Preprint of:

Maier, Florentine, Neumayr, Michaela (in print): Collaboration between nonprofit organizations and businesses, In: (Eds): Ola Segnestam Larsson & Pelle Åberg, Civil Society and Collaboration with the State and the Market, Sagamore

Chapter 2: Collaboration between nonprofit organizations and businesses

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Abstract/Summary

Nonprofit organizations and businesses may collaborate for various reasons, such as obtaining needed monetary or non-monetary resources from the collaboration partner, increasing efficiency, or enhancing organizational legitimacy. They can collaborate in many different forms, for example, cause-related marketing, corporate volunteering, and social impact bonds. Collaborations vary in their degree of formality, permanence, interdependence, and they may range from simple transactional to complex integrative relationships. This chapter provides an overview of the options and design parameters of nonprofit-business collaboration, highlights the potentials of such collaborations, and outlines associated challenges.

Introduction

The athletes of the Swiss para-cycling team are wearing dresses featuring the logo of the elevator manufacturer Schindler. The logos are the visible sign of Schindler having entered a sponsoring relationship with the Swiss Paralympic Committee. This nonprofit organization selects teams and raises funds to send Swiss athletes with physical disabilities to international Paralympic events. Professional sportswear is essential in these highly competitive events, and Schindler has agreed to provide it free of charge for two years. In return, the company's logo is placed on the apparel.

Collaboration between businesses and nonprofits is widespread. They enter into collaboration because organizations complement each other, bringing something to the table that the other does not have. In the example given, the business brings in money to buy expensive sportswear, and the nonprofit brings in its high visibility and good reputation. When a nonprofit organization and a business enter into a collaboration, they do so to achieve outcomes that they probably could not achieve alone.

Nonprofit-business collaborations differ from business-business collaborations. They involve two different types of organizations with distinctive strengths and weaknesses (Salamon, 1987). Businesses usually have more financial strength, and nonprofits often have more expertise or reputation in their field of activity. These differences make nonprofits and businesses complement each other and bring many synergies for collaboration.

Differences between nonprofits and businesses have become somewhat less pronounced in recent years. Nowadays, many nonprofits themselves exhibit business-like characteristics (e.g., engaging in the sales of some kinds of services or products, see Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016). Many businesses have adopted a corporate social responsibility or sustainability orientation, thus exhibiting at least a potential affinity to the values of nonprofits. Nevertheless, fundamental orientations remain different, which can pose challenges for cooperation. In this chapter, we describe how nonprofits and businesses may collaborate, bring examples of such collaborations, and discuss opportunities and challenges.

Design dimensions of nonprofit-business collaborations

Collaboration between nonprofit organizations and businesses can take many different forms. They can be differentiated in terms of the goals and the expected outcome, in terms of formality, permanency, interdependence and intensity of collaboration, and in terms of the resources contributed by each partner. The exact form of collaboration is rarely determined from the outset. Some collaborations are very informal and are entered into almost unconsciously (such as information sharing), while others are formal, strategically planned, and contractual (such as mergers).

Why do nonprofits and businesses collaborate?

Nonprofits and businesses may collaborate for a variety of reasons. Traditionally, it has been assumed that the nonprofit's motive is primarily altruistic work for the common good, while the business partner's motives are primarily self-interested (e.g., enhancing corporate image; garnering social capital and accessing networks; selling products; attracting, motivating and retaining desirable employees, Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 855). However, accumulating research has made it increasingly clear that this distinction is too simplistic because boundaries between altruism and enlightened self-interest are blurry, as is the notion of the common good.

Generally speaking, the reasons that prompt collaboration can be traced back to six motives (Oliver, 1990). Each one is a separate and sufficient motivator for collaborations, but often they interact or occur concurrently:

- **Meeting regulatory requirements:** Businesses and nonprofits may establish linkages with each other to meet necessary legal or regulatory requirements. Mandates from higher authorities (e.g., government agencies, legislation, industry, or professional regulatory bodies) may provide the impetus for collaborations that otherwise might not have occurred voluntarily.
- **Exercising power over other actors:** Businesses and nonprofits may collaborate to be bigger and stronger together, thus being able to withstand the control of other actors or exert control over them and their resources. Partners may even aim for systemic impacts, such as influencing public policy or changing whole industries.
- **Obtaining resources from the collaboration partner**: One collaboration partner may directly or indirectly provide the other with financial or human resources. For example, a nonprofit may help a business increase sales figures or boost employee commitment; a business may pay a licensing fee to a nonprofit. Collaborations may also enhance partners' capacities, such as when nonprofits teach businesses to gauge public sentiment more accurately or teach them new technical knowledge about environmental sustainability.
- **Increasing efficiency**: Collaborations may be motivated by the desire to better use the resources already at hand. For example, collaborators may seek to reduce unit costs, cost per patient or client, waste, or downtime.
- **Achieving stability:** Another reason for collaborations is the desire for stability or predictability. In other words, collaborators may seek to reduce uncertainty in their environment. Such uncertainty arises from resource scarcity and a lack of knowledge about the fluctuating availability of resources and exchange partners. Collaborations are a strategy to forestall, forecast, or absorb uncertainty to achieve an orderly resource flow. For example, a business may prefer to cooperate with an environmentalist nonprofit organization to avoid becoming the subject of unpredictable activism that may damage its reputation.
- **Enhancing organizational legitimacy**: Gaining legitimacy or protecting one's reputation is another reason for collaborations between businesses and nonprofits. For example, a nonprofit organization may enhance the business partner's legitimacy by generating positive media coverage improving their image.

An example of businesses collaborating with nonprofits to meet regulatory requirements is corporate social responsibility (CSR) in India. In 2013, a law was passed that required large companies to spend at least 2% of their net profits on CSR, either by implementing CSR activities directly on their own, through their own nonprofit foundations, or by collaborating with an independently registered nonprofit organization (Guha, 2020). An example for the motive of exercising power over other actors can be found in the field of forest certification schemes (Bloomfield, 2012): The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC) are rivaling eco-labels, both involving businesses and nonprofit organizations. The FSC was launched in 1993, largely due to the initiative of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), a nonprofit organization. The PEFC is also issued by a nonprofit organization, but it requires lower standards than the FSC. The PEFC was established in 1999 upon the initiative of wood producers as an alternative to FSC certification in an attempt to gain control over the eco-labelling in the forestry industry.

How do nonprofits and businesses collaborate?

There are many options for how nonprofit-business collaborations can be designed; there is no one best way. Important design dimensions include the degree of formality, permanence, interdependence, and intensity of collaboration (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Guo & Acar, 2005). Often these dimensions go in parallel, with higher interdependence, permanence, formality, and intensity of collaboration necessitating and facilitating each other:

- **Formality** means that cooperation rules are defined in writing (or graphically, e.g., in organizational charts or process diagrams, or technically in IT processes). Informal collaborations are based on unwritten shared understandings and oral communication.
- **Permanence** means that collaborators make an open-ended, long-term commitment to the partnership. In the opposite case of episodic collaboration, partners engage in one-time transactions, simply exchanging something with each other.
- **Interdependence** means that collaborators combine, share, or transfer their services, resources, or programs. In contrast, collaborations with a high degree of autonomy let partners retain decision-making power over the key management functions of their organizations.
- **Intensity** of collaboration can range from a transactional partnership to an integrative one. In a transactional partnership, both partners remain largely autonomous. They give or receive resources, either in a symmetrical relationship or in an asymmetrical,

philanthropical relationship. In an integrative partnership, the partners' missions merge, and their workforces and activities intermingle.

The following are examples of collaborations with typically low levels of formality, permanence, interdependence, and intensity:

- **Sharing information**: Nonprofits and businesses may share information about wider developments that are relevant to their managerial or substantive professional work (e.g., by participating in events or professional networks). They may also exchange information about individual stakeholders (e.g., sharing information about a particular client as part of a case management approach). For example, managers of nonprofit and for-profit hospitals (as well as public hospitals) may participate in the same professional network for hospital managers, or healthcare professionals in those various organizations may exchange patient information. (c.f. Guo & Acar, 2005)
- **Joint programs**: Nonprofits can design programs in which businesses play an important part. For example, a community rehabilitation centre may form partnerships with companies to place clients to work there. Instead of leaving clients to look for work entirely on their own, the nonprofit assists them by developing ties with potential employers (Suarez and Hwang, 2013, 586).
- **Shared services**: Shared service providers are typically businesses that provide management or administrative services. They focus on transaction-oriented and repetitive services that are similar for many organizations, such as financial services including accounts payable and accounts receivable, pay-roll, facility management, or information technology operations (Walsh, McGregor-Lowndes, & Newton, 2008, p. 202). In those cases, the relationship between the shared service provider and the nonprofit is often long-standing, but on a subscription or subcontracting basis, with the nonprofit organization maintaining autonomy over the direction of the services (Guo & Acar, 2005, p. 344). An interesting alternative to shared service providers are so-called "management service organizations" that are nonprofit organizations (Walsh et al., 2008). Due to tax benefits, these may be able to provide lower prices, and they can offer services tailored to the needs of many nonprofit organizations (e.g. fundraising, contract management with government institutions, and quality assurance in healthcare or social services).

The following are examples of collaborations with high levels of formality, permanence, interdependence, and intensity:

- **Mergers**: A merger means that two or more organizations combine into a single, new reporting entity. Mergers between nonprofit and for-profit entities have been common in the healthcare field. However, most organizations prefer to merge with a partner from the same (i.e., nonprofit or for-profit) sector (Harrison, 2006). When organizations from different sectors merge, the question of whether the new entity should have nonprofit or for-profit status ensues, as do complex taxation issues. Evidence from the US hospital industry (Sloan, Ostermann, & Conover, 2003) suggests that conversions to nonprofit status are less common than conversions to for-profit status, but quite common nonetheless and typically occur as a reaction to a decline in profit margins. Conversions to for-profit status, in contrast, are typically a reaction to chronically low profit margins. (c.f. Guo & Acar, 2005)
- **Joint ventures**: A joint venture is a cooperative agreement between two or more organizations for the purpose of improving their performance by sharing resources or tasks. The partners in a joint venture remain separate legal entities but are bound by an agreement on how to share equity, liabilities, and profits from their partnership. Such joint ventures between nonprofits and businesses are often particularly complex and sensitive regarding taxation. Typical examples can be found in the healthcare field, when nonprofit and for-profit healthcare providers cooperate in providing services, or when it comes to developing real estate held by a nonprofit organization.
- **Parent subsidiary**: Nonprofit organizations and profit-oriented businesses can be connected in a holding relationship. A business may found a nonprofit organization (often a foundation) that provides welfare services to its employees or engages in broader corporate social responsibility practices. For example, Austrian post (the country's largest logistics and postal service provider) has founded a philanthropic association to provide social support to active and retired employees, their relatives, and surviving dependents. This association provides financial support in the event of extraordinary burdens such as illness or natural disasters, discounted tickets to cultural and sporting events, childcare during the vacation season, healthy leisure activities, and so on (Baumüller, 2019). On the other hand, nonprofit organizations may found profit-oriented businesses, often by obligation by tax regulations that engage in profit-making activities and provide funding to the nonprofit organization from the thereby generated profit. For example, the CareQuest Institute is a nonprofit organization that aims to promote the oral health of disadvantaged groups through grant making, health-improvement programs, research, education, and advocacy. It also has a for-profit affiliate, CareQuest Innovation Partners,

which focuses on impact investment to develop innovations in the oral health care industry, such as drill-free technologies to eliminate tooth decay (vVARDIS, 2021).

What do nonprofits and businesses bring to the collaboration?

Collaborations may entail the exchange and combination of various kinds of resources. Consider the example of an elevator manufacturer that has its logo printed on the dresses of para-cyclists. The sponsoring business brings in money, thus enabling the Paralympic Committee to buy dresses. The Paralympic Committee brings in access to an audience of people from the field of disability rights and barrier-free access, which results in the elevator manufacturer becoming better known, improving its image, and perhaps even gaining new clients. Thus, one organization contributes resources that the other needs but does not have. Resources involved can range from highly tangible ones (such as money and gifts in kind) to highly intangible resources (such as reputational resources and other factors that can enhance legitimacy, see Harris, 2012).

Roughly ranked by their degree of tangibility, Table 1 displays the types of resources typically brought into collaborations (Harris, 2012). Businesses typically bring in ”capital, managerial capability, large-scale and global production capabilities, legitimacy with other private sector players, global sourcing, purchasing power and brand value with customers” (Dahan, Doh, Oetzel, & Yaziji, 2010, p. 330). On the other part, nonprofits typically may offer knowledge about markets and customer needs, brand value with their clients, the trust of customers and gatekeepers, legitimacy with civil society and government actors, access to global and local suppliers, and access to distribution systems (Dahan et al., 2010, p. 331). Partners may not just bring in resources directly; they may also bring in resources from third parties. For example, a company may bring in money by prompting its customers to donate money to the nonprofit organization.

Partners may contribute generic resources (such as money), i.e., resources that are common to many similar organizations. Or they may leverage more valuable core competence resources that are distinctive for their organization, for instance, access to a particular supplier, knowledge, or capability (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b). Depending on the intensity of the cooperation, the type of resources involved vary. In typically philanthropic collaborations (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b), the business contributes tangible resources such as money or donations in kind, while the nonprofit contributes intangible resources such as reputation and image.

Table 1. Type of resources involved in nonprofit-business collaboration (modified from Harris, 2012)

	From business to nonprofit	From nonprofit to business
Money (e.g., donation, sponsorship, licensing fee)	x	
Gifts in kind (e.g., goods, premises, food, equipment)	x	
Use of assets (e.g., premises, equipment)	x	x
Untrained labour (employees, volunteers)	x	x
Specialist services (e.g., IT, staff training)	x	x
Specialist knowledge (e.g., market knowledge, technical expertise)	x	x
Social capital, network (e.g., relationships with suppliers, relationships with government officials)	x	x
Halo effect of association with brand name or purpose	x	X

Established and new forms of collaborations

In practice, collaboration between businesses and nonprofits takes many forms. Think of a grocery chain partnering with a nonprofit in an expired food reuse program, the latter giving the food to soup kitchens. Collaborating for joint programs is an example of a rather generic form of collaboration that is common in collaboration between businesses but may be pursued by nonprofits in collaboration with businesses as well. Such generic forms of collaboration also include, amongst others, information-sharing, referral of clients, sharing management service organizations, joint programs, parent-subsidiary-relationships, joint ventures, and mergers. In this chapter, however, we will focus on forms of collaboration that are specific to collaborations between nonprofits and businesses. We describe five examples of such collaborations between nonprofits and corporations that are particularly widespread (cause-related marketing, corporate volunteering, certification schemes) or innovative (social impact bonds, shareholder activism).

Cause-related marketing

With its famous panda logo, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is an environmental organization with a highly recognizable image and one that is highly engaged in cause-related marketing. Taking just Spain in 2019 as an example, WWF engaged in five cause-related marketing actions with various companies. WWF cooperated with the fashion retailer H&M to introduce a children's clothing collection made of organic cotton that featured animals at risk of extinction. H&M donated 10% of the revenue from that collection to WWF Spain for conservation projects (Belda-Miquel, Ruiz-Molina, & Gil-Saura, 2021). The project was meant to improve H&M's image and actual sustainability record, provide funding to WWF, and raise awareness for nature conservation.

Cause-related marketing is defined as an „agreement between a company and a nonprofit organization to collaborate in a social cause and get mutual benefit. The company's commitment focuses on contributing (financially or in-kind) to the cause in terms of sales. Therefore, the donation will depend on consumer behavior" (Galan-Ladero, Galera-Casquet, & Alves, 2021, p. 4). It must not be confused with social marketing (i.e., marketing to achieve pro-social changes of attitudes and behaviors) or nonprofit marketing (i.e., all marketing efforts of nonprofit organizations).

Businesses typically engage in cause-related marketing to increase their organization's legitimacy and improve their image, while nonprofits typically engage to obtain resources from the business partner, such as funding, but also to raise awareness of their causes to a larger audience.

Overall, cause-related marketing is a fairly widespread and established form of collaboration, and both motivations and success factors have been extensively researched empirically. For successful cause-related marketing, it is important to ensure credibility. The customer should perceive that the business has a sincere interest in the social cause and that the marketing campaign actually achieves a positive outcome. Partners can achieve this by publishing information about concrete results of the collaboration (Stumpf & Teufl, 2014). Another crucial success factor is the cause-brand fit. The customer should perceive a fit between the sponsoring brand and the social cause. For example, if a brand of environmentally friendly detergent donates to a nonprofit organization that aims to preserve wetlands, that is a good cause-brand fit. On the other hand, if a manufacturer of carcinogenic pesticides and cancer therapy drugs sponsors National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (see Sulik, 2011), there is a conflict of interest and a poor cause-brand fit. Both partners should be careful about the other's good reputation. It is helpful if the collaborator is widely known, but the advantages of excellent cause-brand fit may outweigh the disadvantages of low brand awareness (Stumpf & Teufl, 2014).

Corporate volunteering

Armanda, Ben, and Daniel – all of them employees in the HR department of the global pharmaceutical company Pfizer – are handing out cups of water to gasping participants in a running race. They are at the Red Nose Run to benefit the nonprofit organization *Red Nose Clowns*, which brightens the lives of children in hospices. Pfizer is collaborating with Red Nose Clowns and has given not just Armanda, Ben, and Daniel but the entire HR department a day off to help run the race event. Employees have a lot of fun on this day, connect with others, improve their communication skills, and feel they have done a meaningful job.

That is what we call *corporate volunteering*; sometimes it is also referred to as *employee volunteering* or *personnel volunteering*. It means that a business offers the time or specific skills of its employees to a nonprofit organization for a planned activity (Rodell, Breitsohl, Schröder, & Keating, 2016). In the case described above, it is the Pfizer employees' time and labor power and not any particular skills they apply to help with the run. Such a collaboration is called hands-on corporate volunteering. Hands-on collaborations typically last one day or even less and involve many employees at the same time, sometimes an entire department or even the entire staff of a corporation. As opposed to that, we speak of skill-based corporate volunteering when employees contribute their specific professional skills and know-how, for example when they help a nonprofit organization with a press conference or its public-relations work, or when they provide legal advice. Skill-based corporate volunteering collaborations tend to last longer, most often a few weeks or months, and they involve only a few employees (Roza, Shachar, Meijs, & Hustinx, 2017). Hence, corporate volunteering projects can be differentiated according to the type of employee resources used, the duration of the collaboration, and the number of employees involved.

Probably the most widespread form of corporate volunteering is hands-on projects that involve many employees and last only half a day or a day. These collaborations are particularly popular with companies, presumably also because of their event character. Especially in the run-up to Christmas or before the summer vacations, many nonprofits receive requests from companies. This is not surprising; the motivations of companies for engaging in corporate volunteering are well studied and there is clear empirical evidence of the numerous benefits of corporate volunteering for companies, particularly in terms of their human resource management and marketing strategy (see Rodell et al., 2016). Scholars have found that corporate volunteering can increase employees' job satisfaction and work efficiency, promote the development of employee's skills, and support team building.

Furthermore, companies can use corporate volunteering to increase employees' identification with and commitment to the company, recognition as an attractive employer for potential employees, and customer loyalty. Also well studied is the question of why employees participate in corporate volunteering. They benefit from corporate volunteering because they can connect with others, experience a sense of belonging, improve work-related skills (e.g., communication, interpersonal skills) or because their job satisfaction and job meaningfulness increases (Rodell et al., 2016). But there is also a critical debate about employees involvement in corporate volunteering, such as whether it is truly volunteering (vs. „voluntolding“), or whether corporate volunteering triggers stress and competition among colleagues (e.g., Rodell et al., 2016; Rodell & Lynch, 2016).

Even more controversial in the literature is the question of why nonprofits engage in corporate volunteering. While nonprofit organizations expect to gain additional manpower, spread their message to a larger audience, and gain access to additional corporate resources, it is unclear whether these benefits actually outweigh their costs associated with corporate volunteering. Corporate volunteering incurs costs for nonprofits because, for example, they need staff to supervise corporate volunteers, to organize the event, and because the necessary materials must be provided. If poorly done, corporate volunteering may even place the reputation of the nonprofit at risk. What is more, often it is difficult to find a meaningful task for a large number of volunteers from companies who want to come at the same time (Caligiuri, Mencin, & Jiang, 2013; Cook & Burchell, 2018; Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013). Statements like ”we're not your free teambuilding event manager” (Schneider & Neumayr, 2021) illustrate that the benefits to the nonprofit are not always there. One of the key factors that make corporate volunteering a win-win collaboration for all involved is the balance of power. Explicit disclosure of mutual expectations also plays a role here, as does the fact that the nonprofit appears as a self-confident partner that knows what it has to offer. Some self-confident nonprofits have started to charge companies for corporate volunteering projects to cover the associated costs - and companies seem to accept this without complaint (Schneider & Neumayr, 2021). This also points to a new development in this form of nonprofit-business collaboration that challenges the assumed win-win character of corporate volunteering.

Labelling schemes

When shopping for tea, consumers are faced with a variety of similar products bearing labels from a variety of nonprofit organizations. Lipton, for example, displays the Rainforest

Alliance label, indicating its commitment to reducing environmental damage in rainforests. To receive this label, manufacturers must pledge to the nonprofit organization Rainforest Alliance to reduce their impact on rainforest ecosystems by a certain amount. Twinings carries the Fairtrade label, which emphasizes the equitable distribution of profits along the supply chain. To earn this label, companies must work with Fairtrade – an international network of nonprofit associations, cooperatives and small agricultural producers – to ensure that producers receive good prices and workers receive fair wages and decent working conditions. So both labels require cooperation between businesses and nonprofit organizations, but they address different environmental and social concerns. (Heyes & Martin, 2017)

A certification is a particular form of issuing an eco-label or social label that provides information about a product's environmental or social attributes, such as whether it was organically grown or harvested in socially responsible ways. Such labelling is often done through standardized logos or symbols on the packaging. It displays product attributes that consumers could – unlike taste or price – not detect directly. When successful, labels guarantee that products meet specified environmental or social standards. (Eden, 2012) Labelling can be done in three different ways. Firstly, manufacturers or retailers may do it themselves. This is called "first-party verification." It is not very trustworthy and more like advertising. Secondly, labelling can be done by trade associations or similar (often nonprofit) bodies closely related to manufacturers and retailers. This is called "second-party verification" and may vary in rigor. Finally, there is certification, which is also called "third-party verification." In this case, an independent organization – often a nonprofit organization – checks adherence to standards. This is the most trustworthy form of labelling that is least susceptible to commercial conflicts of interest. (Eden, 2012; Hatanaka & Busch, 2008)

All three types of labelling aim to increase the trustworthiness and thus organizational legitimacy of the business partner – which is why businesses get involved. At the same time, such labels ensure compliance with certain (ecological/social) production standards, which is the reason why nonprofits get involved.

There has been much research on how to design effective sustainability labelling schemes. One of the main insights from this research is that doing so requires a thorough understanding of the products to be labelled, and of the political, legal, and economic context. Labels are not always the most suitable tool for achieving a particular sustainability tool; sometimes other tools would be more appropriate. Previous research has shown that the consumer credibility of eco-labels is best when environmental nonprofit organizations are involved in the labelling schemes. For achieving the desired impact, it is therefore strongly recommended to involve nonprofits, especially during the selection of products, the development of criteria, and the monitoring phase. Moreover, in case of sustainability labelling, collaboration not just between businesses and nonprofits, but also collaboration with governmental organizations is highly recommended. By attuning labels with wider environmental policy goals, and with additional governmental measures such as sustainable procurement, the overall sustainability impact can be increased. (Frankl et al., 2017)

Critical thinking

"So you decided to buy a nontoxic cleaning product? Good for you. Just don't get too self-congratulatory" (Anthes, 2023). Purchasing a green product could make you more likely to behave more selfishly and less eco-consciously later on. Researchers at the University of Toronto (Mazar & Zhong, 2010) asked college students to shop for products online from either an eco-friendly or a conventional store. Then, in a classic experiment, they found that those who bought the eco-friendly one behaved more selfishly next time. This so-called licensing effect also works in other contexts. For instance, folks who insulate their houses and use green building products are likely to then crank up the heat. Are you like that?

Social impact bonds

In the German city of Mannheim, elementary school students who are not from Germany get extra lessons in German and mathematics. Mentors support students and teachers. The project is financed through a social impact bond. The chemical company BASF has pre-financed the project. The company will get its money back with interest from the city of Mannheim if, and only if, an agreed number of students achieve recommendations for high school. Bertelsmann Stiftung, a philanthropic foundation, initiated the project. The foundation is also responsible for scientifically evaluating the project. (Kapalschinski, 2021)

Social impact bonds (SIBs) come in many variations (Arena, Bengo, Calderini, & Chiodo, 2016; Clifford & Jung, 2016) and are known by different names in different locations. The term „Social Impact Bond" is mainly used in the UK, „Pay for Success" is the common term in the USA, the term „Social Benefit Bond" is used in Australia. Yet all of these forms of funding share certain commonalities: they involve a contract between a commissioner, who is almost invariably a government, and a commissioning agency. The commissioning agency may be an intermediary who prepares the deal, administers it, and subcontracts with a social service provider. Alternatively, the commissioning agency may be a social service provider acting as prime contractor and subcontracting with other social service providers, or may also act as an investor. Social service providers are typically private nonprofit organizations, but also social businesses or for-profit social service providers are possible. At least one investor is involved, who is legally separate from the social service provider and the commissioner. This investor may be philanthropic, profit-, or blended value-oriented. The investor may take on all or a part of the risk of non-performance, with or without guarantee of principal, with longer or shorter time to maturity. Payments are made from the commissioner to the investor if social service providers meet predefined social outcomes. Whether those outcomes have been attained is usually assessed by an independent evaluator. These characteristics make SIBs hybrid financial instruments par excellence: like a derivative, the value of a SIB depends on the achievement of a specific goal, specifically on the achievement of social impact (e.g., bringing a certain number of unemployed people into employment). However, unlike in a derivative, the investor has to provide up-front capital covering all or a large part of the projected costs. Like debt, the investment has a fixed term, the maximum return is capped, and the capital may be partly or fully secured. Alternatively, like equity, the capital may be entirely at risk. The areas of application for SIBs center on social problems where it is relatively feasible to identify the effects of an intervention on individuals or on a delineated group, for example, anti-recidivism programs, training and counselling programs to reduce unemployment, programs to prevent school dropouts, etc.

Unlike the other forms of collaboration described above, SIBs involve other partners in addition to a business and a nonprofit organization. And it is this that makes cooperation and the alignment of different interests and expectations much more complex. Nonprofits, for instance, typically join because they expect stable (long-term) funding and the freedom to innovate and personalize services according to client needs; businesses usually expect a high return on investment or to gain access to a particular social sector; and the public sector, on the other hand, expects increased flexibility and effectiveness in service delivery, evidence-based policy-making and lower overall costs of funding social services (Maier, Barbetta, & Godina, 2018).

The question of whether or under what conditions SIBs really meet these expectations (and are an efficient and effective financial instrument) can unfortunately not yet be answered based on sufficient empirical evidence (see the recent reviews by Broccardo, Mazzuca, &

Frigotto, 2020; Rijpens, Bouchard, Gruet, & Salathé-Beaulieu, 2020). Most research to date has been purely conceptual without empirical data, or relied on a single or few case studies of SIBs, or on interpretive analyses of texts about SIBs as rhetorical or discursive constructions.. Quantitative evidence about any of the effects and the cost efficiency of SIBs, especially in comparison to alternative funding schemes, is still lacking. And this lack of evidence also makes it difficult to come up with critical factors that make SIBs work well for all partners involved. One of the crucial issues is definitely the predefined social outcome and how it is measured, as it has already been warned that SIBs promote a financialized, commodifying, and dehumanizing attitude towards beneficiaries (see, for example, Sinclair, McHugh, & Roy, 2021). Great care must be taken in choosing metrics and target values, to avoid cherry-picking and other perverse incentives. Another recommendation for future SIBs is to publicly disclose more information about the costs, effects, and possible unintended side-effects of the SIB. So far, the lack of disclosure has inhibited research about SIBs (Broccardo et al., 2020), which is paradoxical for a funding tool that is frequently promoted as a paragon of evidence-based policy. It has led some researchers (such as Bell, 2021, p. 477) to become very skeptical of SIBs and even generally advise against using SIBs as long as the empirical evidence remains insufficient to demonstrate SIBs effectiveness and the conditions under which they might be appropriate (Rijpens et al., 2020, p. 31).

Shareholder activism

The oil and gas corporation ExxonMobil is responsible for 3.22% of all global carbon dioxide and methane emissions from human activity from 1750-2010, and has spent millions of dollars on efforts to deny climate science and delay climate solutions (Parafiniuk & Smith, 2019). In May 2021, the election of directors at ExxonMobil's shareholder meeting became the stage of an act of social shareholder activism that attracted worldwide attention. At this meeting, a coalition of activist investors led by the small impact investment fund Engine No. 1, which claims to ”create long-term value by harnessing the power of capitalism” (Engine No. 1, 2021), managed to put two green-tinged directors on the board of twelve. In doing so, the fund was supported by the nonprofit investor network Ceres (Matthews, 2021). Whether this was an effective method of advocating for sustainability, however, is debatable. Some have criticized it as nothing more than greenwashing the billionaire owners of Engine No. 1, and a Machiavellian move to force Exxon back into a strategy of investing only in oil extraction projects that would be profitable even at low oil prices (Jenkins, 2021).

Shareholder activism for environmental or social purposes is a relatively new form of how nonprofit organizations may collaborate with – or coopt, or pressure – businesses. Shareholder activism means that the owners of shares of a corporation take deliberate action to influence the policies and practices of that corporation, rather than just inadvertently influencing them through their buying, holding, or selling of shares. Two types of shareholder activism can be distinguished: financial activism and social activism. In financial activism, shareholders are concerned with shareholder value and related governance issues such as executive pay. In social activism, shareholders address broader concerns such as the corporation's environmental impact or social performance (Goranova & Ryan, 2014). We here focus on social shareholder activism.

The primary reason for nonprofits to engage in social shareholder activism is as an advocacy tactic. By becoming a co-owner of the corporation, the nonprofit can have a say in some of the corporation's strategic decisions and influence them in the direction the nonprofit wants to go. The most important tool for doing this are shareholder proposals. Because nonprofits typically own only a small percentage of the shares, these proposals are usually defeated. It is rare for shareholder activist proposals to be approved over the objections of management. Moreover, while shareholder proposals are usually binding in Europe, they are usually non-binding in the United States. Sometimes management will discuss the proposal with the filers to avoid negative publicity, a compromise is reached, and the proposal is withdrawn. Shareholder activism works primarily as a communications tactic to raise awareness among the public, other shareholders, and corporate management. Often, the filing of unsuccessful proposals over many years eventually results in corporations making some adjustments to their policies and practices. For example, in 2020, the oil companies Total and Royal Dutch Shell committed to stepping up climate action after environmental proposals received significant minority support (Insightia, 2021). And shareholder activists are continuing to target these companies.

There has been a lot of research on financial shareholder activism, which is a long-standing practice in corporations, but much less research on social shareholder activism. Social shareholder activism began to organize in the 1970s in the US, when a lawsuit successfully challenged the United States Securities and Exchange Commission's position that corporations could omit social issue proposals from their proxy statements (i.e., documents that corporations must provide to shareholders before meetings so they can make informed decisions about what will be brought up there). The court's decision spawned the social shareholder activism field, with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility founded in 1971, and the Investor Responsibility Research Center founded in 1972. They were joined by numerous foundations, charities, religious and environmental organizations, pension funds, labor union funds, and social investment firms interested in long-term sustainability and social issues (Goranova & Ryan, 2014). Research suggests that social shareholder activism is highly effective, as firms that have been the target of environmental shareholder resolutions have been shown to significantly improve their polluting practices. Social shareholder activism is particularly effective when it targets corporations that may incur higher disruption costs and are more dependent on reputation for critical resources, such as larger firms and firms in industries close to end-user consumers (Lee & Lounsbury, 2011).

Critical thinking

"Postactivism is the firm belief that very fundamental change is possible. And postactivism feeds on another, deeper source: the belief that it doesn't matter whether we achieve this goal by our rational standards. [...] One thing is certain: we humans will continue to mercilessly ruin our beautiful blue planet. We will keep on wreaking havoc until we just can't do it any longer. [...] The point at which we stand today has been inherent in us as human beings, we could not have avoided it; we should therefore understand it as a challenge and opportunity. We are terrible beings, I am, and so are you. [...] We will throw ourselves and everything we hold dear into chaos, and it will probably be okay. We will grieve, suffer, and die a thousand small and large deaths. And when we land headfirst in the depths of chaos and begin to take root there, when the first dormant buds stir under our skin, at the latest when we begin to build a whole new world, we will need postactivism." (Maiwald, 2023, p. 9, authors' own translation) – Crap or great quote?

Challenges for nonprofits collaborating with businesses

Collaboration between organizations has many pitfalls that affect the success or failure of a collaboration. One of the biggest pitfalls in partnerships between nonprofits and businesses is **power relations** (e.g., Bouchard & Raufflet, 2019; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). Research shows that partnerships on an equal footing, where decisions are made jointly, lead to better outcomes (e.g., Selsky & Parker, 2005). In nonprofit-business collaborations, however, power is often unbalanced; business partners tend to have more power, and nonprofits tend to lose control over decision-making (Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). On the one hand, this could be explained by the fact that business partners typically bring in rather tangible resources (e.g., money) while nonprofits bring in rather intangible ones (e.g., reputation). Since the tangible resources are more visible, power-relations might resemble those between a donor and a recipient. Another explanation is different organizational cultures, namely that businesses tend to have less participatory decision-making cultures than nonprofits (Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). Businesses, therefore, often also do not make decisions in cooperation with nonprofits on an equal footing. But there is also evidence that nonprofits often just think that they are in an inferior power position, as they think that they do not have anything valuable to contribute to the partnership. If nonprofits act confidently and make demands on an equal footing, i.e., if they frame the partnership as one of equality, they can prevent power imbalances (Schneider & Neumayr, 2021).

Another pitfall of collaboration between nonprofits and businesses is the **cost versus the benefit** to the nonprofit. Organizations collaborate because there is the need and potential for benefits that can be achieved together but not alone. Both partners, however, have to ensure that the outcome of collaboration exceeds the required investment. Otherwise, the collaboration is a loss, causing expenses and dissatisfaction. Therefore, the potential value of a partnership, i.e., the potential benefits relative to the costs incurred by the interaction of the collaborating partners" (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, p. 935), should be assessed when a partner is selected. Low-potential partnerships should be terminated as early as possible, a recommendation that is not always easy to implement. In addition to potential returns, the potential sources of value loss in the partnership must also be included in the cost-benefit assessment. This is particularly important in the case of contested firms or contested industries, i.e., firms or industries that suffer from legitimacy problems (Galvin, Ventresca, & Hudson, 2004). Businesses from contested industries, such as tobacco, gambling, mining, and oil, have been documented to be particularly active in CSR (Van Balen, Haezendonck, & Dooms, 2017), presumably with the intention of alleviating their legitimacy problems. To avoid reputational damage due to a problematic partner, conducting a risk assessment at the partnership selection stage is recommended (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b). While finding the most appropriate partner for collaboration takes time, choosing the right partner is one of the most important decisions in cross-sector collaboration to ensure cost-effectiveness.

A third challenging issue is the **fit of motivations** (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, p. 933). All too often, nonprofits see collaboration with businesses mainly in terms of revenue generation, and businesses see it mainly as a simple way to polish their image. In that case, both partners have different motivations, and for neither of them, is the motivation deeply integrated with their organization’s mission. Such collaboration can become transactional at best, failing at worst. For collaborations with transformative, integrative potential, partners need to have shared motivation, and that motivation should be close to their mission. That will be the case if involvement in the collaboration is truly an expression of the businesses’ mission or vision, and if the focal cause of the collaboration is also at the core of the mission of the nonprofit (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2004). If the fit of motivations is high, nonprofits may be able to reap not just tangible and direct benefits (e.g., money), but also intangible and indirect benefits such as increasing donor support or getting their message across more effectively (Gourville & Rangan, 2004).

Conclusion

We have shown in this chapter that there are many opportunities for collaboration between nonprofit organizations and businesses. Through collaboration, both parties may reap benefits and achieve successes that they could not achieve alone or by working against each other. However, such cross-sectional collaborations also carry risks, especially for the nonprofit organization that is often the weaker partner. The nonprofit may become dependent on the business. That may lead to its co-optation and mission drift, as the nonprofit may lose sight of its commitments to beneficiaries and nonprofit values and may align its operations with the collaborator's interest (Bouchard & Raufflet, 2019).

The key to nonprofit-business collaborations that have a high positive impact will be to keep the following points in mind:

- Partners should keep an eye on the balance of costs and benefits of collaboration. They may seek low-cost low-involvement transactional relationships, or higher cost high-intensity collaborations that engender transformation of the business partner, or even at the industry or societal level.
- Partners should safeguard the cause-brand-fit. Nonprofits, in particular, should conduct a risk screening to prevent their reputation from being tarnished by a business partner who engages in activities that are widely considered illegitimate. Also, businesses should ensure that they choose a reliable nonprofit partner. From a business perspective, cooperating with a less well-known nonprofit in a project that greatly fits the businesses' brand image, mission, and vision may be preferable to cooperating with a more widely known nonprofit in a generic project.

- Nonprofits should act as self-confident partners and participate equally in decision-making in the partnership. If the potential for collaboration arises, nonprofits should screen it for opportunities and risks in advance. Sometimes it is better to confidently decline an offer of cooperation rather than enter into a relationship that would end unsuccessfully.

Questions for discussion and reflection:

- Businesses often aim to enhance their organizational legitimacy by collaborating with nonprofits in CSR activities. Can you think of cases of CSR where collaborating with a business also enhances the nonprofit's organizational legitimacy?
- Are transformational collaborations generally superior to transactional collaborations?
- Discuss cause-related marketing campaigns that you know. Which ones do you find particularly good, which ones do you find problematic, and why?
- One recommendation for nonprofits is to prevent ending up in a subordinate power relationship vis-à-vis their business partner by acting confidently and making demands on an equal footing. How can this work, and where might be the limit beyond which this recommendation no longer works?

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