they were doing well; however, there was simply no funding out there. Fear came over individuals in the meeting. They questioned whether there was any funding available. Providers turned to the coordinator to make enquiries with the Local Authority. There were other questions asked which could not be answered. The people that needed to be there, the decision-makers or individuals that were dealing with these issues, were not. I had a feeling moving forward would be difficult.

One good thing to come from the pilot was their joint effort to tender for a new project as a group. This project was called the Headway Project; however, it was announced that they had not been successful. Most of the providers knew this was going to happen because it did not fit with who they were and what they were doing. The organisation leading the project was not at the meeting so it was difficult to understand what it was all about and the process of bidding for it. I

was interested to understand this in my next round of interviews. Generally, I felt there was some bitterness about how certain events had taken place, that people who should have consulted the partnership did not, and how bigger organisations were taking over what they had been doing. There were genuine concerns for their organisations and for the voluntary sector in the area. This was not a positive meeting and I felt less optimistic about the partnership.

- **January 2009 Meeting**

In the next meeting, there were quite a few absences, but the meeting still went ahead. A positive announcement was made by the voluntary agency in that a new member of staff would be joining the group to look into procurement opportunities for the partnership. This person attended the meeting and brought a new perspective on consortium bidding because of his experience in doing it. Unfortunately, there were only two partners there, one of whom worked for an organisation that was closing, but who still wanted to participate. I felt this appointment may have come too late unless new representation could be injected into the partnership. He wanted to visit providers to get to know who they were, which I thought was a great idea. He definitely brought a fresh outlook and dimension to the partnership, which had been missing previously.

At the end of the meeting, GB asked the coordinator, which organisations were still part of the partnership. He did not know. Why did he not know? Had he not been communicating with other providers? The coordinator did not know. Had she not been keeping a record? Where was the documentation? Why was there not a review or audit assessing the partnership, its vision, aims and objectives? What changes had been made or needed to be made by partners? There were no signs of collaboration or organisations working together to deliver services. Surely involvement of organisations in the partnership had been discussed? The coordinator advised that ways of moving forward were being looked into. However, I didn't feel organisations were taking positive steps to be collaborative or even build a partnership with other providers. The partnership didn't seem a partnership. It felt as though nothing was being achieved.

- **May 2009 Meeting**

There were a high number of absences in this meeting, particularly from newer members that had just joined the group. Members who were absent were still communicating with the coordinator and had emailed points to be discussed in their absence. There was mention of other opportunities but it was too late to apply for them. There was quite a lot of discussion about funding but nothing concrete. There were 'little things' (GB) they could apply for as individual organisations, which was disappointing to the group as there were no joint proposals. GB questioned the role by the newer member from the voluntary agency who had been contracted to search for new contracts. Had he done anything from the last meeting he attended? Nothing had been achieved from January's meeting. The outlook from this meeting was bleak.

- **September 2009 Meeting**

Most partners were present in this meeting but discussions were not positive. Over the previous few months, one organisational member had been made redundant

and another was leaving their organisation. There were no funded projects they could apply for as a group, and avenues they would normally have gone down previously for funding had now gone. However, there was one encouraging comment made by the coordinator in that the partnership needed to be more proactive to partnership working in the group. With all the announcements of individuals being made redundant or going elsewhere, I did not see this happening.

It was a shame to see people leaving the partnership as they had made significant contributions during the pilot and in other activities after that period. I felt sad and regretted not helping the organisations involved, but I could not be able as my research stance/position did not allow me to do this. Being a non-participant had been difficult and something I now regretted doing. Watching a partnership go this far and not have another injection of funding was a disappointing experience. Indeed, to actually see the partnership fall apart with my own eyes made me feel unhappy. Like the partners, I had always felt a project would materialise. I had a strong suspicion that this would be the last time I would see these people again.

- **December 2009 Meeting**

A meeting was arranged for this month but the coordinator contacted me to announce that the meeting had been cancelled because of insufficient representation. No other meetings were arranged after this and the partnership ended soon after. As it had become a voluntary arrangement, members simply went their own ways. I did attempt to contact members but email addresses had terminated. The ones I was able to reach advised they were now working on other projects and were forming relationships with other organisations.

(BR Research Diary: October 2008 to December 2009)

The way partnership meetings were conducted always felt informal and too laidback. There was no real urgency to be more collaborative or to develop IORs in the partnership. Even though there was an agenda, discussions always revolved around the same issues (e.g. achieving targets and funding) and it took time for the coordinator to answer pertinent questions as she had to consult with her peers and the commissioning body (CB). As we can see from these observations, individuals were frequently absent from meetings but nothing was done about it. Not a great deal seemed to be happening until another meeting was imminent. At the beginning of this continuance period, individuals were positive and enthusiastic because new members joined the group (see October 2008 meeting). However, between January 2009 and December 2009 this behaviour changed. There was a great deal of uncertainty about their future, what they would be doing next and whether they would still be operating. Furthermore, there was no planning or strategy to keep the project partnership going.

These organisations were very independent and had treated the partnership as a project, but this was slowly changing as they spent more time together. When new representatives and members joined the group, it provided something fresh to their meetings. I was quite relieved and hoped this may be what the group needed. Behaviours changed a lot during this period. At the beginning of this continuance period, there seemed to be an injection of energy. Organisations worked together to bid for the Headway Project, but unfortunately were unsuccessful. This was a new project in which providers would collaborate to deliver a joint service, but they were not happy in doing it because the project did not fit with who they were or what they wanted. It seemed individuals generally lost interest. This was reflected in their attendance, their lack of energy, and the infrequency of meetings.

These observations were interesting as they were the only times members interacted as a group. During the continuance period, members met voluntarily hoping that a new funded project would 'turn up'. I did struggle with my own place within meetings because I often wanted to point something out or help them but chose not to as this would have impacted the direction of my research. I continuously confronted my own motives and my position in these meetings (Finlay, 2002). I had to remind myself that I was a non-participant, a spectator in their arrangement. At times, I did regret taking this position because I found myself thinking, what they were doing is not effective if they want to develop their partnership. Organisational members seemed content with their approach to partnership working but they were not really developing it as a group. I continued to note their behaviour though it did seem rather repetitive, and it took time for things to move forward or issues to be resolved. I felt it needed someone to lead them, to give them direction and pull them together because they were not doing it for themselves. It felt difficult not giving this input.

During these observations, a literature search was conducted. The thesis corresponded to research that examined partnership working, IORs, and collaboration. Other topics relevant to the topic included organisational change, project management, and group development theory. While there is a large body of literature in each of these areas over several disciplines, none of them specifically addressed the research question. In moving forward, though this work was being directed by findings from Phase 1, an integrated framework was developed to identify the main areas of consideration in this thesis (see Chapter 4).

During these periods of attending and observing partnership meetings, two further interview phases took place. My objective in these phases was to understand their partnership journey in more detail. Basically, what happened during the pilot project allowed shared meaning - those categories and themes from the first analysis period - to be reaffirmed and developed, as well as an exploration of whether these stages reflected their shared experience. The following extracts are observations and reflections from these phases:

- **Summary of observations from a second round of interviews**

During this round of interviewing, I felt organisations had made some progress as a group to reform. They were working together outside of their meetings on a new project called the Headway Project. Some were positive about this, while others were less enthusiastic about the idea. All members identified funding to be the main factor for their survival. Providers were still optimistic but there was a lot of uncertainty in their faces and body language. They were not as animated as when I first interviewed them.

These interviews provided a deeper understanding of what had happened over the pilot period while also allowing for other insights to be discussed. I was able to present participants with my findings to-date, mainly shared meaning that was found from the first phase of data collection and analysis. They agreed that the strategy, participants, process and outcome were categories that captured their experience. There was nothing else they wanted to add. I advised participants that, with the data obtained from this second round of interviews, further analysis would be undertaken to distinguish sub-themes in those four categories.

Organisations still worked in isolation and continued to deliver their own services without cooperating with another provider in the partnership. There was no evidence of partners collaborating after the pilot project to deliver a combined service. Members continued to meet but on a voluntary basis and not as frequently as they had previously.

(BR Research Diary: December 2008)

The behaviour of partners had not changed. Members were still optimistic about their future and continued working autonomously, still treating the partnership as a project. Unfortunately, funding was becoming a bigger problem for each service provider. While six months had passed since the project had ended, they had not been successful in a new bid. However, the partnership did allow individuals to see that others were experiencing the same problem. They were all facing similar issues and during this difficult period they were working through it together. There were signs of sadness and

regret that there was not another project they could be working on as a partnership. The coordinator advised that this was happening across the region. Members still enjoyed spending time with other individuals in the group.

Though I was not able to interview all participants as these members were not part of the partnership anymore, I did think that this would affect the quality of findings. However, I was able to interview most members that were part of the original pilot and other stakeholders that were part of its conception. The local authority representative provided another view of the partnership, its members, and the outcome, which were not demonstrated in the first phase of fieldwork. I kept the same approach as that used in the first phase of research; however, during this phase of research, individuals were more expressive in their feelings and views about the partnership and how they collaborated. By being with members in their meetings, I felt individuals spoke to me in a manner that was more casual and open about how certain events had emerged.

During this period, it was possible to narrow down a theoretical framework that coincided with the analysis - a stage-by-stage development process of collaboration. The model demonstrated how a group's behaviour and relationship changes over specific stages. Though their stories were similar to those which were recounted when I asked providers to tell me about their journeys and relationships with other partners in phase 1, further shared meanings were captured in the analysis, which developed five sub-themes in the process category. A collective account of their shared experience could then be constructed from data that were gathered and analysed during this phase of research. Findings demonstrated collaboration to be affected by emerging and sudden change, which impacted the group's behaviour, and there was an urgency to deliver targets rather than build relationships.

The following are observations and reflections after the third round of interviewing with the organisations in the partnership:

- **Summary of observations from a third round of interviews**

This round of interviews was several months after the pilot project, when over a year had passed. While asking partners to recollect their journeys and provide their version of events, I was curious to see whether they still remembered what had happened and whether their thoughts and feelings had changed. Participants explained their experiences much more briefly than had been the case in the first and second interviews and it felt that participants were not interested in what I was doing anymore. This was perhaps because time had passed and I was not really providing them with anything that could help them. Consequently, I did have to probe their responses more during these interviews.

All members seemed very uninterested and dejected. They explained how they had moved forward and were doing other things now. “The partnership seems a long time ago, a lot has changed since then” (CA, I3). “People have gone elsewhere to work now; one has been made redundant and another organisation has closed” (EF, I1). This provider advised that it was “a sign of the times” (EF, I1) and “nothing much could be done about it” (EF, I1). These interviews did not last very long and were less descriptive than earlier rounds of interviews. Organisational members were happy with what they had accomplished but were now working on other projects or jobs. They all realised that, without funding, there was no partnership and it was only a matter of time before it would end.

(BR Research Diary: August 2009 to September 2009)

I was quite lucky to be able to interview individuals during a third round of interviews as many had left the partnership and those who remained also had plans to leave. While members attempted to bid for a new project, most were unhappy with the process through which this happened and what the project was about. Though there was some recollection of their journey in these interviews, most of the discussion involved the events after the pilot or of other things that had happened in their lives. Partners were generally disappointed. Organisational members were leaving their organisations and were not being replaced by other individuals in terms of attending meetings. Why didn't members ask other organisations that were operating in the area to join the partnership? This was something that did not happen but could have given the partnership what it needed to continue operating.

At the end of each interview, I discussed with participants shared meaning that was used to construct the collective account and the sequence of events which collaboration developed. I asked each of them whether this reflected their experiences. They advised that these themes “pretty much summed up our relationship” (GB, I3) and “how they worked together” (PN, I3). There was nothing they wanted to change. I was quite

pleased with this and then asked whether they could identify any underlying themes or factors that influenced their relationship with other providers. The following were identified:

1. The partnership was based on a project in which each organisation had to achieve specific objectives, something that made them isolated from others in the beginning because they were focused on the task (e.g. CA, GB, MS, PN);
2. Time was an important factor for how they delivered services. There was more focus on meeting deadlines than building a relationship with other providers (e.g. CA, GB, MS, PN);
3. Relationships with other providers could have been better, that is, how members cooperated, communicated and collaborated (e.g. CA, EF, GB, MS, PN);
4. The partnership was a learning experience, which allowed them to work with other providers and improve how they provided their services (e.g. CA, EF, GB, MS, PN); and
5. Funding offered organisations sustainability, a means to continue operating and with new representatives joining the partnership, there was a feeling that there would be a continuance (e.g. CA, EF, GB, MS, PN).

Table 25 summarises my reflexivity during this period of fieldwork.

Observations	<p>During this phase of research, I continued to observe partnership meetings. Members were happy for me to do this and I explained to them my intentions and that I could not participate in discussions. I asked members whether they had any issues/problems with this. They all said that this would not be a problem and members got on with what they needed to discuss as though I were not there. I did not feel my presence had an impact on their agenda or their interactions. Being out of sight, sitting away from the group, allowed me to observe their meetings from a distance and also did not distract them when I was taking notes. Some exchanges (e.g. eye contact) were made but there was nothing said that needed my involvement in conversation.</p> <p>Members seemed to be less optimistic and enthusiastic during this</p>
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	<p>second period of research. Because there was no funding they could not continue to meet voluntarily and members gradually disengaged from the partnership. In the third interview phase, members were very uninterested and dejected because they knew the partnership was coming to an end. I really did feel for them at this point. There had been so much optimism and hope in this partnership continuing that we all wanted it to happen and I felt sad that it turned out this way but there was nothing that I could have done. For the consortium to have been more effective, I felt, needed partners to have worked more closely and that was something I could not see happening because they were all working individually. They were not interacting enough and sharing resources (Huxham and Vangen, 2004). Though they wanted to collaborate, internal and external factors were stopping this from happening; for example, their autonomy, the way they interacted and a lack of funding in the VCS hindered a continuance. Members confirmed these findings in interviews.</p>
<p>Research Process</p>	<p>Research methods were again successful though I did question my own role/position during observations because I watched the partnership slowly fall apart rather than helping members to do something about it. Because organisations were not effectively working together, I wanted to advise or give them direction but I chose not to do so because I felt this would have affected my philosophical and methodological approach to this research study. My purpose was to be a spectator, to let the partnership run its course without my interference, and this is something I feel I effectively achieved. Even though I wanted to help, I did not. This partnership needed funding and this is something I could not have given them or helped them with. Consequently, even if had provided consultation with the partnership, the outcome would still have been the same. During this period of research, further interviews provided more description of collaboration and how the developmental process could be separated into stages (see Section 9.3).</p>
<p>Application and Implications of theory</p>	<p>During this phase, a literature search and review was conducted using categories and themes that were captured in the first phase of fieldwork. The models and frameworks identified and used in this thesis helped to organise data in the analysis. These models created an integrated framework that coincided with shared meaning (i.e. how meaningful expressions of collaboration were organised), which identified specific stages of development during the project partnership (see Chapter 4).</p> <p>Though there was sufficient literature on this research topic, it did not specifically address my research question, e.g. how IORs</p>

	<p>between VCS organisations develop over a temporary project arrangement. Other authors also documented a knowledge/research gap in this area of research (e.g. Cropper and Palmer, 2008; Entwistle and Martin, 2005; Macmillan, 2010) and issues with IOR as a topic (e.g. being fragmented across different disciplines). Literature would therefore have to reflect how a group of VCOs working with other service providers collaborated over time. Examining theory from different disciplines provided me with a clearer understanding of collaboration and this type of arrangement.</p>
<p>Analytical approach</p>	<p>The analysis was a long process. Data were triangulated from three interview phases and observations taken from the partnership meetings. Observations stopped when the partnership ended and thus no new data needed to be collected. There was more than enough data to explain how organisations worked together at this point it was evident that that the number of times a person can be asked to recollect past events is finite; this was demonstrated in the third phase of interviews. A long time had passed, and members were forgetting specific details of the pilot project because they were now doing other things. Most of the findings were therefore obtained from interviews in phases 1 and 2. Although it was good to have a third interview phase, as it demonstrated how relationships had developed or, in this case, how they were not developing and were in fact ending, the members' descriptions of their experiences were not as detailed as they had been in other phases of research.</p> <p>Because this research study involved a phenomenological approach, it meant being totally absorbed in the data to capture and explore meaningful expressions of collaboration. I often went back and forth into the data to help construct the collective account of their project partnership. In reviewing these findings, I felt this was an effective technique to study a new phenomenon (Smith and Osborn, 2004, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) and demonstrate a collective sense of a shared experience (Boyce, 1995). Using a constant comparative analysis method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and a hermeneutic cycle technique (McRobbie and Tobin, 1997; Ylijoki, 2005), this study produced rich and meaningful data that captured how these organisations worked together, and engaging in reflexivity enabled me to examine the research process to provide a deeper understanding of the consortium, the strategies and decisions that were implemented, and to present my own journey, as this was something that developed the longer I spent reading about the topic, interviewing and observing participants, and analysing and writing up data.</p>

Table 25. Period 2 Reflexivity

9.3 The Developmental Process of Collaboration

There were three aspects to my reflexivity when I developed the model of collaboration in this thesis. This involved examining three timelines: (i) when I collected data, (ii) when I analysed data, and (iii) when I interpreted and documented findings. A retrospective examination of my own research permitted me to make meaningful connections between my research study and with literature on the topic. Three specific extracts from my research diary have been identified to illustrate my thoughts during this process.

1. When I collected data – ‘Understanding collaboration’

After interviewing participants, it was apparent these organisations had completed the project without being entirely cooperative. I am a little confused and unsure as to whether this is usual. Because I had not conducted a review of literature, it was difficult to discern whether other partnerships were like this - it was a pilot project after all. It is something I would like to explore further, but what would this research provide? What would I need to do? Is it worth pursuing?

(BR Research Diary: March 2008)

In review of this extract I examined:

- Literature written about partnerships and other topics surrounding the case study;
- Potential insights and knowledge that would come from this research if I pursued the study as a research project;
- How I would conduct a single case study using methodology that would provide descriptive accounts of collaboration; and
- How I would capture a shared experience of a single event over time, and what approaches and methods were needed to do this.

As a result of these actions, it was possible to ascertain in this timeline that this research study would need to use a phenomenological approach to understand an individual's experience of collaboration; research would provide an empirical opportunity to study a phenomenon that has not been extensively researched, and would be a project that would address a knowledge gap in collaborative theory. I decided to continue studying

the partnership as long as the organisations allowed. Because this partnership needed external funding to continue, it was difficult to predict how long it would last. I therefore decided to remain with the partnership as long as possible, or until there was enough data to explain their arrangement.

2. When I analysed data – ‘Comparing and triangulating meaning units or themes’

By observing and analysing an organisation’s experience of collaboration over different periods of time, I was able to determine how relationships between members developed during the project period and through a continuance period. Three interview phases were enough to understand collaboration between organisations. No more data could be collected because the partnership ended soon after my last interview phase. The analysis process was rigorous and systematic. I was able to narrow down shared meaning of collaboration from the partners’ accounts using an interpretive phenomenological technique. I was very thorough through this process (e.g. reading and re-reading transcripts, and organising themes with participant’s descriptions that were taken at different times). During this analysis, five main stages were identified that could explain the developmental process of collaboration. Models from Tuckman and Jensen (1977) and Wilson and Charlton (1997) coincided with my analysis. While theory on IOR literature was found to highlight collaboration as a process, it was not detailed enough to give a life-cycle explanation of collaborative development over time. Though these theories supported my research, it was the data (i.e. themes identified from shared meaning) that directed me to use certain theories and frameworks. Was this the right approach to take? Should I have done this differently?

(BR Research Diary: October 2009)

In review of this extract I examined:

- My research framework, specifically the way in which data were captured, explored and triangulated;
- My literature search and synthesis; and
- Respondent validation, whether members agreed or disagreed with my findings (e.g. workshop exercise and further interview phases).

This timeline identified an iterative and unfolding research process. Fieldwork was based on three interview phases and observations taken from non-participants’ meetings. As data were being collected and analysed a thematic structure gradually evolved from shared meaning being organised into themes and categories. These findings were supported by models and frameworks on the topic, mainly those studies

that have identified different stages or phases of a group's development over time. Findings were presented to participants to improve the validity and reliability of my research. The process of data collection and analysis needed to be clearly illustrated and that is something I attempted to do in Chapter 7.

3. When I interpreted and documented findings – 'Clarifying and verifying my research'

I constructed a collective account of the project partnership using descriptive extracts from interview transcripts, but have I been thorough? Would another researcher approach this differently? Is my explanation of the developmental process of collaboration accurate? Have I correctly documented my findings? I believe that it is but this is not an approach that has been extensively documented in organisational behaviour and management studies; therefore, it is necessary to confirm whether my research approach is valid and reliable.

(BR Research Diary: August 2010)

In review of this extract I examined:

- My research process, specifically the way findings are interpreted and documented in a case study. This also included reviewing:
 - How data from a shared experience are used to construct a collective account of an event or activity;
 - How qualitative researchers report their findings, and the implications and limitations of their approach;
 - Whether I have been thorough and rigorous, in that findings answer the aims and objectives of this research study; and
 - Whether my phenomenological approach has done what it set out to do.

This timeline caused me to look back at everything that I had done to determine whether the research question and the aims and objectives in Chapter 1 had been adequately addressed. In review of my philosophical approach, methodology, research strategy, and how I conducted data collection and analysis, I determined that what I had found, how I had acted and how I had reported findings adequately addressed the research question and was an appropriate approach to take for this exploratory study. My discussion and

conclusions in Chapter 10 will aim to clarify my thinking and justify what I have done in this thesis.

9.4 Underlying Themes that Influenced the Partners' IOR

After reflecting on how my study was developed, organised and interpreted, I re-examined everything that had taken place from research gathered over the pilot and continuance period to identify underlying themes that influenced the partners' IOR. In doing so, five themes of how these organisations collaborated were identified. They involved:

1. The orientation of the project and its management;
2. The time allocated to forming, developing and nurturing relationships;
3. The behaviour, interaction and interdependence of organisations or individuals with others in the partnership;
4. Learning and growth; and
5. Sustainability, a continuance of relationships and renewed membership.

These themes 'textualize' (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004) the *essence* of collaboration between organisations in this partnership. Van Manen (1990, p.39) refers to this as "a linguistic construction, a description of the phenomenon. A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way". The process involves a comprehensive understanding, or an interpretation of findings as a whole (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). Lindseth and Norberg (2004, p.146) see it as going back on oneself to establish "the essence of meaning itself".

9.4.1 Theme 1 - The Orientation of the Project and its Management

The project had two clear objectives. They included organisations delivering a set of targets based on five outputs, and organisations collaborating for there to be a partnership. For this to happen, the project had to be coordinated and managed by a lead organisation, which would be a non-delivery partner. The first two meetings during the formation period attempted to clarify members' roles and responsibilities, and other

issues that occurred. However, due to the late commencement of the project, the timeframe to complete targets was disrupted and this restricted how partners collaborated. Additionally, due to the task orientation of the project and the need for it not to conflict with or compromise other projects members were working on, cooperative links among partners at an early stage were minimal and slow in developing. Apart from contractual agreements and meetings, collaboration at the beginning of the partnership was not regarded as being a high priority in terms of delivering a provider's services, which meant different interpretations of what providers had to do and how it would be done. This resulted in some confusion and a lack of clarity amongst providers.

Interaction was ad hoc and synchronised mainly through the coordinator. There was minimal interaction between partners and sub-group relationships formed based on previous relationships. While “partnership synergy is the product of interaction” (Lasker et al., 2001, p.187), any collaborative advantage would always be minimal as interaction with other providers was always limited. The main focus of each organisational member was on the delivery of their individual targets and collaboration was secondary to this. Additionally, without prior knowledge and understanding of formal partnership working, to be fully collaborative would take time. While there was great diversity in how each partner operated, they were all protective of their user groups as these are the organisations' lifeline. Therefore, to change how an organisational member operates (i.e. their approach and functionality in a short timeframe), was not a practical objective to fully realise collaboration. It was something that needed more time.

Given the functional requirements needed to accomplish the task, the alignment of organisations to collaborate was secondary to achieving their targets. This also made sub-groups form, in which there were closer ties between certain organisations because of previous relationships, e.g. STCOD and Shopmobility, and Bliss=ability and Coffee Live. Partners mainly relied on the coordinator for advice, support and direction and their relationships were centrally managed and dependent on the coordinator to facilitate these joint working arrangements. Even though all partners conceded the project to be task-orientated, it was something that overshadowed how their IORs would develop as the project's remit was output-based for funding to be awarded. A reduced timeframe further complicated matters; providers became more focused on delivering targets because some outputs take more time to accomplish but this was not fully considered in

the project remit. Since the project was focused on producing outputs, more time was spent doing this rather than developing relationships.

9.4.2 Theme 2 - The Time Allocated to Forming, Developing and Nurturing Relationships

Time was always against the partnership. Unfortunately, because funding was not allocated to partners at the beginning of the project, providers were prevented from building relationships as there was no guarantee the project would go ahead. When they received the funding, more time was spent delivering services than actually planning ways to be more collaborative. Partners simply had to meet their targets in a shorter timeframe. An organisation with greater resources (e.g. paid staff and funds) could find this task less of a challenge but, as these organisations only had limited resources, it did provide the partnership's first obstacle, which involved supporting a disadvantaged user group into employment, and achieving a high number of targets over a period with a shorter completion timeframe.

Organisations managed their time by working with a caseload of users in four quarters. This involved reporting to the coordinator and attending meetings with other providers every four to six weeks. They would normally discuss general business, their progress, achievements, and any issues. With a delay in starting the project, the partnership did not set aside enough time for collaboration. Their collective focus was on meeting targets. Time is an important factor when building relationships (Huxham and Vangen, 1996), especially as these organisations had never worked with each other in a formal arrangement where they would be accountable for their outputs and monitored by another organisation. Working to complete a project timeframe, which was a good deal less than originally anticipated, hindered the development of relationships to form and grow with other partners. It takes a period of time to get to know a partner and how they operate, and to develop ways of connecting to one another (Huxham and Vangen, 1996). Consequently, duplication of services would be reduced and cooperation enhanced. This never occurred until the end of the mid-point period in the project, a period when they started to share their expertise and knowledge in meetings.

While a partnership requires providers to work with each other, it must also recognise a partner's independence and autonomy in relation to other partners. This was noted by

the NCVO (2007b); agendas must be transparent from the beginning. Some members may just be in the consortium for the money and will not take part in the consultation or development (NCVO, 2007b). Members have to be carefully selected, but also this ‘vetting process’ must establish what providers want to achieve from the project partnership and how they need to go about bridging organisational borders at different stages. This would involve a continuous process of relationship development and collaborative practice (Huxham and Vangen, 2004). Even though there was no manual to which these providers could refer, organisations did start to work together more and they did “wish for more time as it was just starting to get going” (GB, I2). A relationship-orientated IOR was gradually growing at the end of the pilot project, when there was a desire to keep the partnership going.

9.4.3 Theme 3 - The Behaviour, Interaction and Interdependence of Organisations with Others in the Partnership

Interdependency implies ‘mutual dependence’ (D’amour et al., 2005). While organisations had never worked in a formal consortium arrangement with other similar service providers, there were initial boundaries that had to be bridged. There were exceptions of this as some organisations did have closer ties with other partners based on previous working relationships that they had established from other projects. Therefore, some individuals would find it easier to work with these organisations than with others because trust was already there. With minimal interaction and exchange, only through meetings, cohesion and cooperation was limited, which was also captured by Casey (2008). She advised “training and education must be considered for key personnel at the outset of partnership arrangements” (Casey, 2008, p.78), which is supported by Wilson and Charlton (1997). While direct interactions between organisations were restricted to organisational members who attended meetings, sharing information and resources would be difficult as organisations were protective of their user group and what their organisation needed to achieve.

While the coordinator facilitated the exchange of information for mutual benefit and monitored the efforts of members, evidence identified that managing or overseeing organisations was not enough for interdependent relationships to take place. Throughout the partnership’s entirety, coordination played a central role in the consortium. This function supported an organisation’s development in the partnership and how they went

about meeting their targets. When working with a diverse group of individuals and organisations with limited experience in formal consortium working, attention to how a member would work collaboratively with another member should have been documented by the partnership, as this would have illustrated forms of good practice. It seems trust has to be earned and is not automatically gained when forming a new relationship. It is a phenomenon that 'develops over time' (Casey, 2008). This would mean developing formal procedures and mechanisms to bring organisations together rather than an informal relationship, which is something that did take place and was not entirely effective.

This consortium was a simple working arrangement between seven organisations; however, in the absence of key members in meetings, interaction was restricted and interdependence was hampered. Collaboration cannot exist without a series of interactive activities among participants (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). Changing individual behaviour to conform more towards group behaviour, to enable an increase in interaction between members in and beyond meetings, necessitated a closer working relationship between organisations. Though their approach was casual and lacking urgency, the group was always positive about their relationship with others in the partnership even if all members were not actively involved in the interaction. While organisations had a common desire to address a service user's need, they often talked about success stories in meetings and, at times, how they could utilise referral routes within the partnership. However, interviews only identified some organisations making an effort to do this.

All partners had a shared interest in achieving a successful outcome, but long-term aims, objectives, and expectations lacked leadership, i.e. something or someone to lead the partnership and its members into a new project. On top of other priorities that they had to deal with, where they had to manage personnel and their user group, organisational members were directly responsible for this project. Each Project Manager treated the partnership as a project, where the task came first and their relationship, though very related to the task, was secondary. While it was said that a 'team building' exercise could have helped members develop relationships, unfortunately it was difficult to find the time to do this due to the fact that they were all busy working on other projects. It was something that did happen at the end of the project so relationships would develop. Organisational members were gradually becoming more

interdependent with other providers as time went on; these were times organisations interacted as a group. However, there simply were not enough of them.

9.4.4 Theme 4 - Learning and Growth

As partnerships are made up of organisations with their own values and approaches (Wilson and Charlton, 1997), getting people to work together is a process of learning and growth (Casey, 2008). In the literature on organisational studies, learning can mean the adoption of existing knowledge and competence, and it can mean the development of new knowledge also called ‘experiential learning’. In experiential learning, the development of new knowledge is grounded in experience, i.e. the application and adaptation of existing knowledge. Kolb (1984) argued that defining learning in terms of change in behaviour is limiting; he defines it as a human adaptation process wherein knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Evidence identified partners learning from this partnership (see Boydell and Rugkasa, 2007; Casey, 2008). Partners shared their knowledge and insights with others who had also experienced the event, which helped members to understand what they were doing, how they were doing it, and whether others were experiencing the same outcomes. This helped members develop a degree of commonality and to value others in the partnership. It also allowed members to bid for other projects as a consortium as organisations wanted to continue working together and took steps to do so.

Members agreed that the partnership was a learning experience. It allowed partners to be more open to joint working arrangements and it showed individuals what they could do better or how they could approach it differently to improve their outcomes (see Mai et al., 2005). Certain conditions, which were emerging more at the end of the project than at specific points at the beginning, favoured collaboration. During the later stages of the project, members did regret not developing strong ties at the formation stage of the project. However, a teambuilding exercise did come at the end of the project, described as a ‘happy bus’ activity, in which partners visited each organisation to see exactly what each partner did and how they did it. All partners that participated benefited from this.

In the beginning, it is essential that all participants assess and discuss the purpose of the partnership with their own organisational objectives (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998), and

thus draw attention to any areas of conflict (e.g. terminology, cooperation, and referral procedures). In doing so, partners seek consensus and become aware of their differences, to be clear on how others can contribute to their organisation, and how much time, commitment and resources each partner can devote to the project. Distinguishing roles, responsibilities and procedures, and ways to strengthen relationships would have made working as a group easier and the benefits of their joint efforts more tangible. Due to the informality of their relationship, the partnership took longer to do this. It appeared that they were not interacting enough as a group, and as a result, interdependent forms of working was secondary to meeting organisational targets. However, this did change as time progressed.

9.4.5 Theme 5 - Sustainability, a Continuance of Relationships and Renewed Membership

One of the main objectives of VCOs working in a consortium was to achieve targets. However, toward the end of the project, evidence identified partners attempting to develop their relationships and members taking forward those lessons learned from the pilot to apply to other financial opportunities. This project partnership was always temporary as funding was allocated for a fixed period of time. While granting organisations a form of sustainability to overcome financial challenges, being in the project meant building their capacity with other providers. This involved partners sharing ideas, expertise and knowledge with other members to develop services.

At a functional level, the partnership could not achieve its objectives without members prioritising targets. However, a partner's absence from meetings demonstrated a significant problem in building relationships. If the organisation or a Project Manager was absent, there was a missing partner in the partnership. Being part of a consortium meant attending regular meetings, and interacting with all participants to share resources, expertise and offer support when needed (Hartono and Holsapple, 2004). At the beginning, it took time for members to do this. When the project was running, their relationship did not change a great deal. It was only after the pilot that their behaviour and the composition of the group changed. They had no outputs to achieve so they set out to develop their relationships, as a result communication and interactivity improved.

While there was an ongoing commitment to the purpose and values of the partnership, which was shared amongst members, their efforts continued well after the pilot ended. There was a shared interest in being a consortium, as evidenced by the fact that members bid for a new contract as a group after the initial project ended. “Partners do not voluntarily continue a partnership unless they feel satisfied that it is meeting their needs in the most effective and efficient way” (Casey, 2008, p.79). Members were optimistic after the project was completed that they could secure another project and continue working together. They did this voluntarily, but when no other projects were to be found, feelings changed, members became withdrawn and they disengaged from the partnership. Sustainability and continuity were therefore not guaranteed outcomes from the consortium arrangement if there is no funding or opportunity to extend it.

One pertinent question that organisations must consider in this theme is whether a project partnership is intended to be a short-term or long-term inter-organisational arrangement. In doing so, partners will be able to assess what they need to achieve at certain points in time and how to individually and collectively go about this, thus clarifying the intentions and expectations of others in their consortium. For example, are organisations in it for the long haul or are they just in it for the funding? What are they hoping to achieve from the partnership? Organisations in this partnership were initially interested in funding but it became apparent that they wanted more. The project partnership made them aware of a new way of working and something that they wanted to continue. With no sign of a new project that would sustain them, individuals and organisations gradually went their own ways and the partnership ended.

9.5 The Consortium Arrangement and My Reflexive Approach

First and foremost, the organisations in the consortium need to have enough resources to provide adequate services to their user group (Sowa, 2009). Organisations will also take certain steps to ensure that their place in the community is secure and sustainable. Funding is key to their survival as without it they would cease to exist. As a sector, previous funding streams, upon which these organisations have always relied, are now difficult to come by or do not exist anymore (IVAR, 2011). When an organisation does acquire funding, it is only for a short period. The future of these providers will always be problematic and will always be on the minds of individuals working within these organisations as their own futures are tied with them (Alcock et al., 2004; Coid et al.,

2003). Hence, this pilot initially provided an avenue to access funds through a non-compromising project initiative. This partnership would not ensure their future would be safe as funding was only granted for a set timeframe.

When entering a new arrangement, the literature says it is good practice to define roles and responsibilities and the boundaries that separate joint work from the ongoing operations of each partner so that all parties are clear (NCVO, 2006a). The important thing here is to have a clear understanding of whether the partnership is a primary project, creating a new, separate organisation from the members working in the partnership, or only a project where collaboration may not be fully realised (Macdonald and Chrisp, 2005). As with Brown et al. (2006), here there was at least a 'common purpose' between members. Part of this involved a written agreement, which can help to clarify procedures (NCVO, 2006a). Another part of it involved members exploring who other partners were and how they could work together. Evidence showed that organisations were well briefed in what they were doing (e.g. their objectives and aims), what they hoped to achieve, how users would benefit from the joint delivery of services, how they would go about doing it, and whether the outcome was sufficient to justify the time and effort involved in such arrangements (e.g. the value added or gained from being in a partnership).

Although there was a good deal of evidence of an organisation's effort and commitment to deliver targets, where the orientation of the project pressured organisations to meet deadlines, collaboration was not fully maximised in the time the partnership had to complete the contract. While Glendinning (2002) found shared priorities and principles were important in developing strong partnership links, other authors have highlighted a lack of time and resources (e.g. people and effort) as a critical barrier to developing partnerships (Harris et al., 2004). As a consortium, they are responsible for the entirety of service provision, but in essence each organisation is able to continue working within their own field of expertise without having to work with another provider (Dickinson and Neal, 2011). All things considered, the pilot was a learning experience, which Casey (2008) describes as a "key partnership success factor" (p.78). Apart from a continuance to meet, there was no further evidence of collaboration in delivering a combined service. Individuals did attempt to develop project applications together but were unfortunately not successful.

Though I did feel sad that the partnership was slowly coming to an end, my behaviour did not change throughout the research process. At the beginning, I had limited knowledge of these consortium arrangements and theory on the topic. I entered the research site with few or no theoretical preconceptions. Researchers are encouraged to avoid premature conceptualization or theorizing and are instead encouraged to let the key themes or concepts on which theory will be built emerge from empirical evidence (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). It was only when data were being collected and analysed I became aware of something more meaningful about the partners' IOR that had not been explored during the time organisational members worked together in the pilot project. This would later involve a comparative analysis of shared meaning as more data were being collected. The longer I spent examining the partnership the more informed I became about their relationship. Time and my curiosity in ascertaining how these organisations collaborated played a big part in how knowledge was constructed in this thesis.

Whilst using data collected from interviews and observations, another means to understand this journey was an examination of my research diary, i.e. field notes I had recorded after interviews and observations. This documented how I went about this research study. Chapter 5, section 5.7 demonstrates this process. Being a spectator allowed me to look at their relationship from a distance where I would not influence, direct or disturb their relationship. This involved observing how the partnership would progress without my guidance or support. Though a number of questions emerged during interviews and observations, I could not follow them up or act upon them. In doing this, my interactions with partners were hindered because I could see what was happening but could not ask them why this was the case or whether they were going to do anything about it. These dilemmas have been documented in Finlay (2002). The withholding of questions, assumptions or knowledge is the "act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (Van Manen, 1990, p.175). This was a phenomenological reduction technique.

When my philosophical position was examined, this research drew upon a hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology (see Chapter 5). Van Manen (1990) suggests four methodological practices of such an approach. These include: (i) turning toward lived experience, where the research will bracket personal experiences, (ii) investigating the

lived experience as lived using appropriate research methods that capture the experience, (iii) reflecting on essential themes by grasping, elucidating or explicating of the essential characteristics of an experience, and (iv) writing and re-writing the process where data is interpreted to get to the essence of the phenomenon (Hayllar and Griffin, 2005). This research process involved being reflexive, which is “commonly used in qualitative research and has been posited and accepted as a method qualitative researchers can and should use to legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations” (Pillow, 2003, p.175). However, “the idea of being reflexive in theorizing and research has been the subject of some debate” (McKenna, 2007, p.147) because there is very little consensus on how to do it. So while gathering and analysing individual accounts of their experience and constructing a collective account from shared meaning, where meaningful expressions of collaboration were organised into categories and themes, I documented my own journey, in which I recognised my presence and role in studying the partnership and how I framed data using relevant and valid theories, frameworks and models on the topic, most notably those that corresponded with how a group of organisations developed in a temporary project partnership. Denzin (1989) refers to this as ‘contextualisation’, a “suggested mechanism for clarifying themes through the writing process” (Hayllar and Griffin, 2005, p.519).

Whilst interviewing participants and being a non-participant in meetings, I always tried to follow phenomenological procedures, i.e. ways a researcher should conduct himself/herself in a study (see Benner, 1994; Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Giorgi, 1997, Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). I did not advise or consult members because this was not what my research required me to do. I attended meetings but did not participate in them. Interviews were always about the partnership and the relationship with other providers but nothing else. I did not attempt to create friendship or any personal attachment. The analysis and its interpretation always focused on how these organisational members experienced the phenomenon. I always tried to maintain a professional and objective approach. However, I was perceived as being part of the group as the research process demands “that the researcher gets close to the research subject” (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p.64), but I attempted to bracket personal feelings and thoughts from the research process because being preoccupied by one’s own emotions and experiences can skew findings in undesirable directions (Finlay, 2002). An example of this came from their meetings; I knew they were not progressing but I refrained from advising them. I also held back my desire to help the partnership, which I regretted because I did not want the

partnership to end. I hoped organisational members would find a solution for themselves but this unfortunately did not happen.

My objective in this research study was to understand a partnership by not being involved in it (e.g. consultation, decision-making, and strategy development) and that is what I feel I effectively achieved. At the beginning, I did not know a great deal about these arrangements, but by examining this consortium over the last four years, my knowledge and understanding of them has developed significantly. This case study has led me to realise the importance of understanding a phenomenon over time and how my own journey affects the research process or is affected by it. I have definitely grown from this study and hope it will give others something to think about when they are doing their own research project.

9.6 Conclusion

The first part of this chapter identified and discussed the researcher's reflections, observations and reflexive approach, and whether this had any influence on the case study, e.g. whether my behaviour, feelings, preconceptions and assumptions directed the research study in any way. Though my position/role and behaviour did not change as I was conducting fieldwork, my assumptions and feelings toward the partnership did. For example, I was sad to see the partnership end and had assumed that this would happen because all members were optimistic of a continuance. While I did not consult or advise the partnership, I did regret not helping organisational members. Nonetheless, I do not feel there was anything that I could have done or said to have stopped it from happening. The partnership needed funding and that was something I did not have or could help them with. In taking such actions, I was true to this research study's philosophical and methodological approach.

The second part of this chapter identified and discussed themes that captured the essence of the partners' IOR - those underlying themes influencing collaboration. This involved re-examining everything that had been collected, analysed and documented. In doing so, this identified several reasons as to why the partnership turned out the way it did. The orientation of the project, time to complete the contract, relationship development, learning and growth, and renewed membership all impacted the partnership and how members collaborated. The essence of their experience was not

construed to a single factor/dynamic but one where there were several factors involved in its making.

CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main focus of this chapter is on the interpretation of the results that have been presented in previous chapters (Saunders et al., 2009). This final chapter sums up this thesis. It will also address the implications of this research study for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, the limitations of the research, and some concluding remarks that have not been addressed in other sections.

10.1 Introduction

The motivation in conducting this research study was an empirical one. The purpose was to understand and observe how collaboration between several organisations working in a consortium arrangement developed until the project partnership came to an end. At the beginning, I entered the field without any preconceptions of theory that addressed this topic or knowledge of partnership working between Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs). Only when the case study was examined during an independent evaluation exercise was it clear that more fieldwork was needed to understand a partners' inter-organisational relationship (IOR), that is, how organisations experienced collaboration over the project. After the evaluation study, a literature search demonstrated an empirical opportunity, a knowledge gap, and work that would be original. There was simply nothing like this type of research study that had explored an IOR between VCOs within a project partnership.

While the majority of studies in researching collaboration have focused on private and public sector partnerships, this thesis has highlighted the growing interest of governments and regional bodies in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) for smaller, local providers to deliver public services, particularly in a partnership with other organisations, agencies, and public bodies (Entwistle and Martin, 2005; Haugh and Kitson, 2007; Lewis, 2005; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). However, a literature search demonstrated very little knowledge of how charity-based service providers in the employment sector worked together. Consequently, an interpretive, qualitative methodology was chosen, which involved a single case study using a phenomenological approach. In doing so, Patton (1990) stressed two methodological approaches to this

type of research, which include ‘interviews and participant observation’; this is also supported by other studies (e.g. Feldman et al., 2004; Suh and Lee, 2006). Because of the exploratory nature of this research study, data would be approached from a place of ‘wonder’ (Van Manen, 2007) and ‘openness’ (Finlay, 2002). The research process was therefore iterative – as findings unfolded so did the approach used to conduct the study, e.g. the number of times data collection would take place. Phenomenology is an approach that is used widely in studies involving Health, Education, and Psychology, but less so in Organisational Behaviour and Management studies. Nevertheless, this thesis was influenced by the evaluation exercise, the research question, aims and objectives that emerged during this case study, and the methods of data collection that were selected based on their suitability to provide enough data to develop detailed, rich descriptions of the phenomenon (Hamilton and Bowers, 2006; Lee, 1999; Morse & Field, 1995). In doing so, “the insights provided by a simple model”, something that is identified in this thesis, “can be used to raise new questions for future research” (Daft, 1983, p.542). This is an approach that is frequently emphasised in exploratory studies and with those that locate their research within the interpretive paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Fieldwork was conducted over a twelve-month period between 2008 and 2009. Because this topic had not been critically or comprehensively examined, this work went about creating an integrated theoretical framework (see Chapter 4), which demonstrated the main areas of consideration in this thesis (see Chapters 2 and 3). Research was carried out over two main periods of time. The first period of fieldwork examined how organisations collaborated during the pilot project [project period], and the second period of fieldwork examined what came after the pilot project whilst also re-examining those events from the first period of observations [continuance period]. The primary method of data collection included findings from an evaluation exercise, in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and a focus group. Secondary data collection methods included field notes and secondary data sources (e.g. partnership meeting minutes). These qualitative techniques were systematically triangulated as and when data were collected and analysed (Denscombe, 1998; Downward and Mearman, 2004; Jonsen and Jehn, 2009; Seale, 2004).

The research process involved a hermeneutic cycle where shared meaning was: (i) captured from individual accounts, (ii) explored with other accounts and at different

periods in time, and then (iii) triangulated with other data sources (see McRobbie and Tobin, 1997; Ylijoki, 2005). This demonstrated a constant comparative analysis method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which “aided in identifying patterns, coding data, and categorising findings” (Anfara et al., 2002, p.32), and an interpretation process that was iterative (Prasad, 2002) and dialectical (Finlay, 2002; Hayllar and Griffin, 2005). This meant capturing and exploring themes and categories from the analysis of interviews and other observations while also reviewing relevant literature to support these findings. For this study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed (Smith and Osborn, 2004, 2008), which went beyond a thematic analysis (Crabtree and Miller, 1999; King, 1998). In doing so, this produced a ‘detailed interpretative analysis of themes’ portrayed through a narrative account. This demonstrated “a movement from description to interpretation” (Brocki and Wearden, 2006, p.89). Ricoeur (1980, p.246) suggested this hermeneutic interpretation as “the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning”. It is an approach supported by Prasad and Mir (2002), which identifies the temporal nature of meaning units – how meaning changes over time.

The task was not to gather facts and measurements (e.g. positivism) but to capture the shared meaning of a phenomenon, and how they are negotiated and interpreted by individuals working in a partnership (e.g. social constructionism and interpretivism). This approach assumes that multiple realities exist and that meanings shift between individuals over time as they encounter new experiences and engage with one another (Creswell, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 2003). “Moreover, hermeneutics as a methodology makes important demands on the organisational researcher’s capability for self-reflection and auto critique” (Prasad, 2002, p.29). Consequently, this research attempted to understand shared meaning from a number of individuals that shared an experience, and the process by which this was conducted, e.g. how the researcher’s role/position, assumptions, and behaviour affected the case study. In doing so, “the researcher is not looking at the experience of the subjects alone; there is also the position of the interpreter as the scene unfolds and in the process of interpretation” (McAuley, 2004, p.194). In order to explore collaboration and develop an analysis of shared meaning, this thesis used an interpretative framework where the interpretation helped explore the data rather than constrain it (McAuley, 2004). This approach is supported by Brocki and Wearden, 2006; Dahlberg, 2006; Eatough and Smith, 2008; Finlay, 2002; Hibbert et al., 2010; Smith and Osborn, 2004, 2008; Smith et al., 2009.

10.2 The Main Findings and Results from the Pilot Project

Ellison and Flint (2010) advised that there are no ‘off-the-shelf-models’ that explain a consortium, and although researchers can associate collaboration with a number of “public endeavours that draw on the combined strengths of a range of organisations, the phenomenon of collaboration is just as likely to be small or unnoticed - often deliberately so” (FCO, 2009, p.24). Meaningful involvement can be a problem, particularly for small VCOs, including social enterprises, who continue to report some common difficulties with new programmes. These organisations are expected to respond to these new initiatives ‘unrealistically quickly’ (HM Treasury, 2002). Lack of development funding, insufficient shared planning, and a lack of involvement in target setting are also issues that need to be addressed (HM Treasury, 2002). The HM Treasury (2002) advises that new guiding principles, best practice in service and programme development need to be created to provide an effective framework for joint working. This pilot project has been evidence that could support this work.

As this research was initially based on an evaluation study, a review of literature took place as observations were being conducted. A research question during the first phase of research gradually emerged:

How do Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) and a Voluntary Agency, which have been commissioned to work on a pilot project partnership, collaborate to jointly deliver employment and training provision to people with disabilities and mental health illnesses?

The research question demonstrated three main areas of consideration:

1. *The Concept*: partnership working, inter-organisational relationships (IORs) and collaboration between organisations;
2. *The Theoretical Frame*: the transformation process of collaboration over time; and
3. *The Context*: VCOs and a voluntary agency working together in a consortium.

These areas were examined during the second and third phase of data collection, which helped develop a conceptual framework. The analysis of data from the evaluation exercise, the first phase of research, demonstrated that there needed to be a *strategy* for

the partnership to achieve its objective, *participants* or organisations that would deliver services, a *process* in which organisations would collaborate and build relationships with other partners, and an *outcome*, which demonstrated the end of the project and what these organisations had achieved in delivering a combined service. The organisation that was the coordinator, referred to as the Accountable Body (AB), was a non-delivery partner who played a central role in this arrangement. Its purpose or role was to monitor and coordinate the activities and progress of the partnership for stakeholders. While there was a degree of belonging to the partnership, the task orientation of the inter-organisational arrangement, inexperience of partners, a reduction in the time to complete the project, and poor communication between group members beyond their meetings, caused collaborative inertia to develop. This affected the partnership's journey and the way organisational members worked together. Though targets were being achieved, their IORs were not being nurtured.

Based on the design and short-duration of the project, it seems that this partnership was hindered throughout the project and was something to which organisational members had to adapt in order for the contract to be completed. There was an urgency to deliver targets and this is what these organisations set out to do, which unfortunately had an effect on how organisational members worked together. This behaviour established an IOR that was task-orientated. Building relationships was poor at the beginning but then became part of what they were doing and what they needed to do. But this was only realised at the end of the project. Their task-orientated IOR shifted to a relationship-orientated IOR. This highlights the difficulty that some service providers might have in terms of building closer relationships at the beginning of a project. If project partnerships are only meant to be short-term or temporary arrangements, it can be questionable whether any long-term benefit will be achieved if there is not enough time to develop IORs. While it would appear funding regimes have driven these types of organisations to be autonomous and independent, collaboration involves interdependent working. Perhaps what needs to be explored is the ways in which partners can provide services jointly with other organisations over a longer period. It seems that, if service delivery providers are to partner with other service delivery providers, more time and funding is needed to build a partnership, to share resources, and to develop relationship procedures and structures.

Evidence suggests that the partnership did not fully develop collaboration as this arrangement was something new to all organisational members. Advantage gained from the project was mainly attributable to organisations being funded, which sustained and improved their service provision, as well as offering a way for providers to access expertise and knowledge from similar organisations. With no procedures to formally develop relationships, it was difficult to see whether organisations could coexist with others in their partnership and whether relationships would continue. This was dependent on what they did with their time to deliver their targets while being restricted by a shorter completion timeframe. During the project, members did not attempt to build relationships with other providers until it was close to completion. After the project adjourned, members continued to meet and there was a continuation of relationships. Members worked together to bid for other projects as a consortium but were unfortunately, not successful. However, this period of their partnership journey identified a time when they voluntarily met as a partnership. With no funding or opportunities to continue the partnership, members gradually disengaged from the consortium and the partnership ended.

Following Boyce's (1995) approach, this research study has demonstrated how individuals share an experience and how organisational stories are used to construct a 'collective sense' of a phenomenon. This approach has identified that "knowledge is not the property of one individual rather an activity people engage in together" (Du Toit, 2003, p.30). It is a socially constructed activity; "what is experienced is the result of a social interchange between people engaged in reciprocal relationships" (Du Toit, 2003, p.34). To make sense of something "is to organize, and sense making refers to processes of organising using the technology of language – processes of labelling and categorising for instance – to identify, regularize and routinize memories into plausible explanations and, indeed, whole narratives" (Brown et al., 2008, p.1055). This is recognised as a "collectively constructed process over time" (Cunliffe et al., 2004, p.262), which is referred to as 'narrative temporality' that draws upon the past, present and future. It involves exploring how individuals jointly make sense of experience in specific contexts and moments, but also how this sense-making may change as time passes and when new experiences are being encountered. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate this process. Its aim was to observe how several organisations worked together to achieve a shared objective, to collaborate and deliver a combined service, and how their journey continued into a new phase. In doing so, important observations were made as

to how relationships formed, developed and ended, but also what transpires after the original objective was completed. Through narratives, members were able to convey what the partnership was, is and wants to become as well as how it conducts its activities (Küpers, 2005).

The final template or thematic structure of the pilot project identified a number of themes from the analysis process. It involved capturing, exploring and triangulating data from interviews and observations, where words, sentences and paragraphs were labelled under themes and categories. A review of literature in and around the topic helped to frame a final template. Data that were inadmissible were such things unrelated to the research question, e.g. what relationships service providers had with organisations that were not part of the project, and individual projects organisations were working on. “Through careful, iterative interpretation both of the data and of the range of factors influencing the production and analysis of that data”, this thesis has attempted to “move towards a richer understanding of the phenomenon” (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010, p.171) - a movement from description to interpretation (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). This technique provided an analysis process that unfolded over time, was systematic, and reflective of previous and current events. It was a phenomenological approach that provided a richer understanding of the partners’ IOR at different points in time.

This case study aimed to present a shared experience between service providers in a collaborative project. In doing so, this collective account developed a ‘verbal portrait’ (Polkinghorne, 1988) that revealed the essence of the partnership’s journey from everything that had taken place, including a reflexive account of those events (Hayllar and Griffin, 2005; Pivcevic, 1970; Prasad and Mir, 2002; Ricoeur, 1980). Similar to Conklin (2011, p.4), “the synthesis, as the final description, captures the fundamental essence of the experience”. He advised that this account should “reflect the experience of all the participants and can be viewed as the foundational expression of what is timeless in the phenomenon” (Conklin, 2011, p.4). This method of phenomenological research requires researchers to understand and interpret experience, to invite new and ongoing questioning, and to reveal or uncover hidden meaning and truths. It involves a fairly extensive process where the researcher engages in a prolonged period of research (Van Manen, 1990). “The end result is a description of the essential structure of the lived experience from the perspective of the discipline” (Neergaard and Uihøi, 2007, p.81).

10.3 My Reflexive Approach of the Partnership's Journey

One of the hardest parts of this research was not having a 'road map' to follow or knowing a project that had experienced something similar to what I was doing. At the beginning, it was merely an evaluation exercise of a consortium arrangement. My role was presented as an outsider, a Research Assistant who had to collect and analyse data from managers, advisers, and service users for an evaluation report, which would be presented to the commissioning body (CB). I was contracted to research and document the partnership's progress and how service users benefited from this inter-organisational arrangement. Any relationships formed were strictly professional, where there was very little contact with participants except during an interview, partnership meetings, or when something needed to be confirmed from an observation. As Cope (2005, p.181) notes "in terms of reflexivity, it is extremely important that researchers using the phenomenological interview recognize the implicit, 'hidden agenda' that they bring to the research process, even though the primary aim is to explore phenomena from the level of lived experience and not to explore or confirm one's own perceptions, ideas or theories". My approach to this study is explained in Chapters 5 and 9.

Following an interpretive phenomenological approach, this thesis argues that the actions and interpretations of the researcher, in addition to those of the participants, are significant in shaping the outcomes of the research. It assumes participants and researchers (co-)construct research findings (Finlay and Gough, 2003). Ultimately, I played the central role in dictating what was recorded and how it was interpreted. This involved exploring 'sense-making', which is "about such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning" (Weick, 1995, p.6). However, what data were recorded and how these were subsequently analysed was highly influenced by both the epistemological perspective being developed and the theories and approaches being used to structure the analysis. The narrative constructed has been one based on a shared experience and my interpretation of the stories told by several organisational members. Given the rich, descriptive nature of in-depth interviews, and the way researchers go about their studies, presenting findings are subjective to research aims and objectives and a researcher's position in the research (Boje, 2001). By demonstrating the process, through which themes and categories were captured and explored, and addressing these findings with participants during interviews, the

reliability of this work was maintained. Researchers are also “implored to question how they ‘make truth claims and construct meaning’ so as to make the nature of those claims ‘more transparent’. Each researcher is now not just to research other people, but to supplement this with looking inwards and studying himself or herself to create a reflexive dialogue” (Rhodes, 2009, p.664). By providing a reflexive account, of the times when data were collected and analysed, this research study shows how fieldwork was conducted and how the case study was also experienced by the researcher (Finlay, 2002). The objective of this was to support how this thesis was conducted, and provide further insight into the phenomenon that was being examined (Cope, 2004).

By attempting to capture the complexity of a single case (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994), probing and analysing the subject matter intensively through a series of interviews and observations, this thesis has brought new insights into how a consortium experienced collaboration and also how IORs developed over time without any outside interference (e.g. consultation with or advice from the researcher). This allowed the partnership to develop naturally and run its course without my support. My approach and behaviour did not change but assumptions and feelings toward the partnership did. I witnessed organisations working together to deliver services in partnership transform into one that was unable to sustain itself and which eventually ended. These dilemmas have been documented in Finlay (2002). By withholding questions, assumptions or knowledge I attempted not to react to what was unfolding in order to study the phenomenon (Ashworth, 1999; Van Manen, 1997). Though I did not want to see it end, I could not do anything about it. Ultimately, there was no funding and because of this the partnership was unable to continue.

Until similar case studies are examined, it is wrong to assume that this thesis is a blueprint for other partnerships in the VCS, as there are a myriad of organisations providing different types of services that operate in this sector. Subsequent work and or examinations of inter-organisational arrangements are advised, which would demonstrate how similar organisations collaborate with other providers over time, and would also identify whether these types of partnerships experience similar issues. The value and originality of this phenomenological approach included new insights that are important and relevant to other researchers and practitioners that study collaboration, a partnership journey that is also shared by the researcher, and I hope to have made others think differently about the subject of IORs, for example, how I went about a

hermeneutic inquiry, and drew upon theory and frameworks from relevant organisational disciplines to support the analysis and interpretation of an IOR between charity-based service providers in a VCS partnership. The outcome of this, however, is something that will probably be different to other partnerships as relationships are based on a number of contextual factors, e.g. individuals, number of organisations, environmental influences, resources, previous experience of partnership working, and how organisations go about working together (Wilson and Charlton, 1997), most of which have been touched upon in this thesis. Therefore, it is important to recognise that how people perceive and talk about collaboration is likely to vary from partnership to partnership, and may well differ according to how researchers collect, analyse and interpret data, and present their findings.

10.4 Implications for Researchers, Practitioners and Policy-makers

There are several lessons to be learnt from this thesis, which can help those individuals that have something to gain from this type of study and those interested in taking forward this research, mainly researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers. These are groups of individuals who work in the VCS and are interested in partnership working, IORs, and collaboration between small, local-driven service providers.

- What emerges from this case study is that collaboration as a concept is a complex phenomenon that evolves over time, and to understand it involves observing individuals and their interactions when organisations are working together. The aim of this thesis is not to display data that is somehow representative of a wider population to which it can be generalised. Rather, the aim is to convey to the reader a sense of how organisations in a consortium arrangement worked together. Consequently, this research study attempted to understand collaboration using a cross-sectional and longitudinal approach. Because this research approach targets the micro-level of relationship formation and development, and while this adds to current literature, there needs to be further understanding of those macro-level factors (e.g. the external environment) that can affect organisational relationships and decision-making. Though this has been partly considered in this work, given the time and focus of this research study, there needs to be a wider examination which could explore national and regional factors that affect a partnership.

- This study provides significant insight into how VCOs and a voluntary agency collaborate, specifically a partnership's journey, how relationships develop over different stages and what is needed to be more effective, e.g. cooperation, communication, and more formal management procedures and practices. Such research would help inform organisations, local authorities, and funding bodies as to how to address how these arrangements are formed and developed, where under conditions of resource scarcity, organisations will have to engage in certain exchanges with other providers to reduce environmental uncertainty and manage their dependence (Guo and Acar, 2005; Sowa, 2009; Tsasis, 2009); this is supported by 'resource dependency theory' (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). However, in order to survive and be sustainable, organisations must conform to the rules and belief systems that prevail within their environment, which is consistent with 'institutional theory' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).
- From an IOR behavioural perspective, findings do question the time, procedures, and mechanisms that are needed to develop relationships between VCOs, e.g. whether there is enough time in contractual-based project partnerships for collaboration to be effectively developed, as project cycles are short-lived arrangements. Another aspect of these partnerships is how they are managed and led. Is it something that is centrally managed by one lead organisation or by providers managing their own activities as independent providers where their services are not compromised? These issues all need to be addressed by organisational members when entering a consortium as they may conflict with their arrangement at a later stage (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998).
- Despite a growing body of literature on the topic, collaboration between organisations in the VCS remains somewhat fragmented across several disciplines. A conceptual framework, which captures the contextual terrain of VCOs in which collaboration occurs, i.e. how it forms, develops and ends, has yet to be documented. The models that have supported and helped to frame the analysis in this thesis include Wilson and Charlton's (1997) five-stage model of partnership working, Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) five-stage model of group development, Gersick's (1988, 1989) punctuated equilibrium model of change,

Schopler's (1987) work on inter-organisational groups, Huxham (1993, 2003) and Huxham and Vangen's (1996, 1998, 2004, 2005) theory on collaboration, and Ring and Van de Ven (1994) developmental processes of cooperative IORs. These models created an integrated framework that coincided with shared meaning, where there were specific stages of development. However, instead of collaboration sequentially changing over time, the partnership was interrupted by sudden, unplanned change, which affected how members worked together.

The partners' IOR was conditioned to be a functional group arrangement wherein they had to deliver targets. Because of a shortened completion timeframe, and how outputs were individually orientated and managed, collaborative inertia emerged and manifested throughout the project partnership. Collaborative advantage was also achieved during the project when partners shared expertise and knowledge, and their service users, and when members saw the value or benefits of working as a partnership they wanted to continue working together. This suggests both advantage and inertia can be experienced at different stages during a project life cycle and not just as an outcome from a project being completed.

- Lastly, this phenomenological inquiry looked for the “essence or essences of shared experience” (Patton, 1990, p.70), which are the underlying themes of a phenomenon (Gibson & Hanes, 2003). Smith et al. (2009, p.14) refer to this as “the set of invariant properties lying underneath the subjective perceptions of individual manifestations of that type of object”. This study identified five themes, which were: (i) the orientation of the project and its management, (ii) the time allocated to forming, developing, and nurturing relationships, (iii) the behaviour, interaction and interdependence of organisations or individuals with others in the partnership, (iv) learning and growth, and (v) sustainability, a continuance of relationships and renewed membership. These themes captured the essence of a partner's IOR. Basically, this synthesis reflected the experience of all the organisations in the partnership.

What this research study has done is to explore an inter-organisational arrangement between service providers working in the VCS more comprehensively that was initially only intended to be an evaluation study. This thesis has set out to provide a framework

that can be used to study other partnerships that are similar to the one in this case study. This study has important implications for both theory and practice. It provides a basis for understanding collaboration as the unit of analysis in temporary project partnerships between charity-based organisations, and has demonstrated a research process that others are able to follow when taking a phenomenological, interpretative approach to exploring IORs in the VCS.

10.5 Limitations of the Research

Potential limitations (i.e. those theoretical, methodological and analytical choices that have been made) are briefly outlined below.

In response to establishing a congruent theoretical base, this work has attempted to develop an integrated framework from themes that were implied in the research question (e.g. the concept, theoretical frame, and context). Concepts and theories supported the analysis and interpretation of research, but as this was an empirical study, the process revolved around a number of observations over time. How this happened was circumstantial. There was no intent to initially explore collaboration, nor the partners' IOR, which influenced the research process and how I would conduct myself during the research study. By providing a full account of the research process, when a literature search was conducted and what theory / concepts were used, as well as my position/role, assumptions and behaviours, I have attempted to justify my actions and this phenomenological approach to explore collaboration.

Methodologically, this work has attempted to develop a framework using qualitative methods that explore the shared experience of collaboration between individuals working in a partnership. The research strategy reflected a case study design over an eighteen-month period in an attempt to uncover shared meanings that were consistent with all organisational members. In-depth interviews and observations that were triangulated with secondary data sources were appropriate methods to understand the research question. These methods were triangulated at different times to examine whether data were consistent during later periods in the partnership's journey or whether opinions had changed. While this improved the validity of data, this work recognises the need for a quantitative study to compare similar arrangements to

understand whether these types of partnerships experience similar phenomena or shared meaning.

At the beginning of fieldwork there was also great a deal of uncertainty around the research process; however, as more data were gathered during the continuance period in their partnership, the research focus was narrowed. It was an iterative process until the point of data saturation, when nothing new could be said or observed of how these organisations worked together. The third interview phase was an example of this. It was a time when the partnership was ending and participants informed me that they were either being made redundant, were leaving their organisation or that their organisation was closing due to insufficient funds. Because their relationships stopped, so did observations. To address any shortcomings of research validly, data were triangulated and findings were examined at different periods, at which times transcripts were read and re-read until it was clear that those themes were valid expressions of their experience. They were then reviewed with participants to identify whether shared meaning of their journey was accurately represented, and they confirmed that it was. Participants may have various reasons for disagreeing with the analyses of their behaviour, and indeed, such disagreements may provide further evidence of how an organisation has worked with another provider (Fitzpatrick and Boulton, 1994). In a workshop however, key partners confirmed initial findings. Additional interview phases then enabled findings to be explored and interpretation of their shared experience to be validated.

In response to any doubts of generalizability, this case study reveals the complex and connected realities of organisations working in a partnership. A next course of action would be to locate other case studies, to examine whether these arrangements experience similar themes, e.g. whether shared meaning, their collective account, sense-making, and underlying themes are experienced by other VCS consortia. However, this may be difficult to do as it would mean searching for similar arrangements of organisations that have no or very little experience of working with other providers. These would be ‘pilot project partnerships’, which have yet to start or have just begun. It is also important for a researcher to be with organisations as they are delivering their services because it provides further insight into their relationship and how it develops. In doing so, this approach identifies data that organisational members might not discuss in interviews. Only by a researcher observing interactions and the behaviour of partners

in relation to one another do findings become more robust. I was able to retrospectively explore collaboration, by interviewing participants at different points in time and cross checking our discussions, whilst also observing with my own eyes their interactions as the partnership was taking place. A great amount of time and energy was spent triangulating data and verifying findings with participants. Observations, reflections and reflexivity supported this process.

10.6 Concluding Remarks

While this research has added new insight into and knowledge of the study of collaboration, it is a difficult concept to fully appreciate without spending a prolonged period of time with a partnership throughout its duration. The collection of data provided a current, as well as retrospective, view of the partnership. At the heart of a VCO in a consortium arrangement are the quality of services delivered to users and funding. These are issues ingrained in each service provider. However, their individuality in providing services and the short-term nature of the project, conflicted with their interdependence in sharing users and collaborating with all partners during the pilot project. It is an obstacle that needs to be addressed at the beginning of a partnership, as well as how it is monitored and managed. This will help identify how best to work with partners and deliver targets as they are important requisites for collaboration to take place (see NCVO, 2011).

This research study has identified a partnership that wanted or desired collaboration, an inter-organisational arrangement that for most members would sustain their services and for others improve what they already provided. Though it was a project with a short life-cycle, it was a partnership wherein all members wanted to continue. Unfortunately, because these arrangements rely on government and national bodies to fund them, they will not always be there and when funding does become available, it might not fit with what an organisation does or what the partnership is able to provide. Though there was no funding or sign of another project after the first and only failed attempt to bid for a new project, this partnership faced these challenges and uncertainties together as a consortium. While external factors were against them, what emerged from this case study was an organisation wanting to be interdependent with other providers to build a partnership rather than being directed by others in the sector to engage in it. It was a project with a shared objective and that is what the organisations within it accomplished.

It is fair to say that this research study demonstrated two journeys. The first explored a partnership to complete a project and their desire to do it again. The second examined the researcher's approach to understanding their partnership. Though it was a new experience for participants that would last several months, it was also a journey that I shared. Organisations certainly learned how to improve the way they worked together, and I also learned how these partnerships work. There were twists and turns - an evaluation study that developed into a research study, and a partnership that attempted to continue working together without being funded - and there were changes in emotions; feelings of optimism and joy to feelings of doubt and sorrow. Being with the consortium for such a long time, I was sad to see it end but that is part of research (Stake, 2005). Time was an important factor in how knowledge was constructed but also the way in which I employed a phenomenological approach to study the partnership. Though this thesis is quite descriptive, I would certainly do it again. The methods that were used and the way it was conducted, and reported, have provided a detailed account of collaboration and how it was experienced. This research study has developed my curiosity of consortium arrangements and has enabled me to examine a VCS partnership using a range of theories and assumptions that philosophically underpin this study.

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