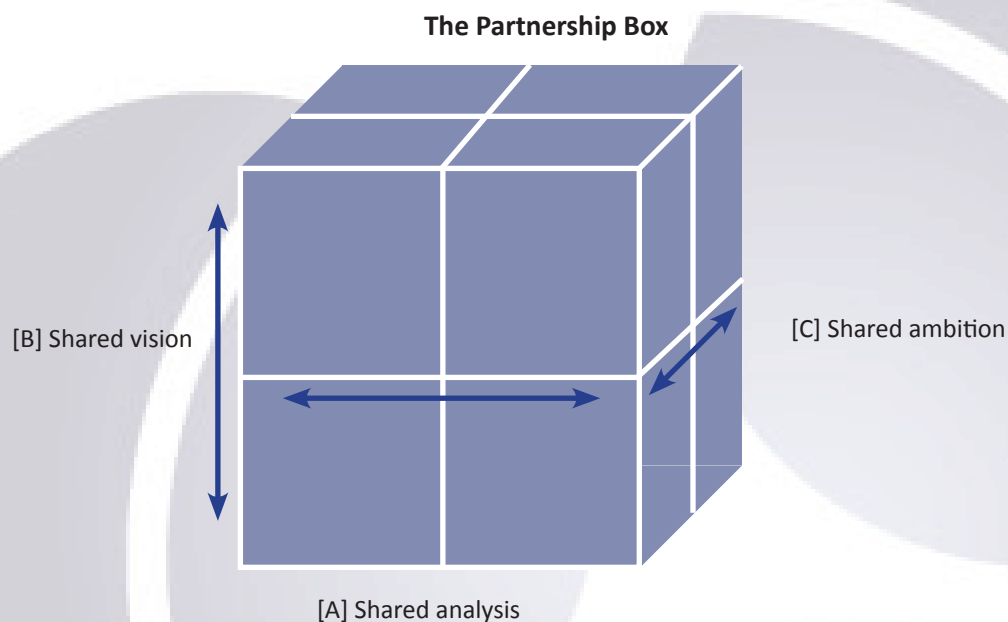


THE PARTNERSHIP BOX

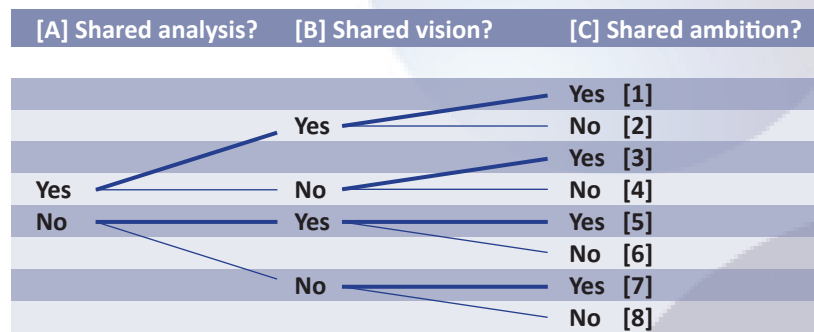
The notion of 'partnerships' can be seen as a process in which partners commit to long-term, structural interaction based on a shared analysis that every actor suffers from a number of failures, consequently a shared vision of sustainability and a shared ambition that all partners should play a role in its achievement. The underlying idea of partnerships is that by generating additional knowledge and resources, results can be achieved that benefit all parties and which they could not have achieved on an individual basis. Collaborative advantage is achieved if the following equation is reached: $1+1+1=4$. The widely-held expectation is that (cross-sector) partnerships provide both organizational benefits to their member organizations and create synergy to achieve effective outcomes for society.

Partnerships, thus, have three basic dimensions: analysis, vision, ambition. Together they can be portrayed as a Partnership Box, consisting of eight possible building blocks.



In practice the box proves more of a 'black box' in which the nature and outcome of the interaction between the building blocks remains largely obscure. Not all of these dimensions are regularly and/or systematically considered in partnering theory and practice. In partnering research the very definition of a partnership is based on a 'shared vision'. But in practice we can see that even without a shared vision, partnerships can be necessary and even effective. Shared vision can materialize also at the end of a partnership project and do not have to function at the start of a partnership. Many partnerships have materialized ad-hoc, so it becomes important to understand whether the partners share a problem-analysis. A shared analysis is bound to influence the effectiveness of the output of the partnership, but is not a necessary condition. The same applies to the third dimension, the ambition or operationalized management of the partnering organizations or individuals.

The Partnership Box: a decision tree



[A] = Issue analysis, problem definition

[B] = goal, output and outcome orientation, mission definition

[C] = implementation, organisation and means attribution (management of expectations)

This sequence can be illustrated by a decision-tree, which distinguishes between eight different types of partnerships based on a particular (simple yes/no) combination of analysis, vision and ambition. The figure also operationalizes what degree of shared vision, analysis and ambition can be expected to lead to the most effective type of partnership. The thickness (weight) of the line shows our expectations. We would expect those partnerships that are based on a shared analysis, vision and ambition to have the highest possible change of success [type 1]. But we could expect that organizations that cooperate on the basis of a shared problem analysis and shared operationalizations (on how to address the issue) [type 3] can be more effective even if they do not share a vision, as compared to a badly operationalized partnership that nevertheless share analysis and vision [type 2]. A shared vision is not a necessary, nor a sufficient condition for a (relatively effective) partnership. A shared problem definition seems to be more important perhaps than a shared vision [types 1-4 as compared to types 5-8]. What can be expected, though, is that in case all three dimensions of the box are not or only weakly present [type 8] the changes of success are particularly bleak. Nevertheless this type of partnership is conceivable. It is the 'agree to disagree' type of alliance, that might be the only possible mode of cooperation for instance at times of conflict or with very large interest differences between the actors.

¹Note that the yes/no characterization in practice should at least be elaborated into a five or seven point scale representing many more possible combinations. The simple decision-tree with eight outcomes is an ideal-type.