PUBLIC SECTOR BUSINESS COLLABORATING: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVE

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Derbyshire Business School

University of Derby
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Abstract

This research study explores the perceptions and experiences of individuals involved in the business collaborations of the Coal Authority (TCA) with other public and private sector organisations.

The study offers two major contributions to professional knowledge and practice. The first is that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaboration process are of as much concern as the economic and structural aspects. The second is a conceptual model and framework which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process, and identifies behaviours and practices which are perceived by the participants to positively contribute to successful business collaborating and to minimise the risk of inter-organisational collaboration failure.

The research accounts underpinning the study are based on the researcher's direct observation, interviews, accounts and life experiences of over fifty individuals that he engaged with during his thirty months involvement within the research process. This was complemented by his reflective diary recording in real time the thought processes from the participants in both the public and private sector involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, as he immersed himself in a purposeful way in the research setting.

Twenty-four of the collaborators work for public sector organisations, twenty-nine work in the private sector. Thematic discourse analysis was used to interpret their life experiences and develop the framework around the four perspectives that emerged.

The four perspectives are:

- The context perspective
- The business and strategy perspective
- The delivery perspective
- The people perspective

Personal reflections on the research process and the framework are based on the Kirkpatrick (1967) four level theoretical model for the evaluation of learning and development outcomes. The researcher also describes the changes in behaviour and practices within TCA with regard to the way the people within TCA interact and collaborate with people from other organisations as a result of the study and its findings.

Finally, the researcher demonstrates his achievement of the six learning outcomes of his DBA doctoral programme.
All the participant and organisation names referred to in this dissertation (apart from TCA as an organisation) are fictitious to protect and respect the privacy and confidentiality of the actual participants and their organisations.
Chapter 1

Introduction, Background and Context

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation and critical reflection describes a self-managed research project using practical work-place research methods, within the work-place environment, to investigate public sector business collaborating from a social constructionist perspective. It does this primarily by exploring the perceptions of individuals involved in the business collaborations of the Coal Authority (TCA) with other public and private sector organisations.

The researcher is the Head of Customer and Commercial Services with TCA, responsible for delivering the property search and information service strategy outlined below in this Chapter 1, for and on behalf of the TCA Board and Executive Directors.

Through this research study I will demonstrate that I have:

1. made a significant and original contribution to professional practice in the discipline of business collaborating (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7);
2. command and confidence in the application of practice based and discipline-related research methods and in the discussion of methodological issues (Chapters 3 and 4);
3. a deep understanding of ethical and professional considerations in the context of the discipline of business collaborating (Chapters 3, 4 and 7);
4. highly developed personal and presentational skills in presenting and
discussing data, ideas and the application of professional practice (Chapters 2,
3, 5 and 6);

5. demonstrated accomplishment in the organisation and management of
independent studies in the form of a project or generating creative works
(Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6), and

6. an ability to reflect critically on my experience of professional practice and in
producing insights relating to the social constructionist approach (Chapters 2,
3, 6 and 7).

1.2 The Coal Authority (TCA)

TCA was created by the Coal Industry Act 1994 (the 1994 Act) on the privatisation of
the British coal industry. TCA doesn’t mine coal itself; it owns the coal on behalf of
the Nation and licences others to do so. However, this licensing work forms only a
minor part of TCA’s activities. Its primary role is dealing with the historic legacy and
consequence of past coal mining activity – dealing with subsidence damage, shaft and
ground collapses, water and gas emissions, and the like. It attracts some £22million
grant-in-aid funding (‘taxpayers money’) from the Government to carry out this work
(TCA Annual Report and Accounts, 2006-07). TCA also has a responsibility under
the 1994 Act to make information available. It does this in two ways, firstly through
its mining records heritage centre located in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, and
secondly through its property search and information services, which are a major
business activity of TCA generating circa £12million income which represents some
80% of its non-grant-in-aid income (TCA Annual Report and Accounts, 2006-07).
The duties, functions and responsibilities of TCA are set out in more detail in Appendix 1.

1.3 The dilemma and predicament facing TCA

The dilemma facing TCA is that, despite TCA’s acknowledged expertise in the delivery of fast, accurate, cost-effective, high-volume property search services (Dearden, 2000), the British coal industry continues to decline (McCloskey 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006) such that demand for residential coal mining reports as an essential part of the conveyancing process is not considered sustainable on a stand-alone ‘coal-only’ basis (TCA Corporate Plan 2006-07 to 2008-09). There are also competitive pressures on TCA to provide its data to private sector search companies to include within their existing environment and other property search reports (COPS, 2006; OFT, 2006). This would mean TCA surrendering its status as a leading data holder and service provider and run counter to TCA’s high-level corporate objective “to establish The Coal Authority as the leading public sector provider of land conveyance information” (TCA High Level Objectives - TCA published Mission Statement and High Level Objectives, April 2006).

TCA’s Corporate Plan objectives and priorities further encapsulate the predicament TCA is facing, and hence the practice value of this study, and are geared towards maintaining TCA’s position at the forefront of the information delivery sector by a drive for increased search volumes and alternative revenue streams facilitated by new product technology and innovation, successful interaction and collaborating with other public and private sector organisations and focus on a changing customer base (TCA Corporate Plan 2006-07 to 2008-09).
However, the Plan also embraces Government initiatives, including the findings of the Efficiency Review carried out by Sir Peter Gershon in 2004 on behalf and part of H.M. Treasury's Spending Review in 2004, which recommended rationalisation of back office services within the public sector, and the needs emerging from a greater emphasis on providing commercial services. TCA's future strategic direction, as set out in its Corporate Plan 2006 - 2009 has the same aims.

The future business environment within which the people within TCA will compete is fluid and uncertain. This poses a risk to the survival of the organisation. For the people working for TCA, the TCA brand is a key asset and underwrites the position and reputation they hold as a leading public sector information provider. It is seen as important to monitor closely the events and changes in the external competitive and political environment as they unfold, so that the members of the TCA Executive and Board can not only keep their strategy under review, but also be prepared to implement fundamental change if the circumstances dictate this.

The Executive and Board of TCA believe that the future success of the organisation will be increasingly dependent on successfully collaborating with other public and private sector organisations to provide its customers in existing and new markets with additional property information services and products. This is something new for TCA and poses risk and dilemma for them, since it means having to offer products and services outside the traditional coal mining areas and to relinquish overall control and to share this with people within partner organisations. There have also been experiences in the past of what have been considered 'unsuccessful' collaborations with other organisations. These have been expensive in time, cost, human and other
resources. The Executive and Board therefore see minimising the risk of collaborating going wrong as a key objective. This research study aims to support this objective by gaining a deeper understanding of behavioural and structural factors in inter-organisational collaborating and relationships, so as to minimise the risk of collaborating going wrong and to maximise the potential for perceived successful collaborating.

1.4 The changing context for TCA working in the public sector environment

TCA’s strategic direction on information provision and market development is influenced most strongly by Government initiatives, which encourage the wider application and commercialisation of public assets. It is also influenced by the way that property conveyancing is changing, and also by the way the property search information and reports provided to buyers and sellers as part of the conveyancing process are changing, by the proposed introduction of Home Information Packs (HIPs) in England and Wales from 1st August 2007 (Minister of Housing, DCLG, July 2006 and May 2007) and the proposed introduction of Purchasers Information Packs (PIPs) in Scotland in 2008 (Scottish Executive, 2007). All the players in the property information sector are lobbying strongly to have their products included within the packs (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006).

Further Government drivers include HM Treasury’s “Wider Markets” Policy Note (1997, updated 2001), which encourages non-departmental public bodies (NDPB’s) like TCA to generate additional income from assets that are service-critical but under-utilised. Government anticipates and expects that through the creation of commercial partnerships with the private sector, these under-utilised assets can be exploited and
used more efficiently and imaginatively to provide new revenue streams for the public sector. HM Treasury permit the proceeds to be reinvested in core activities to provide improved services.

The ‘Modernising Government’ agenda encourages public bodies to trade and share information, to improve the quality and range of available information and improve the speed and ease of delivery (the One-Stop-Shop concept) with a commitment towards full electronic customer interfaces by 2005 (H.M. Treasury, 2000). Whilst this hasn’t been entirely met in all sectors, the demand for electronic delivery of property search information continues to grow, with the expectation that this will provide quicker and less expensive information (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006).

The Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) encourages the information and publishing industries to develop innovative products and services based on public sector information (OPSI, 2006).

The findings of the Gershon Report drive the requirement for efficiency savings and a priority need to offset reduced grant-in-aid funding by alternative revenue streams from the introduction of non-statutory value-added products and services (H.M. Treasury, 2005).

Private sector property search companies are increasing market share (Office of Fair Trading, 2005 and 2006) and becoming more influential through newly formed trade
associations, in particular the Council of Property Search Organisations (CoPSO) and the Association of Home Information Pack Providers (AHIPPS).

There is increasing pressure on TCA from the private sector to gain access to TCA's mining database for the purpose of producing alternative and competitive mining searches into the property market. Requests for information are based upon the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005. Competing services would have a direct effect on the current operating model for TCA’s mining reports service, which could significantly affect the organisation and third parties currently contracted for the provision of this service.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has conducted a review of the property information market, which was published in September 2005. This review has had far reaching effects on providers of information and services to the property market. As a major property search provider, TCA was invited to contribute to the study and provided a comprehensive written submission in April 2005. A further OFT study, initiated in summer 2006, examined the holding and commercial use of public sector information. The driver for this study is a better understanding of how Government engages and competes with the private sector within the conveyancing market. The OFT report was published in December 2006. The key findings were:

1. Access to unrefined public sector information needs to improve, and

2. More competition in public sector information could benefit:
the UK economy, and

- consumers, by providing a wider range of competitively priced goods and services.

These findings impact significantly on those public bodies such as TCA that hold and trade conventional information and electronic data.

The March 2006 Budget reconfirmed the government’s commitment to the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to fund improved public services (HM Treasury, March 2006). The PFI is now a global market and shows no sign of falling out of favour (Berry, 2006, p. 12). The public sector has already signed 700 PFI projects and over the next four or five years the government plans to begin another 200 projects worth a total of £26bn, the largest programme of its kind in the world (RICS Business, 2006). The ideological battle about the PFI appears to have lessened, with the emphasis now on how to make it work more effectively.

1.5 Purpose and aims of the research study

The aim of the research study is to generate credible, useful knowledge and understanding that can be practically applied to address the dilemmas, problems and predicament of the individuals involved in business collaborating at TCA, as described above. The study also offers a significant and original contribution to professional knowledge and practice, with reference to existing knowledge, through a deeper exploration of the public sector collaborating processes. In this way the study contributes to and extends the current academic and professional best-practice literature and advice by developing, based on social constructionist thinking, a
practice-based understanding of public sector business collaborating, through analysis of collaborators’ experiences. In effect, the nature, substance and perceptions of the relationships between individuals involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis; the interactions, the reconstructing of knowledge of reality and making sense about what is going on. The unit of analysis is the individual, kept in the sense of context, time and space for as long as possible, via the identification of themes developed into a conceptual framework and model of my understanding gained from some thirty months of immersion in activities involving TCA and its collaborators from the start of the collaborating programme with other public and private sector organisations in June 2004 through to December 2006.

The completed study offers two major contributions to professional practice. The first is that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern as the economic and structural aspects. The second is a conceptual model and framework, which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process, and highlights and recommends perceived best-practice in collaborator behaviours and practices, so as to beneficially minimise the risk of inter-organisational collaborating failure.

In particular, it addresses a literature gap since a holistic, social, economic and political multidimensional conceptualisation of public sector business collaborating doesn’t exist. This study aims to address this gap from a relational, social constructionist perspective by focussing on the nature, substance and perceptions of the relationships between individuals involved in public sector business collaborating on a day-to-day basis; the interactions, the reconstructing of knowledge and making
sense of what is going on. The world of business collaborating is ambiguous and complex and this study helps make better sense of the literature in general and the problems and predicament that individuals working for TCA are finding with business collaborating in particular.

The broader research question was to determine and make sense of what people within TCA and within its partner organisations perceived ‘successful’ business collaborating to be and what they perceived as being the most important factors that contributed to achieving ‘successful’ business collaborating. My understanding of their views has then been compared and contrasted both between the participants themselves and with the various world-views as described in the literature.

The research material underpinning the study is based on my direct observation, interviews, accounts and life experiences of over fifty individuals that I engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process, backed up too by my reflective diary and real time thought process from the participants in both the public and private sector involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting. Thematic discourse analysis was also used to interpret the life experiences of these public sector business collaborators (Burr, 1995, p.15). Twenty-four of the collaborators work for public sector organisations, twenty-nine work in the private sector. Material from their experiences has been used to support the development of a new conceptual model and framework, proposed for use by TCA and other public sector organisations in their future business collaborations with both public and private sector partners. This model is introduced and discussed in Chapter 6.
Whilst there was a case for conceptualising the whole of the literature before I derived my own definition of business collaborating, a tentative definition at the start of the study, as advocated by Hart (1999, p.121) as a way of putting a boundary around and isolating the research subject area so as to help focus attention on the topic of analysis, seemed beneficial. A tentative definition of public sector business collaborating at that time, within the context of this study and TCA’s current predicament, and drawing on the relevant writers as set out in tables 2.1 and 2.2 in the next chapter, was:

*People from public and private sector organisations coming to a voluntarily initiated co-operative agreement that involves mutual strategic resource exchange to develop a product or service that satisfies a customer demand.*

This is about activity becoming social construction. In this way it links with Tansley and Watson’s views as to the nature of organisations (2000, p. 110). The strategic exchange may be capital, technology, know-how, existing products, services and markets, people, customers, brand-image, knowledge, data and intellectual property rights (Grange, 1991; Kelly and Parker, 1997; Harper, 2001; Anslinger and Jenk, 2004; Ernst and Bamford, 2005; Cross *et al.*, 2006). This list is not necessarily exhaustive.

This research provides an important extension to current theoretical perspectives on behavioural and structural factors in inter-organisational collaborating and relationships, to complement existing research, and provides new insights and a greater contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon of success in strategic
alliances between a non-departmental public body like TCA and other public and private sector organisations working within the U.K. so as to minimise the risk of such collaborating failing to meet the expectations of the people within the collaborating organisations.

1.6 Researcher stance [including the use of ‘I’]

Throughout this dissertation I am writing from a personal ‘first-person’ stance. I believe there is a value in using “I” and securing quality throughout the research process, in that it is in keeping with my relational, social constructionist perspective. The writing is all about me engaging in the collaborating activities and it has become personal to me. I have invested a lot of time, commitment and effort into it.

My original research question and objective was to identify the factors associated with alliance success and alliance management, since this knowledge could help improve the outcomes of the business alliances that the individuals within TCA propose entering into. However, I was mistaken in my belief that a full and comprehensive literature review would provide me with all the answers. It didn’t. Having completed a structured and critical analysis of the prevailing theoretical literature and best practice studies in relation to the benefits of collaborating, the reasons for collaborating and the key factors in achieving successful collaborating, there were still significant gaps in the knowledge needed to find practical solutions to the predicament and dilemmas faced by the individuals within TCA as outlined in this Chapter 1 and in specific relation to the management of strategic alliances and business collaborations between a non-departmental public body (NDPB) like TCA and other public and private sector organisations working within the U.K.
As a business manager, I come from a background and position where management practices have shaped my outlook and perspective: a critical realist perspective. This manifests itself, for example, in recruitment, risk management and customer survey methodologies and practices, which utilise standard questions, questionnaires and structured interviews, which help exercise control over the relationships, the dialogue, to achieve consistent, 'due diligent' outcomes.

I have recognised that my managerial position and background shaped my original critical realist perspective. This also drove my original research question and objective to identify the factors associated with alliance success and alliance management, which has subsequently changed and is now concerned with trying to understand the relationships within business collaborating. In effect, I'm trying to understand the nature and substance of the relationships between individuals involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, and the interactions that are going on, in the context of TCA's property search and information service activities. With my unit of analysis being the individual and the relationships and interdependencies within a collaborating group.

My interpretation of the literature is that it is often presented from a perspective that embraces what could be considered to be a naïve law-like notion that 'the truth is out there'. I concluded that the issue wasn't one of quantitative versus qualitative approaches but a single objective reality versus multiple realities, which are co-constructed through interaction.
I found myself in agreement with Tansley and Watson’s view (2000, p.110), that an organisation has “little existence separate from the ongoing, social, political, cultural and economic processes of human individuals and groups”. In this regard it became clear to me that it is people within organisations that collaborate rather than organisations themselves. This has encouraged me to move away from an entitative perspective to a more relational perspective, which is explained more in table 1.1 below.

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I also found it useful to relate my thinking to Tansley and Watson’s (2000) description of organisation from a traditional managerialist perspective, as it gave me an opportunity, as the research study developed, to demonstrate how I was gradually moving away from an entitative perspective to a more relational perspective. On reflection, my managerialist and functionalist background and perspective probably drove my original critical realist approach and perspective.

Furthermore, I became aware during the study that it wasn’t enough to recognise that individuals had personal perspectives; I also needed to recognise that knowledge and learning is being created and sustained by social interaction. Researchers on
management and organisations are increasingly expected to demonstrate a reflexive understanding of their adopted research position (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Reflexivity has been integral to the nature and meaning of quality and credibility within this research study. My interactions with and subjective perceptions of the research process and data were part of the interpretive process. An early dilemma was whether to include reflections throughout or summarised in a stand-alone section. On ‘reflecting on my critical reflections’ they seem to naturally fit better when integrated across the dissertation submission, as I have attempted to do, as well as summarised at the end in Chapter 7.

1.7 Outline of the dissertation structure

This Chapter 1 of the dissertation describes the problem, dilemma and predicament of TCA with regard to business collaborating. This provides the context and reason for the study. Chapter 1 also discusses the changing context for TCA working in the public sector, and my researcher stance. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the current world-views on what is meant by and constitutes ‘successful’ business collaborating as described in the literature, together with the key factors that the various writers judge contribute to perceived ‘success’. Chapter 2 also discusses learning theory, structuration theory and a social constructionist approach to understanding public sector business collaborating. The background, methodology and results of an earlier pilot research study carried out by the author are then discussed in Chapter 3, in particular the limitations of the methodology adopted for the pilot study (Dearden, 2005a). This led to my subsequent adoption of a social constructionist perspective and approach to the research study. This is discussed further in Chapter 2, which includes a summary of the social constructionist literature and my reflections on the pilot study.
from a social constructionist perspective. As a philosophical perspective, social constructionism is something that I only developed an awareness of as I progressed the research, rather than having a firm view on at the beginning. It is a perspective which subsequently permeated my whole research process and acts as a ‘golden thread’ throughout this dissertation. The pilot study was an important step on my journey from critical realist to social constructionist.

The research methodology and data analysis method adopted subsequent to my reflections on the pilot study are described in Chapter 4 and their appropriateness justified. The results and interpretation of the research data and findings are then outlined and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 6 also introduces a new conceptual model and framework, which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process.

The capturing of the different perspectives of the individuals involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis allows me, from a social constructionist perspective, to provide an account to readers of my dissertation to construct their own understanding. This dissertation is structured so as to share my journey from critical realist to social constructionist (Chapters 2, 3 and 7). To address the dilemma of TCA as outlined in this Chapter 1, I have developed a distinctive theoretical model and conceptual framework that advances understanding and makes sense of public sector business collaborating, both in the context of public sector collaborating, and beyond it, using the conceptual tools of narrative and social construction. It allows a participatory worldview and offers new and varied insights into relations and social interactions (see Reason, 1994). My reconstructing of knowledge and making sense
of what is going on links back to the fundamentals of social construction. From the analysis of my diary reflections, and my interview and conversational transcripts, from a social constructionist perspective I have subsequently identified and derived four key perspectives, the elements of which together formed the foundation to a new understanding of the public sector collaborating process. These are introduced in Chapter 4 and discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The framework model reflects the social constructionist view of reality in that people have constructed it between them through their daily interactions in the course of social (collaborating) life (Karatas and Murphy, 2002, p. 15). The conceptual framework also links and reflects Giddens’ (1984) assumptions that human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents that reproduces the structure. To make sense of the day-to-day collaborating process and its related activities required a conceptual framework that encapsulates the research methodology that took me close to the people themselves, and which allowed close attention to the way people used language and to the context within which they worked. I have used a cake analogy (Chapter 6) to help me better understand and make sense of the public sector business collaborating process, but more importantly my hope is that it helps others understand too, i.e. it helps in my research study’s transferability to the reader to their personal situation. Understanding and taking account of the conceptual framework and model can, I believe, take much of the risk, frustration and perceived failure out of the public sector business collaborating process. Whether this is with people from other public sector organisations, or with people from the private sector, or with both at the same time as increasingly is the case for TCA. I would argue that the approach I have adopted and presented in this dissertation is robust and offers the opportunity to extend and improve understanding
of public sector business collaborating. However, making sense of the public sector business collaborating process only achieves half of the original research study proposition. The other half is that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern to those involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis as the economic and structural aspects. I believe that the research methodology as outlined in Chapter 4, the presentation of the data in Chapter 5 and the interpretation of the data and conceptual model in Chapter 6 will demonstrate this to readers as it has to me. It is no longer of any relevance as to whether an activity is 'hard' or 'soft', tangible or intangible, behavioural or structural. All these factors, elements and activities are mixed up together, in the same way as the ingredients of a cake - a combination of hard and soft ingredients all mixed together. They are no longer relevant as individual topics of analysis or discussion on their own, only as part of a discussion of the business collaborating process as a whole.

Chapter 6 also describes how the research has impacted on me and on the people within TCA and our partnering organisations, by setting out examples of changes in what we are now doing and going to do differently. Finally, Chapter 7 offers my conclusions and critical reflection on the study. This reflexivity is based on the Kirkpatrick (1967) four level theoretical model and is presented from a personal level, as well as from an academic and policy level.

All the participant and organisation names referred to in this dissertation (apart from TCA as an organisation) are fictitious to protect and respect the privacy and confidentiality of the actual participants and their organisations.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the findings of a structured and critical review of the relevant and contemporary theoretical literature and prevailing best practices from academic, professional and practitioner sources in relation to alliance management and business collaborating. The literature can be classified as identifying key factors judged to be necessary for the effective management of 'successful' business collaborations. The review allows a conceptualisation of the factors as being either behavioural or structural. The chapter introduces the need for a more holistic appreciation of the factors influencing collaborating and suggests that the behavioural or structural divide is inappropriate. This in turn points to the value of a qualitative / interpretative research methodology, and, more specifically, social constructionism.

There is a great deal of disagreement, debate and difference of opinion amongst researchers and management gurus in the research literature as to the benefits of collaborating and alliances, the reasons for collaborating and the key factors in achieving successful alliances.

I begin by providing a brief overview of the perspectives of major contributors in the literature as to the definition and types of business collaborating and why people collaborate. I then consider the benefits and risks of collaborating, with particular emphasis on the public and private sector collaborating context. The chapter then illustrates various examples of business collaborating analysis irrespective of whether the authors identified themselves as postmodernist, critical theorists, social
constructionist or of any other perspective. The main part of this chapter examines in
detail, and from a social constructionist perspective, the phenomenon of business
collaborating and alliance management, in particular the sixteen key behavioural and
structural factors identified, discussed and judged by the various writers in the
literature as contributing to the success or otherwise of business collaborating.

A brief review of learning theory and structuration theory follows.

The final sections of the chapter challenge existing approaches to business
collaborating research and discuss how an analysis of public sector business
collaborating, based on practical work-place research methods, within the work-place
environment, can be accomplished from a social constructionist perspective. This
includes a review of the social constructionist literature and its underlying
assumptions, and a proposal for a social constructionist approach to understanding
public sector business collaborating.

2.2 Definitions and types of business collaborating

'Business collaborating' has been defined in many different ways in the literature.
However, among scholars who attempt to conceptualise collaborative behaviour, there
is at least general agreement on it involving recognising opportunities and capitalising
on them by forming and managing joint ventures and alliances (see table 2.1 below).

There seems a universal assumption amongst researchers and management gurus that
business collaborating is just about major companies forming joint ventures. The
reality is much more diverse, particularly in the U.K., where alliances with key
suppliers, competitors and customers, together with large-scale growth in closer working within the public sector and also public/private sector partnerships, are an increasing feature of the business landscape (Roffey Park Institute, 2000). So, too, are the different types of business collaborating, as set out in table 2.1 below, which highlights that the terminology, rather than altering over time, has been more of a diverse nature, reflecting the diverse nature of collaborative venture carried out between organisations. I believe these terms are important to consider and reflect on since they can be used to locate, clarify and think about what my study is about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliances</td>
<td>Doz and Hamel (1998); Spekman et al., (2000); Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001); Anslinger and Jenk (2004); Stanek (2004); Dyer, Kale and Singh (2004); Ernst and Bamford (2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Drucker (1996); Mariotti (2001); Kaplan and Hurd (2002); Hudson (2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Osborne and Murray (2000); Bryant (2003); Evans and Wolf (2005); Huxham and Vangen (2005); Cross, Martin and Weiss (2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Ventures</td>
<td>Beamish and Delios (1997); Callahan and MacKenzie (1999); Johnson (2001) Buckley, Gaister and Husan (2002); Child and Yan (2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>Beckman and Haunschild (2002); Hudson (2004); Huxham and Vangen (2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>Johnson, Manyika and Roberts (2005); Beardsley, Johnson and Manyika (2006).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.1 Writers on types of business collaborating**

Kelly and Parker (1997, p. 1) contend that business collaborating has grown to such an extent, and taken so many different forms, that no standard terminology has yet been established to adequately describe it. They define collaborating as simply “co-operation between two or more organisations”. A brief overview of the definitions of business collaborating proposed by various writers is set out in table 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wheelan and Hungar (2000, p.125)</th>
<th>Define a strategic alliance as “an agreement between firms to do business together in ways that go beyond normal company-to-company dealings, but fall short of a merger or a full partnership.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arino, Torre and Ring (2001)</td>
<td>Define an alliance as a formal agreement to pursue a set of private or common goals through the sharing of resources in contracts involving contested markets and uncertainty over outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariotti (2001)</td>
<td>Partnerships are interdependent relationships between people and/or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
organisations in which they work together to achieve some mutual goals, and in which each invests resources and takes risks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elmuti and Kathawala (2001, p.205)</th>
<th>Strategic alliances are “partnerships of two or more corporations or business units that work together to achieve strategically significant objectives that are mutually beneficial.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernst and Bamford (2005)</td>
<td>Define an alliance as an agreement between two or more separate companies in which there is shared risk, returns, and control, as well as some operational integration and mutual dependence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Writers on definitions of business collaborating

In business alliances and collaborations, two or more organisations will often unite to pursue a set of agreed-upon goals whilst remaining independent subsequent to the formation of the alliance. Characteristically, the partner organisations share the benefits of the alliance and control over the performance of the tasks. As I shall discuss later, these intimated characteristics of strategic interdependence and ‘win-win’ solutions do not always satisfactorily materialise in every business collaboration. This is often because of the normative, designed artefact perspective to organisational management with the debate on organisational perspectives underpinning the drive for the more qualitative, processual research.

I believe the various alliance and business collaborating terms are interchangeable and can be used interchangeably, since they are all about people working together to achieve something that is important to them. For my purposes they are all ‘collaborating’ and this is the term that I prefer to employ throughout this dissertation. As Mariotti (2001) contends, partnership is collaboration. This could be considered as a definition that focuses on process (the becoming of an alliance) rather than the outcome of a process. The aim of this study, however, is to go beyond the mere rhetoric and investigate the nature of successful business collaborating (with a requirement to subsequently understanding the perceived meaning of ‘successful’ in
this context) where this helps in the resolution of TCA’s current predicament and
dilemmas as outlined in section 1.3 of Chapter 1.

2.3 Why do (people within) organisations collaborate?

According to Tansley and Watson (2000, p.110), an organisation has “little existence
separate from the ongoing, social, political, cultural and economic processes of human
individual and groups”. In this regard it is clear that it is people within organisations
that collaborate rather than organisations themselves. This acknowledges the
relational perspective that organisations are in a state of constant change with the
emphasis being on organising rather than organisation. This discussion ultimately
helped set the research questions and the research design.

However, I perceive that much of the literature is written and researched from a
reified perspective, often with associated reified talk of “organisations collaborating”.

Table 2.3 lists some examples of analysis as to why organisations [sic] collaborate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Reason to collaborate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aitken and Hage, 1968</td>
<td>For money, skills and people resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter and Fuller, 1986</td>
<td>To achieve economies of scale and reduce risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grange, 1991</td>
<td>To extend resources and capabilities, hence core competencies, in order to develop sustainable competitive advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly and Parker, 1995</td>
<td>Mutually beneficial core competencies. The sum of the competencies amongst the alliance partners needs to be greater than those of any partner acting alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly and Parker, 1997</td>
<td>For R &amp; D and to access technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavusgil et al., 1997</td>
<td>To develop new product and service offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doorely, 1999</td>
<td>For knowledge sharing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domberger and Fernandez, 1999</td>
<td>For better accountability and to manage demand fluctuations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmuti and Kathawala (2001)</td>
<td>For growth strategies and entering new markets; to obtain new technology and/or best quality or cheapest cost; to reduce financial risk and share costs of research and development; to achieve or ensure competitive advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, 2001</td>
<td>The development of new technology and the pursuit of new market opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper, 2001</td>
<td>Launch new products and services, improve technology, and expand market reach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arino, de la Torre and Ring, 2001</td>
<td>Globalisation and the demands of a networked, fast-paced economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaplan and Hurd, 2002</td>
<td>To expand capabilities and develop critical new service offerings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Points out that there is a huge pressure to share capabilities, expertise and information; especially where expansion depends upon technological innovation, simple economics may force collaborative development. He cites the telecoms companies building the next generation of mobile networks as an example. Bryant also recognises that few organisations today have the material, economic or conceptual resources to operate alone successfully, still less to grow, for any sustained period in present-day conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bryant, 2003</td>
<td>To grow the business, maximise shareholder value, need for fast low cost expansion into new markets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anslinger and Jenk, 2004</td>
<td>To enter an unfamiliar market or to develop a disruptive technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernst and Bamford, 2005</td>
<td>To reduce complexity, redefine roles, and allocate financial, physical and human resources more efficiently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.3 Examples of analysis as to why organisations collaborate**

A constructionist approach was adopted by Bergquist *et al.*, (1995) who, following a series of interviews, found the need for more satisfying work and the sheer enjoyment of the partnership experience as factors suggested as motivating initial partnership decisions. This partnership experience including sharing risk, responsibilities, ideas, goals, hopes and dreams – as well as the more pragmatic business reasons of yielding greater efficiency and creating bigger markets.

The reasons quoted in the literature for people collaborating and forming alliances are many and varied, as table 2.3 above demonstrates. So too has been the discussion amongst writers. However, key themes seem to recur – accessing new markets, for example, which is an area identified as part of the solution to TCA’s current predicament. Another recurring theme amongst people involved in collaborating on a day to day basis, underpinning most of the highlighted reasons for collaborating, is the fact that alliancing is a strategy to achieve something that you cannot achieve alone or that you can achieve in a manner that is more acceptable to you. Again, this fact would seem to underpin the solution to TCA’s predicament. In other regards the discussion has recognised different market structures and economic conditions.
The existence of mutually beneficial core competencies is also a common theme in the literature (Grange, 1991; Kelly and Parker, 1995). This is a relevant consideration for the people within TCA as they seek solutions to their current predicament and dilemmas. There is no value in entering into partnership with another organisation without mutual resource contributions or if it is quicker, more cost-effective and efficient to create and satisfy customer demand alone. This discussion falls within the boundaries of the tentative definition outlined above, which helped scope the structure of the debate.

Postmodernist epistemology advocates that our shared language constitutes the world and that we can only ‘know the world’ through the particular forms of discourse our language creates (Hassard, 1993, p. 3). This is similar to the social constructionist approach of construction of meanings, where there is focus on language as a form of social action (Burr, 1995). However the similarity ends there (Karatas and Murphy, 2002, p.10). Social constructionism places emphasis on sharedness, negotiation and the primary function of language is to facilitate these processes in order to create and maintain various patterns of social relations (Shotter, 1995). In postmodernism, language does not capture or represent reality, a position called ‘crisis of representation’ (Karatas and Murphy, 2002, p.10).

Table 2.3 summarised some examples of analysis as to why organisations [sic] collaborate, often from what I perceive to be a critical realist and normative perspective. Table 2.4 illustrates some further various examples of business collaborating and alliance management research conclusions irrespective of whether the authors identified themselves as postmodernist, critical theorists, social
constructionist or of any other perspective. One of the criticisms of postmodernism and of critical theory is a lack of reflective empirical work resulting in many theoretical texts showing limited understandings of organisational contexts and the people within them (ibid, 2002, p. 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Research analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nilsson, 1995</td>
<td>Following analysis of 121 articles on alliances across the ABI-Inform database during the early 1990's concluded that the potential of strategic alliances is over-rated while the difficulties of realisation are under-rated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faulkner, 1995</td>
<td>Studied three cases, each involving a different type of alliance, i.e. a joint venture, a collaborative venture (but not one structured as a joint venture company) and a consortium. Concluded that a high level of trust was important to effective operation. In both the successful alliances, a high degree of trust was evident. Its absence damaged performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cullen et al., 1995</td>
<td>A desk study of joint ventures found no support for the idea that formal control led to more commitment in alliances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison and Mezentseff, 1997</td>
<td>Proposed a conceptual framework for strategic relationships based on Climate, Thinking, Systems and Learning. Model based on research of previous organisational learning literature. They suggest this can be adapted in internationally focused or domestic alliances based on cooperation and not competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vallence, 1999</td>
<td>In her desk study of the growing number of public and private sector partnerships (PPP's) proliferating in the mid-1990's, demonstrated the synergy between the public sector value of service and the private sector concept of 'customer is king'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and Associates and Alliances, 1999</td>
<td>In a survey of 455 CEO's ranking the importance of certain success factors for strategic alliances, legal contracts and agreements did not show in the final fifteen success factors identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domberger and Fernandez, 1999</td>
<td>Studied the performance of some 7,500 public private partnerships over a three-year period between 1995 and 1998 in Australia, focusing on the forces driving private services through the public sector. The authors claim the study to be the biggest ever questionnaire survey on the topic to date. Performance was measured by constructing an index of service quality, which the public sector organisations rated according to their perception of the service over a period of time. Concluded that where performance monitoring was adopted, contracts performed 38% better on average than where it was not. Where performance monitoring was absent, savings turned negative to the tune of some 12%. Where adopted, savings averaged 12% - a difference of 24 percentage points on the service quality index. Likewise, the research concluded that, without monitoring provisions, service quality slipped to a rating of &quot;average&quot; whereas the pressure of a monitoring system pushed performance well above it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osborne and Murray, 2000</td>
<td>Research explored a conceptual approach to understanding the processes of collaborative relationships, based on a model of collaboration as a multi-phase process. It was applied to a case study of non-profit collaborating in the provision of local public services. It used it to both understand the dynamics of collaborating among a group of four non-profit agencies in Canada, which might otherwise have developed competitive relationships, and to explore the utility of their concepted model as an aid to the actual management of such collaborating by practising managers. The research was an exploratory rather than a summative study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrow et al., 2000</td>
<td>Drawing on nine case studies and personal experience, researchers from the Roffey Park Institute examined the people aspects of strategic alliances. One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26
of the key messages from this research was the need for high level objectives subsequently translated into clear short-term goals at team and individual level.

| Study of 200 corporations and their 1,572 alliances. Concluded that enterprises with a dedicated alliance function achieved a 25% higher long-term success rate with their alliances than those without such a function. | Dyer, Kale and Singh, 2001 |
|——|——|
| Studied aims and outcomes of collaboration between Health Authorities and Social Services Departments. Considers purpose only to be to attract external funding. Observes that the legacy of local history and embedded notions of authority and hierarchy usually cripple such partnerships at the outset. Perceives them to be hampered by multiple accountabilities and conflicting notions of community participation and responsibility. In his view they are unable to make a genuine commitment to put service users first. | Bryant, 2003 |
| Face to face interviews conducted with two researchers present. In addition, quantitative survey administered at the time of the interviews. Respondents ranked 25 alliance value statements and 32 risk statements that were generated from the literature review associated with the alliance management discipline. The results were used to create a model for alliance risk and value. | Stanek, 2004 |
| Quantitative study found that 50% of alliance failures are due to poor strategy while 50% are the result of poor management. | McKinsey, 2004 |
| Theoretical conceptualisations were developed through research carried out over a ten-year period during which time they adopted an action research approach, actively working with managers. The research was concerned with understanding the nature of, and exploring the basis for, successful collaborating. Data was systematically collected and emergent theoretical conceptualisations were tried out for practical relevance during the course of intervention. The conceptualisations that made up the research output were developed through a process of emergent theorising from the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Concluded that the outcome of any evaluation aimed at assessing collaborative performance depended on whoever's perspective matters at the time of the evaluation. | Vangen and Huxham, 2005 |
| Interviewed 100 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) about the level of trust within their top management teams and about the teams' most importantly recent strategic decisions. They found that mistrustful groups are less effective at collaborating and endorse their strategic decisions less strongly, which affects implementation. | Simons and Peterson, 2006 |

Table 2.4. Examples of business collaborating and alliance management analysis

### 2.4 The benefits and risks of collaborating

Following analysis of 121 articles on alliances across the ABI-Inform database during the early 1990's, Nilsson (1995, p.45) concluded that the potential of strategic alliances is over-rated while the difficulties of realisation are under-rated. His conclusion that alliances don't work is not necessarily the most appropriate conclusion from his study. More justifiable in my view would be to conclude what many in the business world are beginning to realise, i.e. that business collaborating can prove to be difficult. In this regard, whilst his study methodology was sensible,
his conclusions do not seem to be fully justified. Whilst there is a need to differentiate between relatively straightforward supplier/purchaser alliances, given these are an essential part of being in business and what Nilsson is talking about, and more strategic partnerships and relationships between organisations, the major criticism of Nilsson’s research is in his not looking to acknowledge that business collaborating can be successful and in not then suggesting, pursuing or referring to further studies as to how organisations might improve the expectations of each party as to the objectives of the collaboration and the means to achieve them. The relationship marketing literature and the networking literature (further to the work of Cullen et al., 1995) also play a role.

Some authors (Gerlach, 1992; Lorenzoni and Baden-Fuller, 1995), believe that competition between organisations is sometimes more destructive than beneficial, and argue that building up durable partnerships with other organisations can often be mutually advantageous. Other authors (Doz, Hamel and Prahalad, 1989; Porter, 1990) are thoroughly sceptical about the virtues of interdependence. They prefer independence, pointing to the dangers of opportunistic partners and creeping dependence on others. They recommend avoiding multi-organisation level strategy development. Contrast this view with Hill’s (2007, p.52) call to “give up the myth of authority for the reality of negotiating interdependencies”. Kelly and Parker (1997, p.4-5) warn of the complications if allied organisations differ greatly in size, particularly with regard to decision making, setting priorities and the threat of takeover. Bryant (2003, p.11) too warns that the fear of loss of identity can be "a powerful countervailing force". This is the discrete organisation perspective described by de Wit and Meyer (1998), which views organisations as independent entities.
competing with other organisations in a hostile market environment. However, Bryant also argues (ibid, p.22) that post-modern conditions of chaotic complexity and continuous change sustain a commercial imperative to collaborate.

Collaborating according to Doz, Hamel and Prahalad (1989, p.133) is merely "competition in a different form". The term 'collaboration' just being a euphemism for collusion and not in the interest of the economy at large. Porter (1990, p.2) too states, "alliances are rarely a solution...no firm can depend on another independent firm for skills and assets that are central to its competitive advantage...alliances tend to ensure mediocrity, not create world leadership". The challenge to this opinion arises from the fact that many business collaborations do seem to be deemed successful by the parties involved even though they fall short of world leadership, however some are more effective than others in delivering the outcomes proposed and expected by the parties, and some business collaborations do fail to achieve what they might from a managerial perspective (Nilsson, 1995; Faulkner, 1995; Cullen et al., 1995; Morrison and Mezentsiff, 1997; Vallence, 1999; Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Osborne and Murray, 2000; Garrow et al., 2000; Dyer, Kale and Singh, 2001; Bryant, 2003; Stanek, 2004; Vangen and Huxham, 2005). The question is "why?"

Kelly and Parker (1997), whilst recognising the benefits of collaborating, also recognise some of the inherent dangers. These include the risk of takeover - by the stronger partner in the alliance; the risk of dependency - coming to rely too heavily on the skills of the partner; security - giving away too much information; slower decision making and weakened control - especially if several firms are involved; and increased administrative costs - where extensive procedures to monitor the activities of the other
partner exist. Bryant (2003, p.11) considers it wrong to overplay the significance of inter-organisational collaborating. As long as autonomous organisations pursue their distinct agendas, their involvement in collaborative ventures with others remains as much a source of tension as of reward. However, Bryant does not seem to acknowledge or recognise the opportunity that constructive conflict can provide in building trust within a business relationship and the various measures that can be adopted to mitigate against any potential negative conflict (Pascale, 1991). This criticism can also be levelled at Anslinger and Jenk (2004) who also seem to purport that alliance partner conflict should be avoided at all costs, or that the alliance should be terminated, instead of recognising the positive value that constructive conflict can achieve where it is anticipated and effectively managed (Pascale and Sternin, 2005).

2.5 Public and private sector collaborating

As a Non-Departmental Public Body, TCA has an opportunity and obligation under the Treasury’s Selling Government Services into Wider Markets Policy and Guidance Note (1997, 1998 and updated 2001) to maximise the use of its assets, particularly with regard to the development of value-added information, products and services, preferably in co-operation with the private sector. Recent legislation, such as the Freedom of Information Act (2000), the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005 has also contributed to growth in both public and marketplace expectations with public interest and commercial demand for information in both raw and value-added forms (Intragovernmental Group on Geographic Information, 2001) and in refined and unrefined information (Office of Fair Trading, 2006). A key objective of the Treasury’s Cost Cutting Review (2000) was the intention to provide “access to government
information more easily and at a fair price that will stimulate innovation and private
sector business activity to the ultimate overall benefit of the UK economy” (IGGI,
2001, p.7). This was echoed more recently in the findings of the Gershon Report
(2004) and the subsequent requirement for efficiency savings and a priority need to
offset reduced grant-in-aid funding by alternative revenue streams from the
introduction of non-statutory value-added products and services (H.M. Treasury,
2005). Even more recently the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) further
reaffirmed its commitment to encourage the information and publishing industries to
develop innovative products and services based on public sector information (OPSI,
2006). This followed the recommendations of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) report
of their study into the commercial use and re-use of public sector information
published in December 2006.

The private sector commercial sector is seen as having a crucial role to play as both
entrepreneur and partner in achieving this. This has led government departments and
agencies like TCA to take a fresh look at how they manage the demands upon
resources that this generates. This is the background against which TCA’s Property
Search Service operates. It compliments and reinforces the predicament outlined in
Chapter 1 rather than being an additional predicament. However, it feeds into the
solution outlined in Chapter 1 whereby the TCA Board and Executive believe that
they can best deal with their predicament and ensure survival by collaborating with
other public and private sector bodies to provide the public with additional property
information services and products, some of which are currently not readily accessible
on a national basis.
From the foregoing it can be concluded that the pressure to join with others is as intense in governmental and non-profit organisations as it is in the private sector (Bryant, 2003). Aside from the government backed initiatives outlined above, it also stems from a clear desire to match service users’ requirements, and a recognition that smaller, nimbler, more flexible organisations stand a better chance of being able to deliver what people want. In her study of the growing number of public and private sector partnerships (PPP’s) proliferating in the mid-1990’s, Elizabeth Vallence (1999) demonstrated the synergy between the public sector value of service and the private sector concept of ‘customer is king’. Furthermore, to tackle the ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel and Webber, 1973) of a complex society that exceed the responsibility, resources and expertise of individual agencies, multi-agency working is an imperative. ‘Joined-up government’ and numerous partnership initiatives are currently looking to address these issues.

The specific public private partnership (PPP’s) research agenda promulgated by Broadbent and Laughlin (2003) is outwith the intentions of this particular research project to further explore. This is because its focus is on the financial accounting, auditing and accountability implications of public and private sector partnerships. Nevertheless, it is of interest in any study concerned, as this one is, with collaborating by a public sector body with other private and public sector organisations and so forms a credible addition to the overall literature on public and private sector business collaborating. This is because PPP’s are highly regulated and one aspect of alliance management is the nature of regulation and governance. Further, it proved to help with the subsequent search for an approach to researching the questions arising out of this review and TCA’s predicament.
Osborne and Murray's (2000) research explored a conceptual approach to understanding the processes of collaborative relationships, based on a model of collaboration as a multi-phase process. It was applied to a case study of non-profit collaborating in the provision of local public services to both understand the dynamics of collaborating among a group of four non-profit agencies in Canada, which might otherwise have developed competitive relationships, and to explore the utility of their concepted model as an aid to the actual management of such collaborating by practising managers. Whilst this was an exploratory rather than a summative model, the approach could be applied directly to TCA's predicament and dilemmas, given the similar nature of TCA as a UK public body. However, such cases are more the exception than the rule. Whilst a significant volume of learned advice and experience is available within the overall body of literature on business collaborating and alliance management, there is minimal advice that could be applied to the problems with collaborating within the public sector context that TCA is experiencing. This is because, as is well documented in the literature, particularly in the systems/contingency theory/natural phenomenon debate, 'one size does not fit all' and any assumption that it can is misguided. It follows that, whilst it is possible to learn from previous research conclusions, such knowledge needs to be shaped and utilised into the bespoke requirements of the people within each organisation and their partners in general, and to the people within TCA in particular. This raises the challenge to research and identify findings that can be transferable to other organisations.

Bryant (2003, p.13) gives a somewhat negative outline of the reasons behind public sector partnerships when he states that many are "shotgun marriages" imposed by
government. He considers them often to be merely "transitional objects" prompted by a shared wish to attract external funding by agencies whose commonality extends little beyond avarice, but which are bound together by the terms under which the monies are made available. Bryant observes that the legacy of local history and embedded notions of authority and hierarchy usually cripple such partnerships at the outset. He perceives them to be frequently hampered by multiple accountabilities and conflicting notions of community participation and responsibility. In his view they are trapped conceptually by ideological differences and repetitious arguments based upon dogma and prejudice and they are "finally and fatally floored" [sic] (ibid, p. 13) by their inability to make a genuine commitment to put service users first. Bryant clearly holds very strong views and opinions, however his conclusions are far from convincing given that his evidence seems to be based solely on examples of ineffective collaborating between Health Authorities and Social Services Departments. As a consequence his views on public with other public sector partnerships seem a little biased and lacking in reasonable balance. Whilst the various sketches and examples of private sector collaborating used throughout his text have been used to demonstrate the application of the drama framework proposed by Bryant, this framework, and his conclusions on public sector partnerships, would not appear to lend itself to assist with TCA's predicament, given the likely solution probably includes a public body collaborating with another public body. However, where it may help is in stimulating debate about the nature of management — motivation, governance, history etc — and to think about this in more conceptual terms, and then to derive a conceptual framework of what has been read; in a similar way that Xie and Johnston (2004) developed a conceptual framework based on the
results of their research of the impact of e-business technological innovations in alliances.

**2.6 Business collaborating and alliance management**

Since Park and Russo (1996) concluded that there was a lack of research on why business collaborations fail and advocated more research to clarify the basis of alliance failure, and Spekman, Forbes, Isabella and MacAvoy (1998) similarly concluded that there was a huge gap in our understanding of alliance management, increasing attention has been devoted to understanding the critical factors that contribute to successful business collaborating.

Collaborating, whether through alliances, partnerships, joint ventures, networks or other co-operative arrangements, is a central feature of much government policy and a common phenomenon of organisational life (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Peter Drucker stated: “The greatest challenge in corporate culture, and the way business is being conducted, may be the accelerating growth of relationships based not on ownership, but on partnership” (Drucker, 1996).

However, strategic alliances are not simple or easy to create, develop, and support (Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001). Further evidence of this is set out in table 2.5 below:

| **Anderson Consulting (now Accenture) (1999)** | A study found that 61% of alliances fail or underperform. Anderson’s research found that only 39% of alliances met or exceeded corporate expectations. The 18-month study involved questionnaires from 323 senior executives in various industries and interviews with 400 senior managers in five industries. |
| **McKinsey (2004)** | A survey of 30-plus companies revealed that more than 70% of them had major alliances that were under-performing and in need of restructuring. |
| **Anslinger and Jenk (2004) on behalf of Accenture** | Found five reasons behind their contention that “about half of all alliances fall well short of expectations” (p.18). These were: a shift in a partner’s strategic direction (87%), senior management attention wanders (83%), |
alliance champions move on (81%), lack of career path/shortage of staff (62%) and clash of corporate cultures (62%). What makes the conclusions of Anslinger and Jenk’s qualitative study of interest and relevance is the quantitative data derived to underpin and back them up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ernst and Bamford (2005)</th>
<th>Reported that the typical corporation relies on alliances for 15% to 20% of its total revenues, sales or income, but that the overall success rate of alliances “hovers near 50%”.</th>
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</table>

Table 2.5 – recent research highlighting alliance failure

This would seem to support alliance management being the focus of the review and justify this theme being taken through both the review and subsequently into the research questions. I am seeking to understand the nature and role of business collaborating and alliances through the experiences and thoughts of people involved – including why alliances fail.

It is my contention that, whilst the results of the Anderson (1999), McKinsey (2004) and Ernst and Bamford (2005) studies and other similar quantitative studies into the numbers of business collaborations that fail (Kelly and Parker, 1997; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002; Kauser and Shaw, 2004) are of interest and well-founded (given the sample size and practical study methodologies adopted) they do not in themselves deliver any effective solutions that can be applied directly to TCA’s current predicaments and dilemmas, and the problem-area would benefit from research of a more qualitative nature. The approaches adopted by a number of the researchers in table 2.1 often seek to establish law-like relations between objects based on science in order to address issues of efficiency, order and control (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996). They are often associated with quantitative research methodologies and reporting. However, it matters less as to how many alliances are formed each year, rather more to understand the “alliance phenomenon and the alliance process” as Spekman et al., (2000, p.2) describe it.
Quantitative analysis alone can be subject to survivor bias and, in any event, not all terminated alliances can be considered as having failed. Epidemiologist Nick Black (1994) also argues that a finding or a result is more likely to be accepted as a fact if it is quantified (expressed in numbers) than if it is not. He observes that most of us are happy to accept uncritically such simplified, reductionist (and sometimes blatantly incorrect) statements so long as they contain at least one number. It is my contention, however, that, based on the literature and in order to ensure that the research makes sense and is relevant to TCA's current predicament, there are benefits in adopting a social constructionist research approach to balance, validate and make sense of the previous quantitative studies described in the literature.

Given the requirements on public sector organisations to adopt formal Risk Management processes and procedures in line with the recommendations of the Turnbull Report (1999) as adopted by the British Government and London Stock Exchange, a comprehensive checklist to better manage alliance risk was advocated. Stanek (2004) usefully attempted to develop such a model approach to measuring alliance value and risk with a view to prioritising alliance projects. This research was based on a major U.S. manufacturing organisation's various global alliances and whether it is realistic to expect a 'one size to fit all' solution from this research to be readily transferable to a UK-based public sector organisation like TCA seems doubtful. This highlights another gap that could warrant review and appropriate research, however, in mapping the (enormous) subject area of strategic alliances (as promoted by Hart, 1998, reprinted 2003) and analysing ideas in order to differentiate themes to help define and refine the topic area, it is clear that the need to establish and maintain a tight focus is important. It followed that, whilst the development of a
comprehensive checklist to better manage alliance risk could help in the resolution of TCA’s current predicament and dilemmas, this is deferred in favour of the conceptual model subsequently proposed.

Researchers are increasingly expected to demonstrate a reflexive understanding of the particular positions they adopt in undertaking research (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). This expectation is reflected in my interest to understand different approaches to business collaborating analysis, through an investigation of the work of a number of writers (including Ring and Van de Ven, 1992; Berquist, 1995; Marshall, 1996; Kelly and Parker, 1997; Doz and Hamel, 1998; Inkpen and Li, 1999; Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Cullen et al., 2000; Arino, de la Tore and Ring, 2001; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002; Bryant, 2003; Stanek, 2004; Vangen and Huxham, 2005; Cross et al., 2006; Reardon, 2007) as they debate different issues surrounding the subject of business collaborating and alliance management in the literature.

There have been various attempts to classify critical business collaborating success factors with different writers identifying different factors as important. These key alliance factors are listed in tables 2.6 and 2.7 below, and discussed in more detail later in the chapter:

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<tr>
<td>Goals and objectives</td>
<td>Ring, 2000; Garrow et al., 2000; Mariotti, 2001; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002; Anslinger and Jenk, 2004; Vangen and Huxham, 2005; Reardon, 2007.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal contracts and agreements</td>
<td>Harrigan, 1986; Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Pietras and Stormer, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002; Ernst and Bamford, 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance management and relationships</td>
<td>Doz and Hamel, 1998; Spekman et al., 2000; Arino, de la Tore and Ring, 2001; Mariotti, 2001; Harper, 2001; Perry et al., 2002; Kauser and Shaw, 2004; Xie and Johnston, 2004. Johnson et al., 2005; Cross et al., 2006;</td>
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Table 2.6 – key alliance factors

Following on from table 2.6, the major writers and the key alliance factors they have identified as critical to alliance success and/or failure are set out in table 2.7 below.

| Marshall (1995) | • Collaborative culture  
|                 | • Leadership  
|                 | • Strategic vision  
|                 | • Team processes  
|                 | • Collaborative structure  
| Bergquist et al., (1995) | • Respect differences of opinion  
|                        | • Open, frequent communication  
|                        | • Shared vision  
|                        | • Enjoyable  
|                        | • Accommodate varying interest and aspirations  
| Kelly and Parker (1997) | • Self knowledge  
|                        | • Partner selection  
|                        | • Risk management  
|                        | • Trust  

| Beardsley et al., 2006; Hill, 2007. |
| Trust | Kanter, 1994; Faulkner, 1995 and 1999; Kelly and Parker, 1997; Murano, 1998; Rousseau et al., 1998; Shepherd and Sherman, 1998; Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Rangan, 2000; Pietras and Stormer, 2001; Arino, de la Torre and Ring, 2001; Perry et al., 2002; Galford and Drapeau, 2003; Bryant, 2003; Bibb and Kourdi, 2004; Kauser and Shaw, 2004; Simons and Peterson, 2006.  
| Control | Geringer and Herbert, 1989; Faulkner, 1995; Spekman, Isabella and MacAvoy, 2000; Pietras and Stormer, 2001; Kauser and Shaw, 2004;  
| Performance measurement | Keely and Parker, 1997; Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Garrow et al., 2000; Harper, 2001; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002; Stanek, 2004; Anslinger and Jenk, 2004; Ernst and Bamford 2005.  
| Conflict resolution | Osborne and Murray, 2000; Garrow et al., 2000; Spekman et al., 2000; Perry, Cavaye and Coote, 2002; Bryant, 2003; Anslinger and Jenk, 2004; Kauser and Shaw, 2004; Vangen and Huxham, 2005.  
| Formal Governance | Garrow et al., 2000; Pietras and Stormer, 2001; Arino, de la Torre and Ring, 2001; Anslinger and Jenk, 2004.  
| Risk analysis and Project management | Kelly and Parker, 1997; Turnbull, 1999; Das and Teng (1999); Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001; Hummel et al., 2001; Stanek, 2004;  

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Key Aspects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morrison and Mezentseff (1997)</td>
<td>• Mutually beneficial core competences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Cultural compatibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domberger and Fernandez (1999)</td>
<td>• Alliance relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Strategic fit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Cooperative learning</td>
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<td>Osborne and Murray (2000)</td>
<td>• Close interaction and dialogue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Manage change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Manage contractual relationship flexibly</td>
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<td>• Partner selection</td>
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<td>• Performance monitoring</td>
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<td>Garrow et al., (2000)</td>
<td>• Pre-contract dialogue</td>
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<td>• Trust</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Build on existing relationships</td>
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<td>• Explicit organisational goals</td>
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<td>• Manage conflict</td>
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<td>• Take account of external factors</td>
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<td>Spekman et al., (2000)</td>
<td>• Objectives</td>
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<td>• Communication</td>
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<td>• Emotional resilience</td>
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<td>• Conflict resolution</td>
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<td>• Alliance management and relationships</td>
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<td>• Commitment</td>
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<td>• Emotional resilience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Interdependence</td>
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<td>Johnson (2000)</td>
<td>• Properly structured Agreement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Alliance management and control</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Adequate funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pietras and Stormer (2001)</td>
<td>• Proper strategy</td>
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<td>• Aligned legal structure</td>
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<td>• Performance monitoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Corporate governance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Control</td>
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<td>Elmuti and Kathawala (2001)</td>
<td>• Culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Trust</td>
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<td>• Goals and objectives</td>
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<td>• Coordination between management teams</td>
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<td>• Risk management</td>
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<td>• Performance feedback</td>
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<td>• Clearly understood roles</td>
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<td>• Partner selection</td>
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<td>• Communication</td>
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<td>Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001)</td>
<td>• Partner selection</td>
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<td>• Contract terms</td>
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<td>• Incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Key Concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mariotti (2001)</td>
<td>Corporate governance, Trust, Partner relationships</td>
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<td>Dyer, Kale and Singh (2001)</td>
<td>Interdependence, Partner selection, Trust, Mutual benefit, Senior management support</td>
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<td>Harper (2001)</td>
<td>Dedicated alliance function, Partner selection, Culture, Provide internal coordination, Facilitate intervention and accountability, Effective knowledge transfer, Alliance management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hummel et al., (2001)</td>
<td>Alliance strategy, Agreements, Co-develop opportunities, Evaluation and adjustment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perry, Cavaye and Coote (2002)</td>
<td>Trust, Commitment, Investment, Competence, Equity, Conflict, Benevolence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaplan and Hurd (2002)</td>
<td>Define purpose, Set metrics to track success, Establish a formal alliance management process, Define the rules of engagement, Nurture the evolution of the alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryant (2003)</td>
<td>Conflict resolution, Culture, Integration of providers, Relationship management, Collaborative skills, Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anslinger and Jenk (2004)</td>
<td>Focus by senior team, Common objectives and definition of success</td>
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<td>Kauser and Shaw (2004)</td>
<td>Highs level of:</td>
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<th>Vangen and Huxham (2005)</th>
<th>• Conflict resolution</th>
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<td>• Performance management</td>
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<td>• Partner selection</td>
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<td>• Aims and objectives</td>
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Table 2.7: Alliance success factors as identified and discussed by key writers on business collaborating and alliance management

2.7 Key alliance factors

Ring and Van de Ven (1992) supported the notion that alliance performance can be understood more fully by the examination of behavioural characteristics. A number of researchers have subsequently focused on behavioural characteristics emphasising the relationship attributes between the partners as an explanation for alliance success (Inkpen and Li, 1999; Cullen et al., 2000). The process of control has also been considered as a crucial organisation process for alliance success (Pietras and Stormer, 2001). However, others find organisational characteristics such as structure and control mechanisms not to strongly influence the success of strategic alliances (Faulkner, 1999; Kauser and Shaw, 2004). This section explores in more detail the sixteen critical business collaborating success factors as identified and discussed by various writers in the literature.

In answer to the question "what can organisations do to make alliances work?" Strout (2000) recommends simply stopping treating them like mergers or acquisitions, since
he found that such approaches led to alliance failure. Moeller (2000, p.11) similarly suggests that organisations should think about alliances as companies sitting in a circle and thinking 'what can each of us throw in to enhance the group?' instead of thinking 'now you're mine!' This rhetoric is, however, a little short on pragmatically useful advice for public sector consumption. Dyer et al., (2004, p.110) consider that companies often take over firms they should have collaborated with, and vice versa, and “make a mess of both acquisitions and alliances”. Bergquist et al., (1995) set out five conditions of success following a series of interviews with individuals involved in partnerships, alliances and joint ventures. These are:

1. respect for differences of opinion,
2. frequent and open communication,
3. an underlying shared vision,
4. the process should be enjoyable (given that it is entered into voluntarily), and
5. sufficient flexibility to accommodate the varying interests and aspirations of the partners.

Bergquist et al’s., (ibid) interviewees talk of satisfying work, enjoyment of the partnership experience, learning, and the desire to work with like-minded people. Compare the difference in thinking of Kaplan and Hurd (2002) who consider that strong and effective alliances require partners to adhere to just three key principles:

1. To define the purpose of the partnership;
2. To establish a formal alliance management process; and
3. To nurture the evolution of the alliance actively and deliberately.
Only three key principles, but within each a whole plethora of requirements to their effective implementation, driven by a primary objective to create new value and achieved by the management and control of the structural aspects of the collaboration. This includes 'settings metrics to track success', 'the objective, analytical identification and scrutiny of potential partners', 'managing partners' (p.3), and 'defining processes and the balance of power', 'planning to enhance interpersonal networks' (p.4) and 'the articulation of an exit strategy as part of the initial agreement' (p.5).

In deconstructing the difference between the Bergquist et al., (1995) and Kaplan and Hurd (2002) research results, Bergquist et al.'s, is about becoming / behaviour, whilst Kaplan and Hurd's is about structure, control and measurement.

Table 2.4 sets out a number of examples of research and analysis of business collaborating and alliance management. The various researchers sought to identify the key reasons behind collaborating success or failure. This includes a McKinsey study in 2004, which found that 50% of alliance failures are due to poor strategy while 50% are the result of poor management. Ernst and Bamford (2005) cite a lack of an effective "challenge process" (p.134) as a primary cause of alliance under-performance. They question why so many under-performing alliances are left to "wallow for years" (p.136), and cite inertia as probably the biggest reason. They contend that alliances need to continually evolve to succeed. They recommend continually asking "penetrating questions" (p.134) about performance, risk and future prospects to mitigate against the complexity of alliance economics and the frequent lack of robust performance metrics.
Elmuti and Kathawala (2001) cite the following risks and problems facing strategic alliances:

1. clash of cultures and "incompatible personal chemistry";
2. lack of trust;
3. lack of clear goals and objectives;
4. lack of coordination between management teams;
5. differences in operating procedures and attitudes among partners.

Other reasons cited by Elmuti and Kathawala (ibid) for the underperformance and failure of strategic alliances included a breakdown in trust, a change in strategy, the champions moved on, the value did not materialise, the cultures did not mesh, and the systems were not integrated. According to the Financial Times (1999, p.3) the main reason strategic alliances fail to meet expectations is "the failure to grasp and articulate their strategic intent." The second reason the Financial Times found for strategic alliance failure is the "lack of recognition of the close interplay between the overall strategy of the company and the role of an alliance in that strategy" (ibid, p.3).

Following their well-researched investigations into alliances and study of alliance competence, Spekman, Isabella and MacAvoy (2000) consider the existence of "alliance spirit" (p.2) to be a critical success factor. This is the essential requirement for partners to share a similar perspective of what is meant to be a partner. It embodies an implicit set of assumptions about the fundamental meaning of partnering and is the psychological contract that exists between the partner organisations. Related to this is setting expectations early regarding what information and/or capabilities to share. It helps understand the scope of the alliance, what is "in bounds"
and what is ‘out of bounds’. Spekman et al., (ibid) suggest 3 key points to be fundamental lessons learned from their research observations:

1. that alliance formation is driven by competitive pressures;
2. that alliance partners should possess complementary skills or expertise;
3. that alliances are not only about business; alliances are also about people and relationships.

This latter observation would seem to be consistent with a people-focused approach to the research study.

From the literature, it is possible to classify a number of key areas, effective management of which can together comprise the key behavioural and structural ingredients of successful business collaborating. These were set out previously in table 2.6 above. The author has carried out a structured and critical appraisal of this research and best practice literature, within the context of TCA’s predicament and dilemmas as outlined in chapter 1. This is summarised below.

2.7.1 Organisational self-knowledge

I am uncomfortable with the use of the term ‘organisational self-knowledge’ in the literature (Marshall, 1996; Kelly and Parker, 1997; Harper, 2001; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002; Kauser and Shaw, 2004). In my view, as a social constructionist, it wrongly promotes organisations as having a concrete existence. They are seen as reified. It is a big title, needs explaining and has ontological dimensions. In its context in the literature on business collaborating, I believe it relates to the need for the people
within organisations to understand themselves and the social, political and economic context within which they work. The writers suggest that people can approach this in two ways. Firstly, based on a personal reflection of themselves as individuals and an understanding of their organisation's culture and history, since this provides the background context as to who they are and how they behave. Secondly, through hard examination of the social, political and economic environment within which they work and how they sit, engage and contribute with the other actors in that same environment, through the practical use of market, resource and capability analysis as part of the business and strategic planning process. In this regard I think the various writers in the literature see the concept of self-knowledge, as in understanding who you are, what you do, what you need and what you are capable of, to be useful in helping the people within organisations effect more productive collaboration with people from other organisations. I perceive this from a managerialist perspective as pre-empting unnecessary personal and business conflict and avoiding unproductive and unnecessary relationships and collaborative ventures.

Marshall (1995) considers true collaborating to be a way of life and the way people naturally want to work. He asserts it to be an ethically sound organising principle for how we lead and manage our businesses and organisations. He concludes it to be a principle-based process of working together, which provides trust, integrity and "breakthrough results" (ibid, p.4) by building true consensus, ownership and alignment in all aspects of the organisation. In this regard, Marshall considers the starting point for effective business collaborating and alliances to be within the organisation itself. In his view, collaborating starts within and forms the basic fabric of the workplace. Marshall's views are consistent with those of Kelly and Parker.
(1997) who also contend that self-knowledge is a key success factor in alliance relationships. The knowledge of your own core capabilities, internal strengths and weaknesses and current market position represent a significant bargaining tool and identifies what the partner brings to the collaboration. One of Harper’s “four steps to a better alliance” (2001, p.25) is to take an inward look at “your organisation’s reality” before selecting alliance partners. By this she means base your company’s alliance strategy on your organisation’s larger vision, mission and strategy. She contends that by looking at your own unique circumstances, competencies and capabilities helps you determine whether an alliance makes more sense than increasing your infrastructure, merging, or outsourcing.

Kaplan and Hurd (2002) also contend that self-assessment, identification of gaps in corporate skills and capabilities, and a thorough review of all options should precede the final decision to partner. Contrast this with Anslinger and Jenk (2004) who do not mention inward self-knowledge at all as a key factor, and Kauser and Shaw (2004) who argue that organisational characteristics are not found to strongly influence strategic alliances. Their conclusions suggest that different ontological and epistemological assumptions will have been deployed to underpin their research and their results will be based on accounts informed by those assumptions.

2.7.2 Partner selection

Careful selection of alliance partners is seen as key to alliance success (Medcof, 1997). Kelly and Parker (1997, p.14) see partner selection as the most important factor affecting the success or failure of any joint alliance. So do Elmuti and Kathawala (2001, p.214). Put simply, whoever chooses the best partners, wins
Bergquist et al., (1995) assert that, apart from access to scarce or valuable resources and learning opportunities, the familiarity process and the desire to work with like-minded people dominate the partner selection process. This sentiment is echoed by Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.40) who assert however that rather than beginning a relationship based on personal ties between key company leaders, the ‘romance phase’ should follow the objective, analytical identification and scrutiny of potential partners. They suggest that first steps in identifying potential alliance partners should focus on finance, strategy and assets and capabilities. They consider that ‘softer’, albeit equally critical in their view, considerations such as cultural fit and personal rapport, enter later. Contrast this very formal approach with the Roffey Park Institute research conclusions that it is the relationship between partners that makes the collaborating function (Garrow et al., 2000). Elmuti and Kathawala (2001, p.214) consider selecting an appropriate partner and itemising the “rules of the alliance” to be the most intensive process in the formation of an alliance, however, done correctly they help ensure a higher quality, longer lasting relationship. Lorange and Roos (1991) cite the process for partner selection to be to:

1. state the organisation’s strategy;
2. develop a partnership benchmark;
3. eliminate undesirable business sectors;
4. select promising business sectors; and
5. select from potential candidates.

Dyer et al., (2001, p.39) cite the example of Eli Lilley & Co.’s approach to partner selection whereby they send a due-diligence team to any potential alliance partner to
formally evaluate the partner’s resources and capabilities. Of particular importance is the evaluation of the partner’s culture, since in Lilley’s experience, it is stated, culture clashes are one of the main reasons alliances fail. In Hamel and Prahalad's view (1994), there is seldom any overall logic to the partnerships and alliances that organisations have.

Too much overlap can stir up competition and suggest that the need for allying is unsubstantiated, whilst too few similarities can often lead to confusion and drift (Stanek, 2004, p.185). Differentiated, but partially overlapping, skill bases may contribute most to alliance success (Doz, 1996). However, trying to quantify the degree of such overlap is to overly simplify the, by definition, unprescriptive nature of different collaborative ventures. Contrarily, Harper (2001, p.25) dismisses the idea of overlap and encourages organisations’ to look to close the gaps in their own organisation’s strengths and weaknesses to increase the likelihood of choosing an appropriate partner.

Stanek (2004, p.186) highlights the benefits of involving the right people early in the collaborative process. This means having the people responsible for the alliance involved in the alliance from its conception. She further contends that if there is not enough consistency from idea to execution, the alliance intent suffers from lack of understanding and delays, due to confusion and misunderstandings.

### 2.7.3 Goals and objectives

One of the prominent reasons as to why alliances fail is the perception gap between expectations and results (Ring, 2000). It is feasible to conclude that this may arise
from both over expectation as well as from under delivery. In either case it seems important to ensure that any gap - perceived or demonstrable - is best minimised. Ring (ibid, p.184) advises firms entering alliances to avoid “love at first sight” and to focus on setting and meeting mutually advantageous and realistic objectives. These objectives need result in benefits for each partnering organisation. There has to be enough in it for both partners (Mariotti, 2001). Whatever the relationship between the two partners, the merging of separate corporate cultures in which the parent forms may have different, even conflicting, strategic intents can be difficult and anything but smooth (Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001, p.212). It is extremely important that alliances are aligned with the company structure. Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.42) recommend that senior leaders periodically review the overall alliance objectives. They consider it appropriate to modify objectives over time and it might signify the strength of the partnership in responding to changing market dynamics. Partners should clearly state the joint and individual objectives of the alliance and revisit them in annual planning cycles. Clearly, this assumes the alliance is not a short-term arrangement. Reardon (2007, p.60) promotes the use of primary and secondary goals, but warns that these should be reasonably within reach, “not pie-in-the-sky ambitions”.

Drawing on nine case studies and personal experience, the Roffey Park Institute examined the people aspects of strategic alliances (Garrow et al., 2000). This research was carried out by a team of four women whose conclusions, co-incidentally or not, seemed more rounded and balanced as to the contributions of both the hard contract and soft human relationship elements of successful alliances than those generally found from their male counterparts (Johnson, 2001; Pietras and Stormer, 2001). One
of the key messages from this research was the need for high level objectives subsequently translated into clear short-term goals at team and individual level.

One of the four key features repeatedly identified in research carried out by Kelly and Parker (1997, p.15) as being the most significant attributes of successful joint alliances, are “compatible strategic motivations” in the long term interest of all the parties involved. Anslinger and Jenk (2004, p.19) consider that, whilst developing clear and common objectives and a definition of ‘success’ seems a straightforward practice, it is often the hardest to achieve, given that the collaborating parties rarely have the same objectives, metrics and definition of success.

The partnering organisations need to agree what the collaborating is all about by determining clear goals and objectives (Stanek, 2004, p.185). Dyer et al., (2001, p.40) argue that specific goals lead to better performance than vague goals. On the basis of ‘what gets measured gets done’ objectives need to be converted into specific performance measurements and targets (Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Stanek, 2004).

Inkpen (2000, p.776) points out that virtually all alliances tend to evolve in ways that the alliance partners did not predict when the alliance was formed - suggesting goal and objective setting should be subject to regular review. However, in effectively promoting performance appraisal, the scope for inconsistent performance appraisal and how this could be avoided is not considered. This is an important consideration to take into account to avoid deriving inappropriate conclusions leading to unnecessary
or inappropriate changes and activities as a consequence of adopting less than robust performance appraisal techniques.

The aims framework developed by Vangen and Huxham (2005) presents a serious challenge to the view that it is essential to be clear about the aims of joint working if partners are to work effectively together. They argue that, in collaborations, genuine aims exist, if at all, in “an entanglement of other, variously characterised aims that are both real and imagined” (ibid, p.3). They point to people’s differing perceptions of aims and conclude that this provides real obstacles to achieving agreement about aims and, therefore, consider any process for supporting collaborating that rely on the notion of a shared vision is unlikely to succeed. They recommend that actively managing the conflicting aims in collaborating is likely to make a difference towards the achievement of collaborative advantage. Vangen and Huxham’s (ibid) theoretical conceptualisations were developed through research carried out over a ten-year period during which time they adopted an action research approach, actively working with managers. The research was concerned with understanding the nature of, and exploring the basis for, successfully collaborating. Data was systematically collected and emergent theoretical conceptualisations were tried out for practical relevance during the course of intervention. The conceptualisations that made up the research output were developed through a process of emergent theorising from the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). The interventions from which they drew were predominantly concerned with supporting managerial learning. Moreover, the outcome of any evaluation aimed at assessing collaborative performance clearly depended on whoever’s perspective matters at the time of the evaluation.
2.7.4 Legal contracts and agreements

Many writers perceive the legal vehicle, in different forms, as necessary to facilitate business collaborating (Harrigan, 1986; Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Johnson, 2001; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002; Ernst and Bamford, 2005). Alliances may be contracts, a new limited company or general partnerships or corporate joint ventures, or may take less formal forms, such as a referral network (Pietras and Stormer, 2001). They may be equity joint ventures, non-equity collaborative arrangements, licensing or franchising agreements, management contracts and long-term supply contracts (Arino, de la Torre and Ring, 2001). According to Johnson (2001, p.34) a properly structured agreement can help mitigate the risks to support a successful partnership. He argues that parties should also agree on the value of both tangible assets (assessed by an independent appraiser) and intangible assets (such as a patent or technology) to be contributed at the outset and to stipulate that agreement in writing. As a partner with a consulting firm specialising in business valuations and financial litigation, Johnson contends that the joint venture contract should set out how funding requirements will be satisfied throughout the term of the contract and the penalties if one party does not contribute its relative portion of any additional funding required, either because it is unable or unwilling to do so at the time.

Some authors (Harrigan, 1986; Cullen et al., 1995; Spekman et al., 2000) consider that contracts laden with over-legalise language, prescriptive conditions and out-clauses can stifle the alliance. Indeed, in a Technology and Associates and Alliances (1999) survey of 455 CEO’s ranking the importance of certain success factors for strategic alliances, legal contracts and agreements did not show in the final fifteen success factors identified. Spekman et al., (2000, p.46-47) contend that to concentrate
only on the initial contract and not acknowledge that, as the alliance matures, unforeseen circumstances might alter the stated intent of the alliance, is to question both the motivation of one’s partner and the implicit value of the alliance. Others contend that intellectual property rights need to be protected at all cost (Johnson, 2001, p.36-37). From a simple due diligence point of view, it would seem prudent for alliance players to protect their own organisation’s valuable assets, including intellectual property rights. This is pertinent to TCA’s predicament, since the protection of the intellectual property rights attached to its coal mining database are considered by TCA’s Executive and Board to be vital to the survival of TCA as a data trading and service provider.

Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.41-42) maintain that, for an alliance to be effective, tightly written legal agreements, clearly defined processes, formal and informal forums of discussion, and targeted performance scorecards provide some of the pieces. This is a view shared by Pietras and Stormer (2001, p.10) who, whilst advocating that alliance operating agreements should be flexible and as clear and easy to understand as possible, strongly recommend that when it comes to drafting alliance agreements, organisations should “consult a qualified corporate attorney with experience in negotiating such documents.”

KPMG (1999) suggest good Service Level Agreements and appropriate exit provisions are two areas where significant improvements to collaborative business success are possible. Johnson (2001, p.36) suggests the contract should provide for a practical and efficient dispute resolution mechanism and even goes as far as to argue for the contract to also specify how decisions are to be made and to set out the
methodology by which prices will be established. However, Harrigan (1986, p.8) argues that "alliances fail because operating managers do not make them work, not because contracts are poorly written". A study of joint ventures by Cullen et al., (1995) found no support for the idea that formal control led to more commitment in alliances.

According to Ring and Van De Ven (1992), four critical areas should be addressed in the legal documentation to make it effective and robust:

1. the level and nature of the risks accepted;
2. the determination of the outcomes and distribution rewards;
3. each party's asset and resource commitment, and
4. the procedures and systems for allocating responsibility, authority and control.

These 'critical areas' compare closely with those advocated by Pietras and Stormer (2001). They paraphrase (ibid, p.10) Robert Frost (Mending Wall, 1915, line 45), "good agreements make good partners" and consider the agreement needs to address four main areas:

1. the allocation of risks and rewards;
2. the partner contributions and distributions;
3. control, and
4. the alliance termination strategy.
Domberger and Fernandez (1999) studied the performance of some 7,500 public private partnerships over a three-year period between 1995 and 1998 in Australia, focusing on the forces driving private services through the public sector. They conclude that it is in the interest of both the public sector and the private sector to manage their contractual relationship with as much flexibility as possible, in a spirit of partnership. Whilst disappointingly not usefully clarifying the nature and scope of the “flexibility” referred to, they do point out that this needs to take account of competition law and accountability.

The debate continues as to the merits or otherwise of exit clauses in alliance contracts and agreements. The negative signals can overwhelm the win-win philosophy of a strong alliance spirit and outweigh the benefits. However, the counter position for including robust exit clauses highlights well-grounded merit. They are important in protecting an organisation’s assets going into the relationship and can avoid costly litigation later. In this regard exit clauses are simply a result of sound planning and, in any event, an organisation’s lawyers would always insist on them! Reasons against exit clauses include them sending out the wrong signal and demonstrating distrust. It is alleged that they over emphasise the worst-case scenario and have a self-fulfilling prophecy aspect to them and provide an easy way out should trouble arise (Spekman et al., 2000, p.185). However, it is difficult finding credible grounds for this conclusion or for the view that, in a subtle way, they take responsibility away from the business people and give power to the lawyers. In establishing metrics to measure alliance success, Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.42) consider the articulation of an exit strategy as part of the initial agreement to be equally important. Since, by their nature, many joint ventures and alliances have a finite life, Johnson (2001, p.37) contends
that the duration of the joint venture, any renewal provisions and the right to terminate
the agreement should be included and clearly set out in the contract document.

Ernst and Bamford (2005) suggest a different approach to exit provisions. They
conclude that most alliances' exit clauses are all-or-nothing affairs, i.e. they spell out
the situation or circumstances that would trigger full termination of the venture but
rarely specify what would trigger less dramatic changes. They recommend creating
provisions that prompt restructuring based on specific performance metrics or external
conditions (ibid, p.135). The business collaborating process, in whatever form and
vehicle, is a continuous process of identifying needs, determining the best method of
fulfilling those needs, evaluating the results of the plan, and modifying the plan.

2.7.5 Alliance management and relationships

While good chemistry (Spekman et al., 2000), a common vision (Bergquist et al.,
1995), and strong rapport among senior executives (Mariotti, 2001) are prerequisites
to signing an agreement, a formal alliance management process to screen, select and
manage partners is critical to the ongoing viability of alliances (Kaplan and Hurd,
2002, p.40). Whilst those involved in the field of human resources might cringe at the
suggestion that partners can be managed, Kaplan and Hurd's conclusions are
underpinned by sound research with regard to the benefits of sound alliance
management processes as a key success factor in business collaborating.

Spekman et al., (1996) concluded that managers focus too much attention on
questions of alliance formation and spend too little time understanding the process of
alliance management and the importance of both business and interpersonal
relationships to the success of the alliance. Alliances tend to fail at least as much
because of poor management as because of flawed strategy. Alliances are about
business and about relationships. Emphasis on either dimension to the detriment of
the other weakens the alliance foundation. Spekman *et al.*, (2000) contend that
achieving balance in this regard is the crucial role of alliance management. Harper
(2001), whose research observed that, even with a secure contract and clear alliance
objectives in place, an alliance struggled because the participants couldn’t agree on
how to work together, echoes this sentiment. She proposes four steps to a better
alliance:

Step 1: develop your company’s own alliance strategy as a foundation.
Step 2: create a joint alliance strategy before finalising agreements.
Step 3: co-develop opportunities according to the needs of the alliance.
Step 4: evaluate and adjust the alliance to serve both companies.

However, a limitation of Harper’s research is that it is based only on one case study
between a high-tech company and a manufacturing company. The sample size is too
small to make the research results conclusive or suitably robust. I would argue that
within her epistemology the assumptions are inappropriate.

Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.41) argue that the strategic aspect of partnering begins with
a joint senior team agreeing on the specific objectives of the partnership. They
contend that the greatest challenges occur not during negotiation, but in the day-to-
day strategic and tactical management of the alliance. Johnson (2001, p.35-36) shares
this sentiment when he recommends that an important distinction be made between
representation at the board level and day-to-day management of the joint venture from an operational standpoint. Clearly defined processes are critical, in Kaplan and Hurd’s (2002) view, to ensuring the smooth flow of activities. Linked to this is the governance process, which they contend must define the balance of power and provide for shifts over time. Of interest is their assertion that an organisational map should also include a plan to enhance interpersonal networks and that, based on their experiences, simply cross-staffing teams, while a valuable step, is not sufficient.

Anslinger and Jenk (2004) recognise the importance of establishing an appropriate governance model for clear decision-making and operating viability. They conclude that most successful, long-lived alliances tend to broaden substantially in scope, which, they contend, highlights the need to plan for evolution by building into the alliance the flexibility to grow.

Drawing on nine case studies and personal experience, the Roffey Park Institute examined the people aspects of strategic alliances (Garrow et al., 2000). One of the key messages from this research was that alliance partners inevitably have their own longer-term strategic goals and so a degree of conflict is inherent in the relationship. Rather than avoid this, the aim should be to build the alliance around common ground and good processes for resolving differences. Because of the inevitable tensions on an alliance, it is the relationship between individuals, which makes the collaborating function. Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.42) consider systems to be “a continuing cause of angst and hope”. For relationship and strategic alliances, they suggest separate databases for the alliance activities are desirable, even if they are slightly less efficient in the early stages. Alliances that prosper will evolve independent systems.
Whilst there are many key roles in alliances, researchers at the Roffey Park Institute (2000) found two of the most important to be the Champion and the Alliance Manager. They consider Senior Champions to be vital not just at an early stage but also in sustaining corporate commitment to the alliance. The Alliance Manager, who is operationally responsible, provides the 'glue' for the alliance, working between partners and representing all interests. Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.42) quote one Alliance Officer who depicted his role as creating a bridge between the partnering companies.

Management of the alliance over time is usually more important than crafting the initial formal design (Doz and Hamel, 1998). Yet, our understanding of how to effectively manage alliances seems somewhat limited when compared with other alliance pre-occupations, like failure rates for example. Further, there is no single, optimal method to successfully manage alliances and no ideal alliance design or governance structure exists (Gulati et al., 1994). Spekman et al. (2000) would disagree with this conclusion. They suggest a number of conflict resolution techniques including their patented No Blame Review © process, which is a collaborative process of conflict resolution, during which, as the title suggests, fault or blame is completely absent. The No Blame Review © process and conflict resolution is discussed in 2.7.12 below.

Ring and Van de Ven (1994) found that, in any collaborative venture, people often start out with an institutional role before they can move more towards personal relationships. They contend that sense-making between individuals comes about when the parties are reaching levels of understanding that are often recognised after
informal relationships begin. As personal relationships develop, they often replace the formal relationships and other substitutions occur, such as less dependence on the legal contracts, leading to greater levels of trust and co-operation. Positive relationship management can often contribute to an alliance project by having the right emphasis placed on personal interaction, often leading to stronger commitment (Stanek, 2004, p.189). This is important in light of Kauser and Shaw's (2004, p.40) research conclusion that commitment is found to positively influence strategic alliances performance and managers' satisfaction with the relationship. Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001) consider frequent and transparent exchanges, not limited to alliance issues, are essential ingredients to enriching the level of relational quality. They contend that management should ensure that employees at all levels, including senior management, meet each other often and under diverse circumstances since they are the ones who will make the alliance work on a day-to-day basis.

Jarillo too stressed the importance of social relationships between partners (1988, p31-41). Jarillo argues that parallel to the acceptance of the importance of competitive behaviour, "the realisation is many success stories in today's management" (ibid, p.31). In his view, competition and co-operation jointly govern inter-firm behaviour, in different mixes under different circumstances. Of particular interest in Jarello's argument is his use of transaction cost economies to explain the rationale of networks. Furthermore, he emphasises the importance of trust in the development of networks.

In expressing a contrary view to much of the other literature, Ernst and Bamford (2005, p.141) contend that too much stability can be a bad thing for an alliance. They
argue that evolution is necessary for success – not just in alliances but also in most relationships and other endeavours.

Eventually, partnerships must come to an end. Bergquist et al., (1995) recommend that partners should aim to retain sufficient independence, both financially and psychologically, in order for the business, and the individuals in it, to be in the best position to continue effectively post-partnership.

2.7.6 Trust and control

I am critical of the trust and control relationship espoused in much of the literature. Trust between the parties is one of the much-quoted ‘soft’ behavioural factors that many writers consider to be an important and critical feature of ‘successful’ business collaborating (see figure 2.6). Control is a ‘hard’ structural factor that is cited by many writers as a positive factor, by many others as a negative factor in business collaborating (ibid). However, many other elements of ‘control’ can be considered, for example, performance management, risk management and project management are identified as separate collaborating elements in themselves, but each has a ‘controlling’ aspect that links them all. Despite this, trust and control are often discussed together in the literature (Faulkner, 1995). However, I want a holistic model that takes account of the social, political and economic context and environment of the people involved in the process. But for the purpose of this review of the relevant and contemporary theoretical literature they are considered together, though separately, in this section.
2.7.6.1 Trust

Business collaborating and partnerships are relationships between people and it is alleged by Mariotti (2001) that the essential success factor in all business collaborating depends on one thing above all else – trust. Trust has been described as the bedrock of human relationships (Marano, 1998). Rousseau et al., (1998, p.393) define trust as a psychological process, activity and state comprising the intentions to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another. Trust and control are often cited as key success factors in alliances. Cullen et al., (1996) assert that trust is essential for the development of sustained partnerships. In a study of 37 companies from 11 countries, Kanter (1994) found trust to be a key element of alliance success. Mariotti (2001, p.3) reminds us that trust is a “two-way street”. In this context, trust is not a naïve belief in honesty, but rather the reduced probability of violations of agreements, a reduction of uncertainty and a check on opportunistic behaviour risk assessment (Stanek, 2004, p.189). However, whilst not directly proclaiming a convergent hypothesis, Domberger and Fernandez (1999) do not actively conclude trust to be a critical success factor following their studies of Public-Private Partnerships. Neither do Pietras and Stormer (2001) who, from their experience serving strategic alliances in a number of different industries, believe that only ‘left-brained’ analytical business factors are key to successful alliances. They cite four:

1. proper strategy (based on the results of a formal assessment process),
2. aligned structure (with alliance structure tailored to business strategy),
3. clear governance rules, and
4. effective monitoring by all parties.
Trust and other behavioural factors of collaborative working do not seem to register on their radar, just the hard structural and control elements. Though research by Kauser and Shaw (2004) concluded that structure was not found to influence international strategic alliance performance and managers’ satisfaction (ibid, p.19).

Simons and Peterson (2006) interviewed 100 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) about the level of trust within their top management teams and about the teams’ most importantly recent strategic decisions. They asked how strongly the CEOs felt their teams endorsed the final decisions and how smoothly the implementation ran. They then sent surveys to the members of these top management teams and asked them the same questions. They ended up with information on 78 strategic decisions, each described by an average of five executives. Simons and Peterson (ibid) found that teams whose members mistrust one another are less effective at implementing their strategic decisions. That lack of trust manifest itself in two ways:

1. mistrustful groups are less effective at collaborating, and

2. they endorse their strategic decisions less strongly, which affects implementation.

They then grouped the decisions into those made by full consensus and those where one or more members reported that the decision was made by the CEO or by a subgroup of executives. Their analysis showed that group mistrust damaged implementation only half as much when the decision was made by consensus than when it was imposed by the CEO or a subgroup. Simons and Peterson’s (ibid) critical
factor here is buy-in. When a group operates with a low level of trust and a decision is forced on members, they rebel. And the rebellion shows up as a weak endorsement of the decision, which in turn has a negative impact on implementation. If trust is high, then imposing a decision does not cause this problem.

Trust requires the presence of an element of risk and mutual interdependence (Shepherd and Sherman, 1998). In other words, there must be an exposure to potential loss or harm for an organisation; a degree of vulnerability that is directly related to future actions taken by one’s partner in a situation of mutual dependence and environmental uncertainty (Arino, de la Torre and Ring, 2001). Research by Faulkner (1995) found that company directors considered six of the top seven factors essential to the success of joint alliances concerned the attitudes of partners to each other. Of these, trust was considered the vital prerequisite. Kelly and Parker (1997) concluded that trust was essential to the success of any joint alliance, that a spirit of collaborating and openness encouraged trust which they found reduced the need for elaborate procedures and, therefore, costs. In a business context, the issue is not whether some people are more or less predisposed to trust other people, but whether organisations and their managers rely on trust in their business dealings. However, trust implies an expectation that one’s partners will subordinate its selfish interests to the joint interest of the alliance. To this extent Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001) support the view of Kelly and Parker (1997) that relying on trust may serve as a substitute for, or a complement to, more formal governance structures. However, Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001, p.110) point out that reliance on trust is “a complex probabilistic decision” and urge management to focus on a broader concept, that of the quality of the inter-partner relationship, as a critical determinant of alliance success.
Although Bibb and Kourdi (2004) acknowledge that trust cannot be manufactured, they fail to recognise that people differ in their personal styles and characteristics. Some people are, by nature, more trustworthy and trusting than others, although Zaheer et al., (1998) present evidence that inter-personal and inter-organisational trust are not comparable. Galford and Drapeau (2003, p.91-95) also conclude that being trustworthy yourself does not guarantee the capability of building trust in an organisation. In their view, that takes “old-fashioned managerial virtues” like consistency, clear communication and “a willingness to tackle awkward questions.”

Others, however, argue that the composition of trust is comparable across vantage points (Rousseau et al., 1998). Bibb and Kourdi’s (2004, p.33) view that “a leader who is seen as acting more for personal gain than for the greater good of the organisation will never be able to create a trusting culture” whilst overly simplistic, has its place against a background of publicly expressed concern about excessive CEO compensation and the growing disparity between top and average pay in companies (BBC Radio 4 News, July 2006). Bibb and Kourdi’s (2004, p.33) statement that “simply put, the greater an organisation’s focus on trust, the more profitable it will be” confuses correlation with causation and its over-simplified conclusion weakens the strength of their otherwise reasoned argument. Among the most enemies of trust cited by Galford and Drapeau (2003) are inconsistent message from senior management, inconsistent standards, a willingness to tolerate incompetence or bad behaviour, dishonest feedback, a failure to trust others to do good work, a tendency to ignore painful or politically charged situations, consistent corporate underperformance, and rumours.
Spekman et al., (2000, p.43) contend trust and commitment are the *sine qua non* of alliances for without trust and commitment there can be no alliance. Despite the dubious logic in the way they phrase their sound-bite conclusion, their overall conclusions are well grounded in research. Research devoted to trust in organisations has over a 50-year history (Lowicki et al., 1998) and the definition of trust converges on a confidence on others’ intentions and motivations. Trust is the belief that one’s alliance partner will act in a predictable manner, and will not behave in a way that negatively affects the other. This last point is particularly salient under conditions where one partner might feel vulnerable due to a heightened dependence on the other.

Kramer and Tyler (1996) contend that, on average, people trust one another more when they share similarities, communicate frequently and operate in a common cultural context that imposes tough sanctions for behaving in an untrustworthy manner. The counter-argument is that people often conform regardless of the different cultural contexts within which they each work (Stanek, 2004). Park and Ungson (1997) found no empirical support for positive associations between cultural distance and alliance termination. They contend that the cultural problems may be overstated. Though DeMeyer and Schneider (1991) strongly argued that when it comes to decision-making, this is most definitely influenced by the culture of the respective parent organisation. Given the often-significant contrasts between corporate cultures, Bryant (2003) points to the routine use of cultural audits to screen prospective partners. However, whilst the use of such audits may be increasing, the research does not justify the suggestion that they are carried out routinely.
A number of authors (Kelly and Parker, 1997; Spekman et al., 2000; Bryant, 2003; Pascale and Sternin, 2005) have recognised that there is an inherent tension within alliances given there is less formal organisational structure than exists within a single organisation and a need for shared decision-making that is balanced by trust and a sense of fair-dealing that grows, over time, through the partners’ interactions. To trust one’s partner to act in the interest of the alliance rather than to act in his or her own self-interest requires a significant change in thinking and represents a key interpretation of the meaning of trust. In the course of defining the terms of an alliance, managers are effectively required to make decisions regarding the degree of vulnerability, uncertainty and risk they are willing to accept. Their willingness to rely on trust plays a critical role in managing these issues (Arino, de la Torre and Ring, 2001). Arino et al., (ibid) also consider that negative information will have a more marked effect if relational quality is low, whilst good relationships will be more tolerant of disappointments. However, other evidence from the literature seems to indicate that negative experiences *per se* have greater impact on trusting behaviour than good information (Lewicki, McAllister and Bies, 1998). Perhaps the standard an organisation might use to evaluate the reasonableness of its partner’s defection, and therefore its tolerance of it, would be whether, if faced with similar circumstances, they would have acted in a similar manner.

When it comes to sustaining successful business collaborating, Bergquist et al., (1995) contend that giving continuing attention to preserving trust in the partners’ intentions and skills is a critical condition. They also assert that maintaining balance between, on the one hand, specialisation and division of labour, and on the other hand, integration and co-ordination of functions with and around the partnership, as a
further condition for sustained success. Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001) cite examples of both formal and informal alliances that have endured market and competitive changes, economic cycles and inter-partner conflicts for thirty years or more, this, in some cases, in spite of conflicting interests and the absence of clear measures of value added. They quote other examples (including Coca-Cola’s joint venture with Nestle) where large and experienced companies found that working in the context of a collaborative alliance, where decisions had to be reached by consensus, was too difficult and time consuming to merit continuation in spite of potential benefits. In accounting for these differences, Arino, de la Torre and Ring (ibid) contend that, whilst factors such as compatibility, robust terms of collaborating, proper incentives, adequate governance procedures and favourable economic conditions play a critical role, other skills are required to manage within such a non-hierarchical role. These include entrepreneurship, ‘corporate savvy’ and cross-cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, Arino, de la Torre and Ring (ibid) consider the ability to rely on mutual trust constitutes a critical ingredient by which the partners can deal effectively with the conflicts that economic and competitive changes, as well as shifts in corporate priorities, will throw their way. They cite Koza and Lewin (1998, p110) who called for more systematic research into the role of trust in business relations, observing that “It is clear that research on trust needs to advance beyond a catch-all residual in the unexplained random error.”

The research work carried out by Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001) into the concept of “Relational Quality” seems a highly relevant piece of work when considering the management of trust in corporate alliances given it is well-grounded and underpinned by credible qualitative research. They contrast transactional exchanges and relational
exchanges and argue that with relational exchanges, unlike transactional exchanges, the parties have a past (one that is known and remembered) and they may be associated with each other again in the future. Arino et al., (ibid) contend that these are important factors in the ways the parties conduct themselves in relational exchanges since the parties will focus on their “relational quality”, that is, the extent to which the partners feel comfortable and are willing to rely on trust in dealing with one another. Whilst they are not saying that managers choose whether or not to be transactional or relational, Arino et al’s., (ibid) analysis avoids an interpersonal or psychological connotation of the concept of trust while preserving its fundamental elements as they apply reliance on trust in an inter-organisational context. In this regard relational quality is a broader concept than trust since it involves factors such as the degree of compatibility of organisational cultures and decision-making styles, a convergence of worldviews, and other organisational characteristics.

Arino et al., (ibid) set out and describe four elements of relational quality:

1. The initial conditions surrounding the exchange determine the degree of trustworthiness and derive from the partner’s inherent characteristics, the organisational context within which the alliance exists, their respective reputations for fair dealing and any direct prior experiences.

2. This initial reservoir of comfort and confidence may be enhanced or diminished through the negotiation process.
3. A critical determinant of future levels of relational quality between the partners is their experience with each other’s behaviour as the venture develops. These direct experiences will influence the parties’ views of each other’s capabilities and trustworthiness in the face of external challenges or internal difficulties. Furthermore, they may affect the partners’ willingness to rely on each other in terms of any one of the three elements that influence performance: organisational capacity, technical prowess or integrity. As the quality of the relationship improves, the potential for positive conflict resolution increases, which in turn enhances the partners’ views of each other’s trustworthiness (Das and Teng, 1998). The reverse is also true.

4. The partners’ behaviour outside the context of their venture will nonetheless affect their perceptions and attitudes regarding each other’s trustworthiness where it reveals their commitment to certain values or business practices that may be critical to the venture’s success.

Researchers studying the formation of trust in temporary teams of professionals that came together for specific projects identified ‘traditional’ sources of trust as including familiarity, shared experience, reciprocal information disclosure, threats and deterrents, fulfilled promises and demonstrations of non-exploitation of vulnerability (Kramer and Tyler, 1996). Some of these are known in advance whereas others can only be learned once the new team begins to work together. Similarly, there are social expectations shared by alliance members where certain understandings are ‘taken for granted’. These expectations may be person-based, e.g. similar culture or schooling (Cohen and Fields, 1999), institution-based, e.g. professional or corporate affiliations
(Zucker, 1986) or process-based in that they proceed from a record of past interactions. An organisation’s initial willingness to rely on trust in dealing with another organisation in the formative stages of the alliance will be governed by these expectations (Arino, de la Torre and Ring, 2001). However, the weakness in this argument is it implies an assumption that organisations are unitary bodies. Yet, specific subsidiaries, offices, departments, even individual managers and directors, may have reputations for trustworthiness that are quite different from those of the parent organisation as a whole. Whatever initial expectation exists, ‘negotiating the deal’ will either cement or distort the initial assessments of trustworthiness derived from such generic sources.

Rangan (2000, p.813) introduces the concept of “negotiation bandwidth”, arguing that the quality of the relationship, particularly in terms of its impact on the willingness to rely on trust in future negotiations, is much higher under a broad bandwidth negotiation process, where the parties focus beyond the specific tasks and resources necessary to bring about the expected outcome and conducting only passive sensemaking, to actively observe each other’s business judgement, reliability and operational competence, altering any initial perceptions and assumptions to reflect judgements made about relational quality and trustworthiness that go beyond those derived from pre-negotiation data. In their contention of relational quality as both an input to and an output of the processes of collaborating, Arino et al., (2001) conclude that, as the alliance venture develops and the partners perceive that their goals are being realised and that partner behaviour is consistent with their original expectations, relational quality will grow. Future conflicts and difficulties are then more likely to be resolved amicably and fairly. Though it would be naïve to consider relational quality
to be an end in itself, but rather a means to an end, i.e. the satisfactory achievement of
the alliance’s objectives. Building relational quality as urged by Arino et al., (ibid)
requires time, effort and investment and can only be worthwhile if the returns
obtained through trust-based process (quicker action and smoother collaborating)
warrant it. Even then there is a need to consider when to substitute trust for more
formal governance and controls. To their credit Arino et al., (ibid, p.130)
conscientiously draw attention to the limitations imposed by relational quality and its
decline when confronted with “breaches of faith, falls from grace or sins of
omission”. In such circumstances they suggest managers should resort to more
formalised controls, first as complements and then as substitutes, to reliance on trust
before considering the more radical step of dissolving the alliance.

2.7.6.2 Control

As discussed in the introduction to section 2.7.6 above, trust and control are often
cited together in the literature on business collaborating. Control in strategic alliances
is the process by which one particular partner influences the behaviour and output of
the other and of the alliance itself, through the use of power, authority and a wide
range of bureaucratic, cultural and informal mechanisms (Geringer and Herbert, 1989,
p.235). The evidence from Faulkner’s research (1999), using a similar definition of
control, suggests however that managers who hold to the popular idea that control is
necessary to make an alliance work are mistaken. Faulkner studied three cases, each
involving a different type of alliance, i.e. a joint venture, a collaborative venture (but
not one structured as a joint venture company) and a consortium. All faced a similar
challenge in the development of trust. The results are set out in table 2.8 below. The
study, whilst lightweight given that it only involved three cases, concluded that a high
level of trust was important to effective operation. In both the successful alliances, a high degree of trust was evident. Its absence damaged performance.

Table 2.8: Faulkner 1999 - Trust and Control in Strategic Alliances

In the three cases, the less control that existed, the better the performance. However, it is important to remember that in case studies of this kind it is difficult to factor in changes over time. Different control mechanisms develop over time, as does the extent and nature of trust. Performance also varies over time. To draw hard and fast conclusions from this analysis would be inappropriate. But at least one can be suspicious of the suggestion that the best way to run an alliance is by tight control of one's partner's actions. The importance of trust in achieving performance seems clearly validated. In his inimitable and refreshingly straightforward - though often annoyingly overly alliterative - way, Mariotti (2001, p.4) contends that “power is poison to partnerships”.

However, the ‘less control the better’ view is far from universal. Pietras and Stormer (2001) cite control as being a key area to be covered specifically in the alliance governance documents. Issues ranging from the policy on admission of new partners to appointment of board members to the conditions under which the terms of the
alliance agreement may be modified and the mechanics for doing so, are all seen as being necessarily agreed ‘up front’ to avoid subsequent conflict later. Kauser and Shaw (2004) found that organisational characteristics such as structure and control mechanisms were not found to strongly influence the success of international strategic alliances. Their study based on the questionnaire results from 114 companies involved in international strategic alliances found behavioural characteristics to play a more significant role in explaining overall alliance performance compared to organisational characteristics. They found that the focus of control not to be a good predictor of strategic alliance success since the sharing of control responsibility over the alliance’s activities was found to be a characteristic of both successful and less successful strategic alliances. Whether these results can be applied to non-international alliances is uncertain. There are a number of limitations to the Kauser and Shaw (ibid) study. First, the study relied on secondary data from the Economist and Financial Times to identify the strategic alliances that made up the sample frame for the study. In this regard there is likely to be a bias in the data as only well-known firms and their alliance activities are likely to be reported in the press. Secondly, the analysis conducted in the study was based on the perceptions of the British partners engaged in international strategic alliances and, therefore, does not capture the cooperative characteristics of both partners. Third, despite the importance of their findings, knowledge concerning behavioural and organisational issues is, by their own admission, at an early stage. While the concepts used in the study may be reliable and show validity, it is not possible to capture all the complexities of commitment and trust when measuring these constructs. Finally, in measuring success, the study used data that are perceptual and subjective, though elsewhere the literature supports the use of perceptual performance measures (e.g. Geringer and Hebert, 1991).
Firms may find control issues expensive since control involves legal support, increased overhead and continual performance measurement (Spekman, Isabella and MacAvoy, 2000). However, more reliance on trust between the parties can help mitigate against any avoidable costs whilst still securing effective control (ibid); though this is more a positive ‘control’ as against the process by which one particular partner influences the behaviour and output of the other and of the alliance itself, through the use of power, authority and a wide range of bureaucratic, cultural and informal mechanisms as defined by Geringer and Herbert (1989). Further, given the nature of collaborating, it is difficult for alliance partners to use a hierarchical command and control mentality. Organisations must sacrifice some autonomy and engage in joint decision-making and control. Partners should no longer focus solely on self-interest but rather pursue policies that are mutually beneficial to all alliance partners. Spekman et al., (ibid, p.46-47) assert that control as a concept is no longer relevant; verbs like influence, educate, persuade and collaborate enter the alliance conversation to describe how work gets done. They describe 4 key factors to effective trust building:

1. Risk-Taking – where trust and risk-taking form a reciprocal relationship. One partner takes a risk and trusts the other and the other tends to be motivated to behave in a trustworthy manner (Larson, 1992);

2. Fair dealing breeds trust – so profits and other benefits that accrue from the alliance are distributed fairly, not necessarily equally, but such that partners do not feel taken advantage of;
3. A willingness and ableness to adapt to the changing needs of the environment. Flexibility in one’s approach to the alliance sends a signal of trust and encourages partners to focus on their mutual interests;

4. Communication and a willingness of partners to share information in an open and timely fashion.

The research literature often cites lack of co-operation, together with the opportunistic behaviour of partners, as causes for the relatively high failure of alliances (Das and Teng, 1998). However, Doz et al., (1989, p.133) point out that co-operation has its limits, in that organisations should only share what is necessary and defend against “competitive compromise”. They contend that, for co-operation to succeed, each partner must contribute something distinctive. They see the challenge being to share enough skills to create advantage while preventing the wholesale transfer of core skills to the partner. Other authors share the view that open and prompt communication among partners is an indispensable characteristic of trusting relationships (Kanter, 1994), with the quality of information transmitted between partners and the sharing of information being greater in more successful alliances compared to less successful alliances (Kauser and Shaw, 2004). Mariotti (2001) contends that whilst smart and effective collaborating and partnering are built on trust, they operate effectively on shared information. In an alliance study by Govindarajan and Gupta (2001), alliance communication barriers were ranked second in importance and degree of difficulty to fix. Cultivating trust among members was ranked first. Research by the Roffey Park Institute (Garrow et al., 2000) found the sharing of relevant information to be critical to partners’ ability to deliver their part of the alliance. The more information shared the higher the level of trust. However, people
also need to be clear about information that they need to protect. Other key behaviours cited by the Roffey Park Institute for effective alliance working include building personal relationships, open leadership style, understanding partner’s needs, goal focus, negotiating for success, managing differences, operational effectiveness and regular, effective communication. Most of the skills needed by those working in alliances are those increasingly required for team-working within organisations. They include broad business understanding, cultural agility, friendliness, negotiation, managing complexity and tolerance of ambiguity. Alliance managers also require a high level of emotional resilience, since the Institute research found these individuals often feel they are giving a lot of emotional energy to the alliance, which their own organisation may or may not see. All of which brings us full circle to the question of ‘what is trust and how do you get it?’ as defined and described at the beginning of this section 2.7.6, and drawing together that trust and trust building are related and a process of becoming rather than the outcome of a process, and about activity becoming social construction.

2.7.7 Performance measurement

Anslinger and Jenk (2004, p.22) contend that the biggest reason many alliances do not succeed is because most organisations do not employ performance measurement concepts. In many ways this is another form and aspect of control. In order for strategic alliances to succeed, their performance must be continually assessed and evaluated against the short and long-term goals and objectives for the alliance (Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001, p.211). On the basis of ‘what gets measured gets done’ objectives need to be converted into specific performance measurements and targets (Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Pietras and Stormer, 2001; Stanek, 2004). In order
for the feedback monitoring system to be successful, it is important that the goals of the alliance be well-defined and measurable (Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001, p.212). In addition, benchmarks for alliance performance should be set to assist management in evaluating alliance results. Though Kelly and Parker (1997, p.5) warn of the threat of increased costs where extensive procedures exist to monitor the activities of the other partner.

A study of alliance successes suggests that performance evaluation is a critical element. However, this is not measuring for measuring's sake. There is a need to develop criteria that are important and unique to the alliance (Stanek, 2004, p.188). They should include information that is both strategic and operational, with appropriate measures, and also contain short and long-term objectives (Gulati et al., 1994). Ernst and Bamford (2005, p.135) recommend putting in place the people and systems to create "robust performance data and an effective challenge process".

Drawing on nine case studies and personal experience, researchers from the Roffey Park Institute examined the people aspects of strategic alliances (Garrow et al., 2000). One of the key messages from this research was the need for alliance partners to set clear objectives and criteria by which they will measure success. Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.42) assert that, for the alliance to prosper, both partners must be able to track their success and spot emerging problems. They suggest joint dashboards that serve as a basis for regular discussion function most effectively.

Domberger and Fernandez (1999) studied the performance of some 7,500 public private partnerships over a three-year period between 1995 and 1998 in Australia,
focusing on the forces driving private services through the public sector. The authors claim the study to be the biggest ever questionnaire survey on the topic to date. Performance was measured by constructing an index of service quality, which the public sector organisations rated according to their perception of the service over a period of time. Whilst this research only covers experiences inside Australia and the methodology is open to criticism as to its arguably non-scientific nature (though giving an impression of quantitative robustness), it does have a reasonable qualitative justification. The study showed that where performance monitoring was adopted, contracts performed 38% better on average than where it was not. Where performance monitoring was absent, savings turned negative to the tune of some 12%. Where adopted, savings averaged 12% - a difference of 24 percentage points on the service quality index. Likewise, the research concluded that, without monitoring provisions, service quality slipped to a rating of 'average' whereas the pressure of a monitoring system pushed performance well above it. However, whilst the primary 'lesson-learned', that requirements must be clearly specified and expectations well-managed through the whole life of the relationship, is a view shared by other authors, this conclusion does not seem to logically flow from the research survey undertaken or subsequent article discussions.

Stanek (2004, p.191) contends that measuring the perceived value of the alliance is important. Doz et al., (1989) contend that for value to be present, each partner must contribute something distinctive that adds value. Anand and Khanna (2000) suggest several alliance measures including: complementary skills between partners, the type of alliance, the organisation’s prior experience with alliances, the ability to transfer tacit knowledge, the ability to manage relationships and the level of ambiguity facing
partners. Stanek (2004, p.192) also asserts that value should include a measure of contribution to net income that is averaged over the lifetime of the alliance. Whilst measuring the perceived value of the alliance may be a laudable aim, given the metrics outlined above, the valuation process is clearly more of an art than a science! As the alliance progresses, it runs the risk of taking on a life of its own and evolving away from its original objectives (Harper, 2001, p.26). Based on the outcomes of her own qualitative case study research, Harper suggests it is essential to establish frequent “checkpoints or milestones” (ibid, p.27) to evaluate the alliance partners efforts and to rethink the alliance purpose. She encourages executives from each of the alliance organisations to review the results to date and compare them to the originally agreed success criteria. Whilst stressing the importance of keeping focused on the intent of the alliance, she stresses the need to be prepared to modify the agreement and processes if necessary. Contrast this approach with the suggestion by Johnson (2001, p.37) for the alliance parties, at the outset, to anticipate the issues that may arise during the course of the business arrangement and to document their mutual understanding as to how such matters would be dealt with.

2.7.8 Building alliance capability

Cavusgil et al., (1997) conclude that the more experiences an organisation has in alliance management, the greater competency it can develop in alliance co-operation and co-ordination. Spekman et al., (2000) conclude that alliance-competent organisations will outperform others and will have a sustainable competitive advantage in global markets. Anslinger and Jenk (2004) contend that creating and maintaining a true alliance capability is too important to be managed on an ad-hoc basis.
Accepting that competitive advantage lies in successfully collaborating, many organisations view alliance capability as a valuable asset. Lotus Corporation has 35 'rules of thumb' to manage each 'phase' of an alliance from formation to termination (Dyer et al., 2001, p.40). These have been developed through summits, training, business case development, meetings and through benchmarking activities (ibid).

Spekman et al., (2000) focus on the concept of alliance competence as a result of the recognition that many alliances fail to achieve their potential – this despite credible partners and strategic intent. In reporting the results of their research they describe a case where errors occurred in a particular alliance management process because the subject organisation was not alliance competent, i.e. they lacked the skills to find, nurture and manage partners who were aligned with its objectives and goals, shared a similar sense of what it meant to be a partner or had the capability to maximise the skills and capabilities that each partner brought to the table. Frustration also linked to structural, process and system barriers within the organisation, which inhibited the growth of alliance-like skills. From this is concluded that alliance competence is partly a function of individual skills and capabilities and organisation-level attributes that enhance, encourage and support alliance-like thinking and behaviour throughout the organisation.

Companies that engage in successful alliances make alliance planning a focal point and a competence. They are clearheaded about their objectives and they understand that their partners want something out of the relationship too. Most important, they consider alliance-build to be a competency in itself. Dyer, Kale and Singh (2001, p.37-43) contend that, developing a dedicated alliance function, with its own vice
president or director of strategic alliances, is key to building the expertise needed for competitive advantage. This follows their study of 200 corporations and their 1,572 alliances and their finding that enterprises with a dedicated alliance function achieved a 25% higher long-term success rate with their alliances than those without such a function. However, the shortcoming from this research conclusion is that, as stated by Dyer et al., (2001, p.42) “businesses must be large enough or enter into enough alliances to cover this investment”. Many organisations are not large enough or have sufficient alliances ongoing to justify having a dedicated strategic alliance function and whether (just) a 25% higher long-term success rate finding is sufficient to warrant this anyway is questionable, particularly given Dyer et al., (ibid) do not quantify what they mean by “long-term” or “success”.

2.7.9 Interdependence

Much of the debate about interdependence between collaborating partners centres on the same arguments discussed in section 2.4 as to the benefits and risks of collaborating. A number of writers cite interdependence as a key alliance factor, with some considering it an asset to the strength and sustainability of the relationship (Garrow et al., 2000; Mariotti, 2001). Kauser and Shaw (2004, p.22) suggest that empirical research from the alliance and dealer-supplier literature provides strong evidence that interdependence enhances the performance of alliances. They suggest the proposition that the level of interdependence between partners will be higher in successful strategic alliances than in less successful partnerships. Other writers see interdependence as a danger where one of the collaborating partners comes to rely too heavily on the skills of the other (Doz, Hamel and Prahalad, 1989; Porter, 1990; Kauser and Shaw, 2004, p.4).
2.7.10 Commitment

Within the context of collaborating, commitment has been described as the intention to continue the relationship into the future (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p.20). We discussed in 2.7.6.1 how Spekman et al., (2000, p.43) contend trust and commitment are the *sine qua non* of alliances for without trust and commitment there can be no alliance. Other writers also suggest commitment as a key collaborating success factor (Garrow et al., 2000; Perry, Cavaye and Coote, 2002; Kauser and Shaw, 2004). Commitment has been described as simply “making the effort” (Arino, 1997, p.190) and as “an implicit pledge of relational continuity” (Dwyer et al., 1987, p.17). Perry et al., (2002, p.78) cite commitment as the second major bond of a relationship (with trust as the first). Elmuti and Kathawala (2001, p. 210) argue that the commitment of the senior management team is a key factor in any alliance’s ultimate success. Without senior management commitment, they found that alliances would not receive the resources they need. Commitment also factors into cooperation by changing collaborators’ views so that they focus on completing the project (Buckley and Casson, 1988, p. 29). One of the biggest hurdles that Elmuti and Kathawala (2001) found that senior management needed to overcome in committing itself to strategic alliances was management’s own fear of a loss of control. This was explored earlier in 2.7.6.2 and is an issue for the TCA Executive and Board as discussed in Chapter 1. However, by demonstrating commitment to the alliance, and taking a strong leadership role, management can minimise the perceived view amongst their employees that the alliance is not as important or as worthwhile as the organisation’s core business (ibid, p. 210).
2.7.11 Risk management

Risk management seems to be seen more as a beneficial management activity within joint ventures and alliances, rather than a behavioural activity. It is often associated with project management activities, which often include a degree of risk management process and procedure as part of their related activities (Kelly and Parker, 1997; Hummel et al., 2001; Stanek, 2004). Ever since the publication of the Turnbull Report Guidance on Internal Control and Risk Management in 1999, public sector organisations like TCA are charged with developing and maintaining robust risk management processes and procedures as an essential part of their public sector corporate governance requirements.

Linked to commitment, relational risk is concerned with the probability that partner firms lack commitment to the alliance and that their opportunistic behaviour could undermine the prospects of an alliance (Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001, p. 209). Because these activities can potentially seriously jeopardise the viability of an alliance, Elmuti and Kathawala (ibid) consider relational risk to be an important component of the overall risk management of strategic alliances. In a similar vein, performance risk is the probability that an alliance may fail even when the partners commit themselves fully to the alliance. The sources of performance risk according to the study by Das and Teng (1999) include environmental factors, such as changes in government policy and economic recession; market factors, such as fierce competition and demand fluctuations; and internal factors, such as a lack of competence in critical areas. It may even be down to sheer bad luck.
2.7.12 Conflict resolution

Having arrangements in place to deal with differences of opinion and related conflicts that may arise within and between the collaborating partners is often cited by writers as being beneficial to the sustainability and ultimate success of any business collaboration (Osborne and Murray, 2000; Perry, Cavaye and Coote, 2002; Bryant, 2003; Anslinger and Jenk, 2004; Kauser and Shaw, 2004). Pietras and Stormer (2001, p.10) typically reflect the view that rather than trying to anticipate every problem or dispute that could arise among the partners, the governing documents should place greater emphasis on the process for resolving business disputes among the partners, through negotiations and other conflict resolution processes. Johnson (2001, p.37) similarly argues that a clearly established dispute resolution mechanism can help in avoiding lengthy and costly litigation. Vangen and Huxham (2005, p.39) recommend that actively managing the conflicting aims in collaborations is likely to make a difference towards the achievement of collaborative advantage.

According to Garrow et al., (2000), alliance partners inevitably have their own longer-term strategic goals and so a degree of conflict is inherent in the relationship. Rather than avoid this, the aim should be to build the alliance around common ground and good processes for resolving differences. Garrow et al., (ibid) contend that because of the inevitable tensions in an alliance, it is the relationships between individuals which makes this organisational form function. Osborne and Murray (2000, p.17) also accept that competitive tensions will continue to be a legitimate part of collaborative ventures and need to be recognised and managed, not ignored. Unlike Garrow et al., (2000) and Osborne and Murray (2000), Spekman et al., (2000) suggest a number of conflict resolution techniques including their patented No Blame Review
© process, which is a collaborative process of conflict resolution, during which, as the
title suggests, fault or blame is completely absent. The No Blame Review © process
encourages the partners to examine the whole of the alliance, in an objective fashion,
to jointly assess and deal with areas of concern and disagreement. Least effective of
the other conflict resolution techniques suggested are using external mediators,
resorting to harsh words, having lawyers craft solutions and referring to contracts for
remedy. Most effective is working hard to resolve problems, talking openly and
honestly, joint problem solving and trying to convince partners. However, conflict
resolution does not necessarily ensure a sustained relationship. Successful resolution
might be alliance dissolution.

2.7.13 Communication

As with any relationship, communication is cited as an essential attribute for
successful collaborating (Bergquist et al., 1995; Spekman et al., 2000; Elmuti and
Kathawala, 2001; Kauser and Shaw, 2004). Open and prompt communication among
collaborating partners is believed to be an indispensable characteristic of trusting
relationships (Kanter, 1994). In an alliance study by Govindarajan and Gupta (2001),
alliance communication barriers were ranked second in importance and degree of
difficulty to fix. (Cultivating trust among members was ranked first). Without
effective communication between the partners, the alliance “will inevitably dissolve
as a result of doubt and mistrust which accompany any relationship which does not
manifest good communication practice” (Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001, p. 215).
Spekman et al., (2000, pp. 46-47) consider that trust building is based on
communication and a willingness of partners to share information in an open and
timely fashion. Stanek (2004, p. 187) agrees that alliance networks should be open and free flowing, but only after protected information has been clearly identified. Whilst communication processes are deemed to underlie most aspects of how strategic alliances function and are thus cited as critical to alliance success, studies of communication are underrepresented in the empirical research literature (Kauser and Shaw, 2004, p. 23) Where communication does receive the attention of researchers there is often a lack of meaning as to what the writers actually mean by ‘communication’ in practice when they refer to its importance in the various alliance examples they quote (e.g. Bergquist et al., 1995; Garrow et al., 2000; Hummel et al., 2001; Stanek, 2004). A further example of this is with Kelly and Parker (1997, p.15-16) who state that “open communications are essential” without expanding as to what is actually meant by “open communication”. In the example quoted, Kelly and Parker (ibid) propose such “open communication” as one of the key elements of cultural compatibility, which they cite as one of their four key features “repeatedly identified in research as being the most significant attributes of successful joint alliances” (ibid). This notion of culture and interorganisational and interpersonal cultural compatibility is considered further in the next section.

2.7.14 Organisational culture

In his work back in 1995, Marshall (p.8) suggested ‘collaborative culture’ as one of his five core components of the collaborative workplace. Marshall described this as a set of core values that shape the behaviours and conduct of a business. Research shows that, on average, people trust one another more when they share similarities, communicate frequently and operate in a common cultural context that imposes tough sanctions for behaving in an untrustworthy manner, with alliance failures often
attributed to cultural distance (Kramer and Tyler, 1996). However, an interesting finding by Park and Ungson (1997) found no empirical support for positive associations between cultural distance and alliance termination, leading some writers to believe that the cultural problems may be overstated, though decision-making is often influenced by the culture of each parent organisation according to DeMeyer and Schneider (1991). Bryant (2003, p.10) concludes that the cultural barriers to effective corporate collaborating should not be underestimated and that many organisations are faced with this challenge as they seek to work with others. He cites this as a reason for the increase in the routine use of cultural audits to screen prospective partners.

Elmuti and Kathawala (2001, p. 208) and Dyer, Kale and Singh (2001, p.37) contend that cultural clash is probably one of the biggest problems that corporations in alliances face and one of the main reasons they fail. They see this at a personal individual level caused by “incompatible personal chemistry” not just at international inter-organisational collaborating level. Garrow et al., (2000) concluded that alliances need to evolve their own cultures, which are often different from either of the parent cultures. They coin the phrase ‘cultural agility’ which they perceive to be a useful competence for collaborating. They suggest a good way of working towards the shared culture is to establish behavioural ‘ground rules’ which describe how people will deal with each other. This begins to link directly with the suggested importance of formal governance procedures as a key collaborating success factor, as discussed in the next section.
2.7.15 Formal governance

Arino, de la Torre and Ring (2001, p.111) cite adequate governance procedures as a key collaborating success factor. Kaplan and Hurd (2002, p.38) agree with this approach when promoting the establishment of a formal alliance management process, which is objective and includes “analytical identification and scrutiny” as key processes, as one of their key principles for strong and effective alliances. Contrast this with Garrow et al., (2000) who, whilst recognising the relevance and importance of formal alliance governance processes, contend that a balance is required to avoid too much bureaucracy at an early stage which can signal a lack of trust and stifle innovation. Pietras and Stormer (2001, p.12) conclude that in order to improve the chances of success, collaborating companies should follow “a careful, organised process from start to finish” and “to take the time to properly set the strategy for the alliance, create the optimum structure for the alliance to flourish, to set clear rules of governance, and to monitor the results on a timely basis.” The notion of having clear rules and formal structure is echoed by Anslinger and Jenk (2004, p.20) who argue that establishing the appropriate governance model is critical for clear decision making and operating viability (ibid, p.21).

2.8 Learning Theory

One of the key themes of my research study is learning. Learning is often defined in the literature as a change in behaviour (Smith, 1999). In any review of the theory of learning it is useful to begin by examining it as a product and as a process. The latter takes us into the arena of competing learning theories - ideas about how learning may happen.
More recently, many theorists have been less concerned with overt behaviour but with changes in the ways in which people “understand, or experience, or conceptualize the world around them” (Ramsden, 1992, p. 4). The focus for them is gaining knowledge or ability through the use of experience.

Two of the key findings from Säljö’s (1979) research concerned:

1. Learning as making sense or abstracting meaning, which involves relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world, and

2. Learning as interpreting and understanding reality in a different way, where learning involves comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge.

We can see that these two conceptions are qualitatively different from any that imply a less complex view of learning, whereby learning is something external to the learner, that just happens or is ‘done to you by teachers’. Smith (1999, p.3) compares this outlook of learning as becoming “a bit like shopping. People go out and buy knowledge - it becomes their possession”. Säljö’s (1979) two conceptions look to the internal or personal aspect of learning, where learning is seen as something that you do in order to understand the real world. According to Ramsden (1992, p. 27) “students who conceive of learning as understanding reality are also able to see it as increasing their knowledge”.

One particularly helpful way of approaching the area has been formulated by Rogers (2003) who sets out two contrasting approaches:
1. task-conscious or acquisition learning, and

2. learning-conscious or formalised learning.

In task-conscious or acquisition learning, learning is seen as going on all the time. It is "concrete, immediate and confined to a specific activity; it is not concerned with general principles" (Rogers 2003, p. 18). Some have referred to this kind of learning as unconscious or implicit. Rogers (ibid, p.21), however, suggests that it might be better to speak of it as having a consciousness of the task. In other words, whilst the learner may not be conscious of learning, they are usually aware of the specific task in hand.

In learning-conscious or formalised learning, learning arises from the process of facilitating learning. It is 'educative learning' rather than the accumulation of experience. To this extent there is a consciousness of learning - people are aware that the task they are engaged in entails learning. “Learning itself is the task. What formalized learning does is to make learning more conscious in order to enhance it” (Rogers 2003, p. 27). It involves guided episodes of learning.

Lave and Wenger (1991) do not consider learning as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals, rather as a process of social participation, where the nature of the situation impacts significantly on the process.

In this same way, those involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis create and sustain knowledge and learning by social interaction.
Argyris and Schön (1974) recommended reflection as the way of verbalising tacit knowledge and making theories-in-use congruent with espoused theories, in this way aiding learning and teaching processes (Schön, 1983).

Schön's (1983; 1987; 1991) notions of ‘the learning society’, ‘double-loop learning’ and ‘reflection-in-action’ have become part of the language of education and are a major contribution to the understanding of the theory and practice of learning (Smith, 2001). Schön (1983) focussed on the processes and development of reflective practitioners. He sought to offer an approach to an epistemology of practice based on a close examination of what a small number of different practitioners actually do. The heart of this study was “an analysis of the distinctive structure of reflection-in-action” (1983, p.9). He argued that it was “susceptible to a kind of rigor that is both like and unlike the rigor of scholarly work and controlled experimentation” (ibid). Though claiming that reflection paralyses action, Czarniawska (2003, p.361) contends that unreflected action will “sooner or later lead to disaster, so we need to oscillate between the two modes of being.” Czarniawska (ibid, p.354) also reminds us of research that shows that only piecemeal, iterative changes have a chance to succeed.

For the purpose of this dissertation reaching and being useful to a wider audience there is a need to ensure that the conclusions are presented in a way that makes sense to them in a clear, straightforward way that must ultimately belie the extent and complexity of the research behind them. Particularly so given that Carter and Jackson (1993) contend that research results might take up to 25 years to be incorporated into practical knowledge. Complex research findings do not have to be explained in a complicated way (Plain English Campaign, 2007). My attempts to subsequently do
this and look to improve on the timescale suggested by Carter and Jackson (1993) start in Chapter 5 and continue in Chapter 6.

I believe that the Kirkpatrick (1967) model for the evaluation of learning and development outcomes provides a useful theoretical framework for my personal reflection on the doctoral programme. This model defines four levels of outcomes:

1. Learners' reactions and evaluation of the educational and development experience;
2. Learning, conceptualised mainly as the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the evaluation of the change/gain as a result of the development experience;
3. Behaviour change, including the evaluation of the application of the change/gain as a result of the development experience and the application of learning to the work setting; and
4. Results, assessed in relation to intended outcomes and in particular the evaluation of the organisational performance improvement as a result of the application of the change/gain from the development experience.

The advantage of Kirkpatrick's model is that it focuses attention on different levels of evaluation and rightly implies that a comprehensive approach should be concerned with all these levels. Thus, it would be insufficient for me to simply reflect and evaluate the doctoral programme according to whether or not I enjoyed the presentations and found them informative (the satisfaction questionnaire), or to assume that it is adequate to establish that I acquired particular skills, in
communication, for example, without investigating whether or not I am now able to transfer those skills to practice.

The model is a linear progressive one which I can use to reflect on how the doctoral programme has enhanced my professional competence and contributed in turn to improved organisational effectiveness. Reflection based on these four levels also helps me to demonstrate that the learning outcomes, competences and attitudes the doctoral programme has sought to engender have become embedded.

Reflections at each of the four levels is outlined and discussed in Chapter 7.

2.9 A social constructionist approach to understanding public sector business collaborating

The next section of this chapter attempts to challenge existing approaches to business collaborating research and to provide a discussion about how an analysis of public sector business collaborating, based on practical work-place research methods, within the work-place environment, can be accomplished from a social constructionist perspective. It does this primarily by exploring the perceptions of individuals involved in the business collaborations of the Coal Authority (TCA) with other public and private sector organisations. The following section will lay the groundwork by clarifying the assumptions of social constructionism.

2.9.1 Social constructionist literature

Social constructionism is influenced by a variety of disciplines and traditions. Its roots go back to the Mead’s (1934) ‘symbolic interactionism’ whose basic view is that
people construct their own and each other’s identities through their everyday encounters with each other in social interaction (Burr, 1995). Berger and Luckmann (1966) made a key contribution when they proposed that people create and sustain all social phenomena through social practices, and in doing so engage in the construction of social reality. Gergen (1985, 1999), Shotter (1995) and Burr (1995) also influenced social constructionism. Table 2.10 shows the development of social constructionism.

| Table 2.10. Development of social constructionism. Based on Karatas and Murphy, 2002. |
| During my literature review I encountered and studied social constructionism (see table 2.10; Pearce, 1992; Seale, 1995; Hackley, 1998; Job, 2001; Karatas and Murphy, 2003;) and, with the lessons learned from the pilot research study in mind (see Chapter 3), found myself engaging with the social constructionist perspective. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, I found myself in agreement with Tansley |
and Watson's view (2000, p.110), that an organisation has "little existence separate from the ongoing, social, political, cultural and economic processes of human individuals and groups". In this regard it had become clear to me that it is people within organisations that collaborate rather than organisations themselves. Secondly, a social constructionist approach also helps with concerns I have about any perceived interventionist role on my part during the research work, in the sense that I'm seen as an 'expert' able to diagnose and cure any collaborating ills. In the field of management consultancy this may be an understandable expectation, but it is not the purpose of my research role. Devins and Gold (2002) conclude that, based on social constructionism, an interventionist would not take up a position of outside expert or consultant, nor look to impose his or her values, judgements and perspectives but instead give attention to what the collaborators themselves perceive to be important; paying attention to the way the world of business collaborating is constructed through what is said and valued.

Thirdly, I believe that the social constructionist framework provides a way of looking at business collaborating holistically, which is a way that I believe has been largely ignored in the literature to date. I also believe that analysis based on a social constructionist framework of direct observation, interviews, accounts and life experiences of individuals engaged with during the researcher's involvement within the research process, complemented by reflective diary recording the thought processes from the participants in real time as the researcher immerses him/herself in a purposeful way in the research environment, has potentially useful practical implications and resulting application for all those involved in the business collaborating process.
The social constructionist research tradition is a broad one and contains many strands, which are not necessarily regarded as commensurable by their proponents (Pearce, 1992; Hackley, 1998). While there are a number of approaches to social constructionism, the key features identified by Burr (1995) can be summarised as follows:

- The use of language, organised into conversations, discourses, narratives and stories, provides the means by which 'we' come to experience our world and construct 'reality'.
- Meanings are made through a relational process between people, which become embedded into ongoing ways of talking, which in turn may become accepted versions of reality in a particular local context.
- By participating in different relationships and in different contexts, we acquire various ways of talking, which can be used for the achievement of valued ends in different situations.

The assumption that meaning is a social construction as opposed to a purely private cognitive construction effectively distinguishes all the different social constructionist methodological approaches from cognitivist approaches to social research (Hackley, 1998). Social constructionist qualitative research allows a sense of constructed meaning to be acknowledged in the research.

I found myself particularly impressed with Burr's (1995) views on knowledge being sustained by social processes. She recognises that people construct their knowledge of the world (and ways to understand it) between them. She highlights that it is through
the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated. So social interaction of all kinds, especially language, is of particular interest to social constructionists. The "goings on between people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices during which our shared versions of knowledge are constructed" (ibid, p.4). It follows that what we regard as 'truth' i.e. our current accepted ways of understanding the world, is a product of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other, not of objective observation of the world. Social constructionism proposes that knowledge is built through social interaction, with concepts and ideas discussed and remembered over time until they form tacit taken-for-granted knowledge. In this regard, knowledge does not "prevail ...over time" (Gergen, 1985, p.7) because it is correct, but rather because people remember it and discuss it with others (Job, 2001). ‘Successful’ business collaborating seems to be spoken of in the literature as an actual material entity, however, according to Burr (1995), social constructionism allows researchers to see words as constitutive of social events. It follows that I do not need to establish a definition of what 'successful' collaboration is or what a 'successful' collaborator is doing. Successful collaboration is a social construction: it exists because of and by people talking about it. This has driven a need in my research to capture the voice, natural language and discourse of the participants involved in such collaborating, and then to analyse and make sense of what they are saying (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997).

2.9.2 Social constructionism and business collaborating

Gergen (1985) notes the key assumptions of social constructionism as a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, historical and cultural specificity, a focus on
processes, especially interaction and social practices, and language as a form of social action. The social constructionist view of reality is that people construct it between them through daily interactions in the course of social life (Karatas and Murphy, 2002, p. 15). At the ontological level there is a belief in multiple realities, which are constructed through interactive research. Gergen (1999) calls this ‘collaborative inquiry’.

In taking account of the role of language and discourse in my study of business collaborating and alliance management I have focussed on its constructive nature and on the significance of social processes as units of analysis. The aim of my inquiry shifts from structures or outcomes to processes. More specifically from collaboration to collaborating, and to the process of collaborating. The main focus of my inquiry from a social constructionist view is to how certain forms of collaborating are carried out by people in interaction. By placing an emphasis on the everyday interactions between people and relating as an ongoing process of construction, language is considered having a social function rather than private one (see Watson 1994, Burr, 1995 and Shotter 1995).

Watson (1994) adopted a social constructionist approach in his study of managerial work in a large organisation, and his strategic exchange perspective is another frame of reference. His analysis is written to reflect the views, feelings and words of the people who were interviewed, and he accepted that he was dealing with ‘what people say’ as opposed to what is objectively the ‘case’; with his role as being the creator and writer of the account constructed as an outcome of a process of sense-making (Weick, 1995) by both the researcher and the researched (Watson, 2001, p. 224). Watson
(1994) defines organisations from a social constructionist epistemology as 'sets of ongoing human relationships utilising various technologies in which people cooperate to achieve tasks which would not be possible, either at all or from an equivalent resource base' (p. 32). To make sense of the managerial work required a research methodology that took Watson close to the people themselves, which allowed close attention to the way people used language and to the context within which they worked. As a researcher he influenced the research in the very process of studying it (Karatas and Murphy, 2002). I believe this approach could be applied to business collaborating.

2.9.3 Structuration theory

Similarly we have the theory of structuration, which, according to Giddens (1984) notes that social life is more than random individual acts but is not merely determined by social forces. Instead, Giddens (ibid) suggests, human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents that reproduces the structure. This means that there is a social structure - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently.

For Giddens (ibid), human agency and social structure are not two separate concepts or constructs, but are two ways of considering social action. There is a duality of structures so that on one side it is composed of situated actors who undertake social action and interaction, and their knowledgeable activities in various situations. At the same time, it is also the rules, resources, and social relationships that are produced
and reproduced in social interaction. Structuration means studying the ways in which social systems are produced and reproduced in social interaction (ibid, pp. 25-6).

Giddens defines structuration as "the structuring of social relations across time and space, in virtue of the duality of structure" (ibid, p. 376).

Giddens (ibid, line 2-3) makes time and space two major aspects of his theoretical perspective. While often ignored in earlier theories, time and space are central aspects to social life, and, I would argue, no less so in business collaborating life.

Giddens also notes how practices are continued or enduring, and how they are reproduced. As a result, social action and interaction as "tacitly enacted practices" become "institutions or routines" and "reproduce familiar forms of social life" (p.131). Giddens makes this point as follows:

*The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible* (ibid, p. 2).

This argument provides Giddens with a means of integrating human social action with the larger systems, structures, and institutions of which we are a part. It is the continual repetition of social action and interaction in fairly regular and habitual
forms that constitute what may appear to be the larger social forms. In particular, the structuration perspective can be distinguished from the external and coercive social facts of Durkheim (1893 / 1997). Structure is not outside social action, but exists only because of social action.

Whilst not claiming to be anywhere near as masterful as Giddens, I too have attempted to provide an all-encompassing theoretical view relating to the social behaviour and interaction, control systems and structures, and the political and cultural context surrounding business collaborating. With each of these I have attempted to solve my perceived social constructionist gap in the literature, and some of the problems experienced in professional practice, with regard to business collaborating, by integrating the seemingly disparate behavioural and structural factors, theories and perspectives from the literature, into a conceptual framework and model that is grounded in social constructionism and makes sense of the public sector collaborating process.

2.9.4 Social constructionism and business collaborating research approach

According to Reason (1994), social constructionism allows a participatory world view and offers new and varied insights into relations and social interactions. Often the attention is on the processes through which individual knowledge is transformed into collective knowledge, as well as the process through which socially constructed knowledge influences local knowledge (Huysman, 2000, p. 136). I aspire to this view of learning in my own research study, which intends to explore the collaborating experience of individuals and groups within multi-organisational settings.
Taking a social constructionist approach, with emphasis on social interactions through which shared versions of knowledge are constructed (Gergen, 1985; Burr, 1995), the unit of analysis is the individual, kept in the sense of context, time and space for as long as possible, via the identification of themes developed into conceptual frameworks and model of my understanding gained from thirty months of immersion in activities involving TCA and its collaborators. This is steered by my ontological and epistemological assumptions. Since constructionism emphasises the relational qualities and multiplicities of social realities (Karatas and Murphy, 2002), collaborating teams can be studied as a vehicle for generating accounts and interpretations in organisations which are not objective entities but socially constructed phenomena (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

There are two main related research questions that provide the focal points of the research and my attempt to offer positive and constructive contributions to both the academic literature and to professional practice in a way that allows it to be transferred to other settings. The first is that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern as the economic and structural aspects. The second is a conceptual model and framework, which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process. Sensemaking can be a useful framework for this inquiry as it might provide answers to how the individuals involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis construct what they construct, why and to what effect (Weick, 1995).

The approach meets my perceived need for research from a social constructionist perspective into business collaborating and alliance management. Given my aims it is
necessary to consider a number of sources (Denzin, 1970). These include historical
documents, minutes of meetings, contracts and agreements, internal memoranda,
current documents, reports and related documentation. It also requires discussions
with individuals working for TCA and for our partnering organisations involved in
business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, as well as participant or non-participant
observations of and informal discussions about day-to-day work activities. I
acknowledge the limitations in terms of the need to analyse such a large volume of
data and accounts, but consider the benefits of this type of approach to warrant it.

As we have seen, some of the writers have adopted approaches that seek to establish
law-like relations between objects based on science in order to address issues of
efficiency, order and control (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996). They are often associated
with quantitative research methodologies and reporting, positivism and the use of
scientific knowledge and assumptions. From Burrell and Morgan (1979) we could
classify such an approach as functionalism, whereby the key concept is that of
business collaboration as a functionally effective system if it achieves its goals as
defined through rational decision-making. From an interpretivist perspective, business
collaborating can be thought of as a social entity and concept, comprising of
important characteristics and focussing on the social rather than the economic aspects
of business collaborating and alliance management activities, and the aim is to show
how particular realities are socially produced and maintained (Deetz, 1996). Social
constructionism has its roots in this interpretivist paradigm, and holds communication
processes as the vehicle in which self and world are in ongoing construction
(Schwandt, 1998).
According to social constructionists, knowledge and truth are created. It follows that, from a social constructionist perspective, business collaborations are culturally and historically unique entities where members collectively engage in the construction of a social reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Critical theory sees collaborative ventures as social historical creations produced in conditions of struggle and domination, often repressing meaningful conflict (Deetz, 1996, p. 202). Postmodernism has gone beyond the idea of domination and introduced the investigation of aspects of business collaborating and alliance management life previously considered inappropriate for serious consideration (Hancock and Tyler, 2001, p. 63). Issues such as the relevance and importance of certain behavioural aspects of business collaborating, participant subjectivity and reflexivity and the ontological status of the people involved in the collaborating, have all been subject of research (Spekman et al., 2000; Arino, de la Tore and Ring, 2001; Mariotti, 2001; Harper, 2001; Perry et al., 2002; Kauser and Shaw, 2004; Xie and Johnston, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005; Cross et al., 2006; Beardsley et al., 2006; Hill, 2007).

Whilst it is not my intention to establish the superiority of the social constructionist paradigm over other paradigms, the role of the researcher in business collaborating theory is a concern to me since there is little in the way of evidence of an holistic approach having been adopted in much of the research into business collaborating to date, particularly collaborating involving the public sector (Domberger and Fernandez, 1999; Osborne and Murray, 2000; Trim, 2001; Bryant, 2003). My research needs to do this, and from a relational, social constructionist perspective. The modernist assumption that the researcher is an objective observer is challenged by the postmodernist and constructionist approach, which positions the researcher within the
frame of the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (ibid, p. 4) recognise that research is an interactive process shaped by many factors, with researchers telling stories about the worlds they have studied. Their conclusions suggest that different ontological and epistemological assumptions will have been deployed in undertaking research on business collaborating and alliance management, and the narratives or stories researchers tell will be accounts informed by those assumptions. Whilst I understand the different research approaches and can communicate with different paradigms in researching business collaborating and alliance management so as to improve my understandings of collaborating complexity and ambiguity, I have chosen to locate myself within a social constructionist paradigm and to conduct my research accordingly. Though this does not mean that I will discount positivist measures of success or failure.

2.9.5 Reflecting on the pilot study from a social constructionist perspective

Reflecting on the pilot study (Chapter 3) challenged my understanding and acceptance of the social constructionist perspective. It also challenged me to establish what sort of social constructionist researcher I am, and, at the methodological level, to determine what social construction means and the implications of using a social constructionist approach. In this way the pilot study helped me explore and better determine the value, suitability and feasibility of my original proposed research methods – questionnaire and semi-structured interviews – both as data collection techniques and their fit within a constructionist perspective. The experience also helped me recognise when I was entering into research methodology that conflicted with such an approach.
In reflecting further on the pilot study, and the different language used by interviewees to describe similar elements of collaborating and the many different adjectives appended to words like ‘communication’, I’m finding the key features of a social constructionist research approach identified by Burr (1995) now make more sense to me, particularly the use of language as a means by which ‘we’ come to experience our world and construct ‘reality’. My initial view, developing on from Hackley’s (1998) assertions, of seeing successful collaborating as a social construction, which can’t exist except from the ways people talk about it, has been affirmed by the pilot study. Also further affirmed for me is my initial argument that, in a similar way that Devins and Gold (2002) argued that social constructionism provided a theoretical framework to underpin support for the development of managers in SME’s, so business collaborating can be understood as a particular ‘form of life’ which are created and sustained by language and the co-ordination of meaning between the individuals of the collaborating organisations. For the life of a business collaboration to continue, there must be sufficient shared meaning leading to the various actions that forms the reality within a specific context. This may also explain why there are so many differences between different business collaborations. What may be shared meaning and seen as real, good and right in one organisation, can be seen as something less real, bad and wrong in another. Organisations, from a social constructionist perspective, are “culturally and historically unique sites where members collectively engage in the construction of a social reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.12).

One of the important lessons learned from my pilot research study was an appreciation of the value of quantitative analysis of data. Whilst an etic approach
based questionnaire does not sit well with a constructionist perspective, the
assignment provided an opportunity to explore my sense of what the literature means,
in terms of the 16 concepts and variable factors identified from the literature (see table
2.9 below), and of the practitioners' connection to the concepts, the meaning they had
of the concepts, and modelling a hierarchy of the relative importance of the factors.
This allowed some quantitative analysis which, whilst on its own having limitations,
did have the benefit of 'getting the attention' of the people within my sponsoring
organisation, since they are more comfortable with this 'bottom line numbers' kind of
conclusion. However questionable the assumptions behind some quantitative research,
it tends to deliver apparently reliable and valid correlations between 'variables' that
appear to be self-evident (Silverman, 1993). Kirk and Miller (1986, p.10) argue that
qualitative research "does not imply a commitment to innumeracy". In suggesting that
there's nothing wrong in the qualitative researcher "dirtying their hands with
numbers", Silverman (ibid, p.161 - 164) takes the view that it "gives the reader a
sense of the flavour of the data as a whole" and overcomes any doubt that "the
researcher has selected only those fragments of data that support his argument". The
major limitation of the 'numbers' approach in my view, is that it doesn't address the
"so what?" question. Also, purely quantitative research may neglect the social and
cultural construction of the 'variables' that they are looking to correlate. However,
providing the temptation to count everything is resisted, and analysis is based on data
collected from a constructionist perspective and on a sound conceptual basis linked to
the participants own methods of ordering the world, then both types of data can
inform the analysis of the other.
It is important that the research project is underpinned by quality of work guidance. For example, steps have been taken to ensure that my pilot research study data and accounts are preserved and are available for re-analysis. There has been continued care about the sensitivity of my research participants, and ethical standards have been maintained by adopting the University of Derby Standard Ethics Protocol. The quality of my research work has been audited against Marshall and Rossman’s (2000, p.22) twenty questions to judge the goodness of qualitative research. The summary findings are set out in Appendix 10.

2.10 Next steps

This is the context, through my critical reflection, that I found myself in. It is also why I am where I am now. In this regard, quantitative versus qualitative is not the debate. Social constructionism would now guide me to do things, rather than me just want to do a qualitative study. Even though I might intend to gather and present both quantitative and qualitative data, social constructionism will drive my data gathering methodology and my analysis will be carried out within a social constructionist context. From a social constructionist perspective the role of the researcher is to convey different understandings about a phenomenon “by capturing and honouring the voices of those who are studied” (Karatas and Murphy, 2002, p.1). Consistent with this I will retain the individual’s voice, and write dialogue based on that person’s life experiences and their view of reality. I have recognised, however, that I may compromise the position by deriving my view of reality based on my understanding of the research participants, in my attempts to present my research outputs to readers in a form that suitably clarifies and deepens understanding. Where I subsequently recognise themes and patterns from the research, I accept these will reflect my view...
of that particular reality and, consequently, I acknowledge and accept the limitations that this brings.

As a consequence of where I found myself, and in recognising that terms like ‘success’ and ‘collaborating’ are constructs, my research question changed and was more concerned with trying to understand the phenomenon of relationships within business collaborations from the perspective of those who experienced it. In effect, the nature and substance of those relationships between individuals involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, and the interactions that are going on. My unit of analysis being the individual, and the relationships and interdependencies with a collaborating group. The identity that the various individuals brought to the TCA group and the collaborative partners group(s), and the identity of the various groups. Comparing and contrasting these between the people at TCA and their collaborative partners. Whilst business collaborating is a phenomenon that I personally work in, I would now focus on the individuals and how they perceive those relationships. How meaning is created and sustained between these parties and by the individuals themselves. Continually working from ‘them’ to ‘me’ with regard to my research questions.

I believe this approach has generated credible, useful knowledge that can be practically applied to address the dilemmas, problems and predicament of the individuals involved in business collaborating at TCA. I have subsequently structured this dissertation submission to outline and critically discuss my research strategy, design and collection methods, analysis and interpretation methods, and presentation and writing up proposals, to deliver this outcome.
2.11 Conclusions

A holistic, social, economic and political multidimensional conceptualisation of public sector business collaborating doesn’t seem to exist in the literature. This study aims to address this gap from a relational, social constructionist perspective by focussing on the nature, substance and perceptions of the relationships between individuals involved in public sector business collaborating on a day-to-day basis; the interactions, the reconstructing of knowledge and making sense of what is going on.

Marshall’s (1995) conclusions on business collaborating make for an appropriate epilogue to this literature review summary. He contends that in times of instability and chaos, collaborating is not only the most efficient form of organisation for a highly motivated marketplace, but also the most effective way to engage the members of the workplace and enable them to be their most productive selves. Even more important to Marshall, he contends that collaborating brings dignity, civility and values-based stability to the workplace.

The dilemma facing The Coal Authority (TCA), as described in Chapter 1, is that, despite TCA’s acknowledged expertise in the delivery of fast, accurate, cost-effective, high-volume property search services, the British coal industry continues to decline such that demand for residential coal mining reports as an essential part of the conveyancing process is not considered sustainable on a stand-alone 'coal-only' basis. There are also competitive pressures on TCA to provide its data to private sector search companies to include within their existing environmental and other property search reports. This would mean TCA surrendering its status as a leading data holder and service provider and run counter to TCA’s current high-level corporate objective
“to establish The Coal Authority as the leading public sector provider of land conveyance information” (TCA High Level Objectives - TCA published Mission Statement and High Level Objectives, April 2006). Altogether this risks the very survival of TCA as an organisation.

The Executive and Board of TCA believe that the future success of the organisation will be increasingly dependent on successfully collaborating with other public and private sector organisations to provide existing and new markets with additional property information services and products. However, this poses risk and dilemma for them, since it means having to offer products and services outside the traditional coal mining areas and to relinquish overall control and to share this with partner organisations. There have also been experiences in the past of what have been considered ‘unsuccessful’ collaboration. These have been expensive in time, cost, human and other resources. To “minimise the risk of collaborations going wrong” (TCA CEO, 2004) is therefore seen as a key objective. This is the business problem and predicament that this research study aims to help resolve and find solutions to.

There have been various attempts to classify critical business collaborating success factors with different writers identifying different factors as important. These key alliance factors were introduced and listed in tables 2.6 and 2.7 above, and discussed in more detail in section 2.7 of this chapter, following a structured and critical analysis of the prevailing theoretical literature and best practice studies. I have subsequently identified, listed (in no particular order) and classified (on a behavioural and structural basis) the following 16 key elements of collaborating, which represent
those factors that the various writers seem to most commonly refer to as being critical to alliance success and/or failure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key behavioural elements of collaborating, i.e. the less formal and more intangible areas (soft factors).</th>
<th>Key structural elements of collaborating, i.e. the more formal and tangible areas (hard factors).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A - organisational self-knowledge</td>
<td>I - partner selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B - commitment</td>
<td>J - formal governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C - trust</td>
<td>K - risk analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D - interdependence</td>
<td>L - legal vehicle (contracts and agreements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E - communication</td>
<td>M - performance measurement and monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F - conflict resolution</td>
<td>N - goal and objective setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G - alliance management and relationships</td>
<td>O - control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H - organisational culture</td>
<td>P - project management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.9 – key behavioural and structural elements of business collaborating

However, whilst the factors identified in the literature review have been examined in various organisational contexts, there are still significant gaps in the knowledge needed to find the solutions to the predicament and dilemmas faced by the individuals within TCA in specific relation to the management of strategic alliances and business collaborations. In particular, no published research was found that empirically examined the joint effects of the behavioural and structural characteristics of business collaborating on the success of collaborative alliances between an organisation like TCA and other public and private sector organisations working within the U.K. The importance is heightened by increasing Government pressure to work in public/private partnerships and the TCA’s Executive and Board’s view of the need to reduce the risk of such collaborating ‘going wrong’. My study, therefore, attempts to address this gap in the existing literature by examining both the behavioural and structural characteristics, so as to better understand and make sense of the factors that impact on the success of business collaborating and alliancing.
The aim of the research study, therefore, is to develop a practice-based understanding of public sector business collaborating, through analysis of collaborators' experiences. In effect, the nature, substance and perceptions of the relationships between individuals involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis; the interactions, the reconstructing of knowledge of reality and making sense about what is going on. Emphasis is placed on the unit of analysis being the individual and the relationships and interdependencies with a collaborating group.

The broader research question is to determine and make sense of what people within TCA and within its partner organisations perceive 'successful' business collaborating to be and what they perceive as being the most important factors that contribute to achieving 'successful' business collaborating. My understanding of their views will then be compared and contrasted both between the participants themselves and with the various world-views as described in the literature.

The completed study will offer two contributions. The first that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern as the economic and structural aspects. The second will be a conceptual model, which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process.

As well as generating credible, useful knowledge that can then be practically applied to address the dilemmas, problems and predicament of the individuals involved in business collaborating at TCA, the study should also offer a significant and original
contribution to professional knowledge and practice, with reference to existing knowledge, through a deeper exploration of the public sector collaborating processes.

Finally, it is appropriate to return to my earlier tentative definition of public sector business collaborating in relation to this study, as originally set out in section 2.2 of this Chapter and restated below:

*People from public and private sector organisations coming to a voluntarily initiated co-operative agreement that involves mutual strategic resource exchange to develop a product or service that satisfies a customer demand.*

This is about activity becoming social construction, linking with Tansley and Watson’s views as to the nature of organisations (2000, p. 110). Together with the following quote from Elmuti and Kathawala (2001, p.209-10), it connects fully to social construction and also bridges the gap to the next two chapters, which comprise a reprise of my pilot research study and my resulting research design and methodology:

"The scholars who study strategic alliances and the consultants who help them have both addressed the question "What does it take for strategic alliances to succeed?" Perhaps the best answers to this question are provided by those who engage in alliances."

The phenomenon of public sector business collaborating from the perspective of those who experience it forms the focus of my inquiry. My intended approach with this
study is to identify such people, to get close to them and to the context within which they work. To listen and pay close attention to the language they use and watch them in action. To find out what works for them based on their perceptions, views and opinions and based on the experiences that they share with me. By these means I hope to ultimately make better sense of the public sector collaborating phenomenon based on my subsequent analysis and understanding of what I learn and experience.
Chapter 3

Pilot Research Study

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, throughout this dissertation I am writing from a personal ‘first-person’ stance. I believe there is a value in using “I” and securing quality throughout the research process, in that it is in keeping with my relational, social constructionist perspective. The writing is all about me engaging in the collaborating activities and it has become personal to me. I have invested a lot of time, commitment and effort into it.

In 2005 I designed a pilot study comprising of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The aim was to determine what people within TCA and within its various partner organisations perceived ‘successful’ business collaborating to be and what they perceived as being the most important factors that contributed to ‘successful’ business collaborating (Dearden, 2005a). The intention was then to compare and contrast both the views of the organisational actors between themselves and against the various world-views as described in the literature.

This research project was intended to act as a pilot research study to assess suitability and feasibility of the methods used, as a precursor to the same research methodology, or one shaped differently based on a critical reflection of the experiences and lessons learned from the pilot, being used more extensively and comprehensively within my main DBA dissertation research work.
The study helped me explore and better determine the value, suitability and feasibility of my (then) proposed research methods - questionnaire and interviews - as data collection techniques useful to gather data to analyse and interpret such as to provide answers and solutions to my research questions.

The rationale for the pilot research study was the view (then) that a critical realist perspective and approach offered a credible and useful theoretical perspective within which to frame qualitative research into business collaboration and collaborating. This justified my use of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. In retrospect, the pilot research study effectively set the scene for my subsequent journey to becoming a social constructionist.

3.2 Pilot Research Study Methodology and Project Plan

The collection of meaningful, accurate data is the foundation of good research and, although the 'problem' determines the techniques, the greater number of appropriate techniques, the better (Kane, 1985). Having considered the research technique choices available to me (Selltiz et al, 1964, 1985; Silverman, 1993; Blaxter et al, 1996), together with the administration of the techniques, and evaluated the relative merits and feasibility of these techniques and approaches in the context of this particular pilot research assignment, the study was conducted by questionnaire and interview. I didn't consider participant observation to be appropriate, nor documentary analysis (other than my literature review to date), especially given the time constraints. Whilst it was expected that individual responses from the respondents/interviewees might provide some insights into successful and not-so-successful business collaborations, these research methods were chosen primarily to understand and more usefully
identify those characteristics that the people perceived as important to the successful and less-successful ones. The research results could then be compared and contrasted with each respondent’s own questionnaire results, the group as a whole, and it would be possible to validate the literature and make sense of it. The research methodology adopted would also highlight whether those individuals involved in interorganisational business collaborating on a day-to-day basis perceive the ‘harder’, more tangible, structural and control factors or the ‘softer’, more intangible, behavioural factors as being more important (see table 2.9 in Chapter 2).

Because this research methodology was being applied to people within different partnering organisations, as intended as part of the main DBA research work and piloted using two organisations here in the first instance, the results could also be compared between the partnering organisations and between different work role types, using Mintzberg’s (1989) categories of managerial and strategic, technician and specialist, administration and supervisor. The results would also allow comparison of TCA’s staff views with those of the people in our partnering organisations.

3.3 Pilot Research Subjects, Interviewees and Respondents

Given there is no additional credit to be obtained for gathering data in difficult circumstances (Triplett, 2002, p. 178.) I decided to work initially in familiar territory. The initial research was carried out with and on six members of staff from my own organisation – the Coal Authority (TCA) and six members of staff from the Earth Sciences Agency (ESA) based at Lockworth in Northamptonshire, i.e. cross sections of project teams dealing with collaborative projects (Note: The partner organisation name and location is fictitious to protect and respect the privacy and confidentiality
of the actual organisation and its location). ESA are an alliance partner organisation (though independent) of TCA. The ESA members of staff were all involved in a collaborative venture with TCA (with which I was involved as Head of Customer and Commercial Services with TCA) and comprised a Director, a senior manager, a project manager, a commercial manager and two specialist geologists. The six participants from my organisation included the Chief Executive, a Director, a senior manager, a project manager, a specialist-mining surveyor and an administration supervisor. The chosen units of analysis represented an ideal setting for me since I had easy access, immediate rapport with participants and could gather data directly related to my research interests.

The decision to go for six people from each of the two organisations was because I felt they represented the make-up of project teams in that they comprised a mix of people from both business and non-business, technical and non-technical, and managerial and non-managerial disciplines, and the research needed to be open to the impact of the diversity in their backgrounds and learning experiences. It is suggested that only those persons immediately affected by organisational events (e.g. business collaborating) have sufficient knowledge of the precise circumstances to be able to suggest cause and effect relationships (Jennings and Beaver, 1997) and I took this view into account when deciding on the most appropriate research subjects to engage with.

As an ethical protocol, I spoke with each of the participants about the project and its purpose, thanked them for their participation, pointed out it was entirely voluntary and that they were free to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from any
interview at any time. I affirmed that any questionnaire results and interview feedback would be kept strictly confidential and available only to my DBA supervisory team and me. I took the advice of Kane (1985) to keep my explanation clear and simple so that it ‘travelled well’ to reduce possible distortion of my purpose as the account travelled from one person to another. This was to avoid future interviewees forming an attitude in advance of my arrival, which might bias their responses.

3.4 Pilot Research Methodology – Questionnaire Format

I adopted an etic approach (Gill and Johnson, 2002) to the questionnaire and based it on the key elements of ‘successful’ collaborating as established from my literature review discussed in Chapter 2. Respondents were asked to assess each of the 16 factors against each other. These are identified in Table 3.1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key behavioural elements of collaborating, i.e. the less formal and more intangible areas (soft factors).</th>
<th>Key structural and control related elements of collaborating, i.e. the more formal and tangible areas (hard factors).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Risk Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>Legal Vehicle (Contracts and Agreements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Performance Measurement and Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>Goal and Objective Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Management and Relationships</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 – key behavioural and structural elements of business collaborating

Respondents were asked to assess each of the factors against each other in the format shown in Figure 3.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In successful business collaborating......</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge is more important than Commitment</td>
<td>Tick the appropriate column</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management is more important than Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust is more important than Goal and Objective Setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1 – extract from questionnaire
The questionnaire asked 240 questions in all, i.e. asking whether each of the 16 elements was more important than the other 15. The statements were mixed up to avoid having all the same elements and element types together. A covering explanatory note clarified that the purpose of the survey was to establish which of the factors suggested to contribute to successful interorganisational business collaborating were perceived to be the most important from the point of view and perspective of those people directly involved in business collaborating and alliance management on a day-to-day basis.

Respondents were asked to review and consider each statement and to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement made. It was pointed out to respondents that there were no right or wrong answers and that what was important was whether the statement made reflected what they believed and perceived to be important in successful business collaborating.

Respondents were given the option of providing their name, organisation and their predominant role within their organisation using Mintzberg’s (1989) categories of managerial/strategic, technician/specialist, and administration/supervisor. They were asked to leave blank any statements they were unsure about. The questionnaire ended with an open question asking, "In your own words, how would you describe successful business collaborating?"

The explanatory note confirmed that all completed forms and feedback would be used solely for this DBA research project and for no other purpose, and that participants’ privacy and feedback would be respected and held in confidence at all times.
A copy of the covering explanatory note and the full questionnaire is included at Appendix 2 and 3.

Of 12 questionnaires distributed, 6 were completed and returned from my own organisation, with 4 returned from the ESA members of staff. I then invited these 10 participants to be interviewed, using the approach outlined in section 3.5 below. Each completed questionnaire was analysed and the results were logged on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

3.5 Pilot Research Questionnaire Results

Of the two questionnaires not returned, one participant was out of the country and the other, despite 'gentle' persuasion on my part, couldn't find time to complete the questionnaire, on this occasion, by the time I needed it.

The questionnaires were analysed as follows:

1. Two (2) points were awarded to each factor for every instance where the respondent agreed with the statement that the factor was more important than the factor it was being compared with;

2. Zero (0) points were awarded to any factor where the respondent disagreed with the statement that the factor was more important than the factor it was being compared with;
3. One (1) point was awarded to both factors in any statement where no choice was made by the respondent as to which was considered to be the most important. As a point of interest there were only 81 occurrences of no choice being made out of 4,800 individual assessments returned.

By way of example, the scoring for the extract results in Figure 3.2 below are shown in Figure 3.3:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In successful business collaborating......</td>
<td>Tick the appropriate column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge is more important than Commitment</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management is more important than Communication</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust is more important than Goal and Objective Setting</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment is more important than Risk Management</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.2 – example extract of completed questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal and Objective Setting</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.3 – scoring the factors in the completed questionnaires**

Each completed questionnaire took about an hour to score using this system, with the results then logged to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This was carried out during the evening of the same day as receipt – to avoid a backlog of questionnaire analysis building up, but also in reflection of the excitement, anticipation and satisfaction I felt on receiving a completed questionnaire; a questionnaire that I had personally crafted. I simply couldn’t wait to start the analysis process. The ‘buzz’ I felt from this was quite a surprise to me.
The results of the questionnaire scoring are shown in Table 3.2 below with the full Microsoft Excel version at Appendix 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>ESA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role (Managerial/Strategic Technical/Specialist Admin/Supervisory)</td>
<td>M/S</td>
<td>M/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>SP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Behavioural Elements (softer, more intangible factors)</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>AS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Management and Relationships</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Structural &amp; Control Related Elements (harder, more tangible factors)</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Contracts and Agreements</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Measurement and Monitoring</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal and Objective Setting</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2231</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 – questionnaire quantitative results

Analysis of these results highlight the following:

When taking the aggregate scores of all participants, the ratio of ‘hard’ factors versus ‘soft’ factors is 46.5% / 53.5%, i.e. the key behavioural elements score (marginally) higher than the key structural and control related elements of business collaborating.

This is of interest. It suggests both types have a perceived relative degree of importance according to the participants. However, when the results of each organisation are compared and contrasted, the conflicting organisational perceptions highlighted in Table 3.3 below become evident, and this is of more interest.
When the results at an individual work role level are compared and contrasted, it can be seen that, whilst the managerial/strategic work role level in both organisations perceive behavioural factors to be more important, though by differing degrees, at the technical/specialist work role level within my own organisation (TCA), the key structural and control related factors are perceived to be considerably more so. This is highlighted in Table 3.4 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Roles</th>
<th>Overall importance of business collaborating factors</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Hard' Structural Factors</td>
<td>'Soft' Behavioural Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCA Managerial and Strategic</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESA Managerial and Strategic</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCA Technical and Specialist</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESA Technical and Specialist</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 – hard v soft importance perceptions at individual work role level

Of further specific interest is the comparison of the perceptions of two project managers leading their respective organisational project teams working together on a collaborative initiative. This is shown in Table 3.5 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Roles</th>
<th>Overall importance of business collaborating factors</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Hard' Structural Factors</td>
<td>'Soft' Behavioural Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCA Project Manager</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESA Project Manager</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 – comparison of perceptions of Project Managers working together on current collaboration

It is also possible to produce a league table of the factors showing which were perceived to be the most important overall, as shown in Figure 3.4 below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborating Factor</th>
<th>Overall Score</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Hard or Soft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
<td>SOFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>9.69%</td>
<td>SOFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>9.12%</td>
<td>SOFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Contracts and Agreements</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>7.27%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Management and Relationships</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>7.27%</td>
<td>SOFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal and Objective Setting</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>6.15%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>5.83%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>5.44%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>4.54%</td>
<td>SOFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>4.52%</td>
<td>SOFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Measurement and Monitoring</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>4.44%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>3.87%</td>
<td>SOFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>HARD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.4 – league table of factors in order of perceived importance to ‘successful’ collaborating

However, of more interest are the differences when the aggregate responses from each organisation are compared and contrasted. These are highlighted in Figure 3.5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TCA League Table</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>H / S</th>
<th>ESA League Table</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>H / S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>11.72</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Contracts and Agreements</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>11.46</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>10.57</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Alliance Management and Relationships</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Goal and Objective Setting</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Management and Relationships</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Legal Contracts and Agreements</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>H</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal and Objective Setting</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Performance Measurement and Monitoring</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Measurement and Monitoring</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>S</td>
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<td>4.40</td>
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<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
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<td>3.87</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.5 – league table of factors in order of perceived importance to ‘successful’ business collaborating

Further detailed analysis is included at Appendix 4 and could be extended to compare and contrast individual responses both with each other, their organisations overall position or against the questionnaire responses. However, whilst such quantitative analysis is interesting, it fails to provide any insight into why the respondents...
consider, perceive and hold the positions they do; neither do we understand what the respondents actually mean by ‘communication’ or ‘control’. This highlights the limitations of quantitative analysis alone and the merits and benefits of including additional qualitative data collection and analysis and taking a social constructionist perspective and more emic approach in examining how the individuals see and categorise their world. This was to be provided by the subsequent interviews but started by asking an open question at the end of the questionnaire as to "In your own words, how would you describe successful business collaborating?" The feedback from the respondents to the open question:-

1. supported some of the key elements and factors of successful business collaborating highlighted in the world literature, but ignored others;
2. supported some of these key elements and factors though using different language and terminology;
3. highlighted new elements and factors – new insights;
4. some existing factors discussed in the literature were highlighted by individuals from both organisations, some from just one and some by more than one individual in the same organisation;
5. some new elements and factors were highlighted from both organisations, others from just one, some by more than one individual in the same organisation.

Whilst the view is held that social constructionist arguments are not easily expressed in conceptual language (Hosking and Bass, 2001), I’ve attempted to provide a summary of this feedback affirming the existing world literature view of the key
elements of successful business collaborating, together with the new insights perceived as important by the respondents, by developing a conceptual matrix format based on the type shown in Figure 3.6 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard Tangible</th>
<th>Soft Intangible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key factors and elements</td>
<td>Key factors and elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key factors and elements</td>
<td>Key factors and elements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**World View**

**New Insight**

*Figure 3.6 – matrix of new and existing key factors and elements*

This matrix approach can then be developed further to produce a more comprehensive analytical model that can usefully contrast the perceptions of the individual respondents as to what they consider to be the key elements and factors. This can be summarised on an organisational level basis to enable a comparison to be made of the responses between each organisational player and contrasted against the world literature view.

This model is shown in Figure 3.7 below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>World</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by TCA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by ESA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by BOTH</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by TCA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by ESA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by BOTH</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
<td>Legal Contracts and Agreements</td>
<td>Legal Contracts and Agreements</td>
<td>Legal Contracts and Agreements</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals &amp; Objectives</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals and Objectives</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliances and Relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Factors Not Mentioned by TCA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Not Mentioned by ESA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Not Mentioned by BOTH</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Not Mentioned by TCA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Not Mentioned by ESA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Not Mentioned by BOTH</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Mgt</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Project Mgt</td>
<td>Risk Mgt</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Project Mgt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
<td>Alliance Mgt and Relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by TCA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by ESA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by BOTH</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by TCA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by ESA</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors Mentioned by BOTH</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bringing individual specialisms</td>
<td>Mutual &amp; Joint benefit &amp; outcome</td>
<td>Contract Change Control Negotiation</td>
<td>Contract Change Control Negotiation</td>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not compromising your position</td>
<td>Change Mgt</td>
<td>Agreed timetable and deliverables</td>
<td>Change Mgt</td>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not compromising your position</td>
<td>Agreed timetable and deliverables</td>
<td>Identify each partners barriers to success</td>
<td>Agreed timetable and deliverables</td>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not compromising your position</td>
<td>Identify each partners barriers to success</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
<td>Identify each partners barriers to success</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
<td>Wanting to do it again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being too greedy</td>
<td>Shared Values and Behaviours</td>
<td>Shared Values and Behaviours</td>
<td>Not being too greedy</td>
<td>Shared Values and Behaviours</td>
<td>Shared Values and Behaviours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.7 – analytical model - key elements and factors highlighted from analysis of open questionnaire question

Note: the elements and factors highlighted in bold type represent multiple responses made of these key factors from different individuals within the same organisation.
The number of additional factors and element headings would seem to demonstrate that the etic approach adopted using factors taken from the literature is just the start of the research process. There is an opportunity and need to go deeper, to probe more - in my opinion to take a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism recognises the importance of talk, dialogue and interpersonal communication in the development of tacit knowledge and engages the learning interests of the research participants themselves (Devins and Gold, 2002).

Given the people in my own organisation's overall perception from the quantitative questionnaire results that the more tangible structural and control elements of collaborating were more important, it is interesting that they have highlighted more new intangible behavioural elements than the ESA staff, and given the people at ESA's overall preference for the more intangible behavioural elements, they suggest more tangible structural and control elements than intangible behavioural ones.

This, to my mind, highlights the benefits of an open, qualitative, constructionist approach to information gathering, analysis and sense making.

The feedback to the open question at the start of each interview as to “How did you find the questionnaire?” is set out in Appendix 5. These responses can be categorised into 3 recurring themes. These are:

1. some respondents found the questionnaire to be too long and repetitive; others considered it “thorough”;
2. whilst respondents generally considered the questionnaire to have been “interesting” and “thought-provoking”, some found it “difficult”, in the sense that they needed to consider which elements were more important and they hadn’t done this before;

3. however, respondents reported that the nature of the questionnaire had prompted them to provide their own spontaneous, personal views and opinions. This was exactly what I wanted and consistent with a more social constructionist research approach.

This feedback provided useful ‘lessons learned’ that I could take into account if I choose to use this or a similar questionnaire as part of my main DBA research.

3.6 Pilot Research Methodology – Interview format, questions and results

All ten of the respondents who returned completed questionnaires accepted the subsequent invitation to be interviewed, although, in the event, one participant from my own organisation had to cancel the session at the last minute because of another work commitment. Unfortunately, there wasn’t enough time to reschedule this interview. The interviews were on a one-to-one basis using a standardised schedule interview type as identified by Kane (1985), i.e. formally structured, asking the same questions in the same order. I needed some element of standardised interview schedule so as to better code and process the responses so as to better establish and represent the respondents’ perceptions of what constitutes ‘successful’ business collaborating. However, the questions would be crafted so as to give the participants the opportunity to introduce variations in the answers and different perspectives, consistent with a constructionist approach. The interview would also include open
questions at the end. In adopting a semi-structured interview approach, I have drawn on Silverman's (2000) discomfort with attempts to identify qualitative research with open-ended informal interviews. He argues that whilst open-ended interviews can be useful, we need to justify departing from the "naturally occurring data that surrounds us and to be cautious about the 'romantic' impulse which identifies 'experience' with 'authenticity'."

A 4-step approach similar to that adopted by Peters (1994) in his work on carrying out Training Needs Analysis was used as the basis for the interviews. Given the time constraints of this pilot study, I decided that if I wanted a deeper understanding of the interviewees' perspectives and perceptions, views, outlooks and opinions, then rather than 'just do it' I would, better, contrast this particular interview method against one that facilitates that.

The 4 steps were:

**Step 1** – I asked each interviewee to identify 2 instances of successful business collaborating (as simply A and B to avoid embarrassment, respect privacy and to encourage more full and open responses). Where I was asked what I meant by 'successful' I pointed out that the purpose of the interview was to discover what they mean by 'successful', though I did point out that the instances could be one aspect of a particular collaboration and not necessarily the whole project or venture.

**Step 2** – I asked the interviewee to identify 2 instances of business collaborating that they considered to have been 'not so successful'.
Step 3 – I then asked the interviewee 4 key questions:

1. What do/did people do similarly/differently?
2. How do/did people spend their time differently?
3. What do/did people consider to be important?
4. How do/did people react differently in exceptional or challenging circumstances?

The interviewee was asked to pair the A and B collaborating against C and then to identify something that A and B would do or did similarly that C would or did differently. This was repeated for each of the 4 questions.

Step 4 - The interviewee was then asked to pair the A and B collaborating against D and again asked to answer each of the 4 questions in turn. By this process I was looking to highlight other characteristics considered relevant to the interviewee.

Each interview started with an open question as to “How did you find the questionnaire?” in order to get useful feedback to establish if it is practically feasible for my main project research work, particularly with it having 240 questions. I was also concerned as to whether completing my questionnaire pre-disposed the interviewees to respond in a certain way to the interview questions. To minimise this I carried out the interviews one month after the questionnaires had been completed. Nevertheless, I listened carefully during the interviews to any hints that the interviewees were referring back to the questionnaire.
The interviews closed with open questions as to “What do you think an ideal
collaboration might be?” and “How was the interview for you?” The responses to this
question are set out in Appendix 6.

A copy of the interview template and questions asked is included at Appendix 3.

Subject to the interviewee’s agreement (granted in every case), each interview was
tape-recorded in order to help me ensure that I accurately established and recorded the
interviewee’s responses. I also made my own notes during the interview (on the
interview template), so that I could subsequently compare and contrast the two
methods of recording the interviews.

Each session took 30 to 45 minutes in total, with the actual interview taking some 15
to 20 minutes to complete. Typing up the notes took a similar length of time for each
interview. Listening to the tape recordings and filling in any ‘gaps’ took slightly
longer in each case. Overall the interviews took some 15 aggregate hours to carry out
and write up. The interviews with the 4 ESA people took place on the same day at the
ESA headquarters at Lockworth in Northamptonshire.

The data gathering process involved:

- tape recording the interviews as well as with taking rough notes during the
  interview;
- typing up the notes after the interview into a summary sheet based on the
  interview template – one for each interview;
• reviewing the typed notes with the tape recording – identifying any gaps and updating the summary sheets as necessary;

• coding and categorising the data, identifying themes and deriving conclusions.

As with the feedback from the open questionnaire question, the interview data reaffirmed the importance to the interviewees of those behavioural and structural elements as highlighted in the world literature as being the most important for ‘successful’ business collaborating. Though, again, a number of these factors were not mentioned by the interviewees or were perceived using different terminology. The main result of the qualitative interview process was the high number of new insights that were perceived and disclosed. The analytical model used to highlight, compare and contrast the feedback from the open questionnaire question has been adopted at Figures 3.8 and 3.9 below which provides a summary of the key tangible and intangible elements and factors highlighted by the interviewees during the interview process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Hard’ Tangible Structural &amp; Control Factors</th>
<th>‘Soft’ Intangible Behavioural Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACTORS MENTIONED BY</td>
<td>FACTORS MENTIONED BY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCA only</td>
<td>BOTH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Contracts &amp; Agreements</td>
<td>Goals &amp; Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Mgt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS NOT MENTIONED BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Mgt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.8 – analytical model – worldview key elements and factors highlighted from semi-structured interviews

Note: the elements and factors highlighted in bold type represent multiple responses made of these key elements and factors from different individuals within the same organisation

138
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS MENTIONED BY</th>
<th>FACTORS MENTIONED BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEW INSIGHTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>NEW INSIGHTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Capability</td>
<td>Alliance Capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;the longer you’re at it the better you get&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;the longer you’re at it the better you get&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set realistic outcomes</td>
<td>Set realistic outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained staff in Management Process (e.g. Prince2 Project methodology)</td>
<td>Trained staff in Management Process (e.g. Prince2 Project methodology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right people on board</td>
<td>Right people on board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well documented processes</td>
<td>Well documented processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick to the business plan</td>
<td>Stick to the business plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put in sufficient financial resources to ensure benefits achieved (&quot;don’t penny pinch&quot;)</td>
<td>Put in sufficient financial resources to ensure benefits achieved (&quot;don’t penny pinch&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual, balanced, clear &amp; adequate input &amp; contribution of unique skills &amp; resources and time, effort &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Mutual, balanced, clear &amp; adequate input &amp; contribution of unique skills &amp; resources and time, effort &amp; commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early mutual input in initial discussions to encourage joint ownership</td>
<td>Early mutual input in initial discussions to encourage joint ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutually agreed, fixed &amp; understood aims</td>
<td>Mutually agreed, fixed &amp; understood aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint decision making</td>
<td>Joint decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do right thing at right time</td>
<td>Do right thing at right time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced mutual priorities</td>
<td>Balanced mutual priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good ground work (pre collaborating)</td>
<td>Good ground work (pre collaborating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Rules</td>
<td>Ground Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives</td>
<td>Incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targets</td>
<td>Targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both to have a lot to lose if fail</td>
<td>Both to have a lot to lose if fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid multi-lateral collaborating “Bi-lateral works better”</td>
<td>Avoid multi-lateral collaborating “Bi-lateral works better”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early mutual input in initial discussions to encourage joint ownership</td>
<td>Early mutual input in initial discussions to encourage joint ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutually agreed, fixed &amp; understood aims</td>
<td>Mutually agreed, fixed &amp; understood aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint decision making</td>
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<td>Balanced mutual priorities</td>
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<td>Good ground work (pre collaborating)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Targets</td>
<td>Targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both to have a lot to lose if fail</td>
<td>Both to have a lot to lose if fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid multi-lateral collaborating “Bi-lateral works better”</td>
<td>Avoid multi-lateral collaborating “Bi-lateral works better”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking for people</td>
<td>Liking for people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to succeed</td>
<td>Desire to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid selfishness &amp; personal gain (at individual and organisational level)</td>
<td>Avoid selfishness &amp; personal gain (at individual and organisational level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be prepared to listen</td>
<td>Be prepared to listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain reputation</td>
<td>Maintain reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as a team</td>
<td>Work as a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathise with other party and individuals</td>
<td>Empathise with other party and individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand sensitivities</td>
<td>Understand sensitivities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive</td>
<td>Constructive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to work together again</td>
<td>Desire to work together again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time for people</td>
<td>Making time for people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Go the extra mile”</td>
<td>“Go the extra mile”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid perfectionism</td>
<td>Avoid perfectionism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.9 – analytical model – new insight key elements and factors highlighted from semi-structured interviews*

*Note: the elements and factors highlighted in **bold type** represent multiple responses made of these key elements and factors from different individuals within the same organisation*
Only one of the tangible structural elements - Goals and Objectives - was highlighted by people in both organisations. Five of the remaining seven were not mentioned by people in either organisation. However, the interviewees between them highlighted some 23 new hard tangible insights, some mutually, and with people from ESA highlighting the most. Contrast this with the ‘low score’ they gave to the ‘harder’ tangible key elements in the questionnaire results.

The three most unpopular intangible behavioural elements from the questionnaire results - Organisational Culture, Organisational Interdependence and Organisational Self-Knowledge - were not mentioned by any individual at all. This may have been because these are dimensions they do not understand or call something else. Whilst the remaining 5 of the literature’s behavioural elements were mentioned, an additional 38 behavioural elements were mentioned also, many mutually, and most from people in my own organisation who had, generally, taken a perceived preference for the ‘harder’ tangible structural and control elements and factors from the etic approach based questionnaire. This suggests that the ‘world view’ has only a partial connection to the realities of business collaborating as constructed by the respondents and interviewees I engaged with in this particular research work.

Whilst these findings may be as a result of the nature of the questions, they are probably more as a result of the more qualitative, constructionist perspective, approach and process adopted with the interviews, even though they were semi-structured. The interviewees were viewed as “experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds” (Silverman, 1993, p.91). The primary issue was to generate data that gave an authentic insight into people’s experiences. The emic
approach provided much less of the world literature view and many more new insights than the etic questionnaire based on the literature. This does not mean that these ‘local versions’ of what works in successful collaborating is right and cannot be challenged; it’s a key tenet of social constructionist understanding that such versions are always incomplete and unfinalised (Dachler and Hosking, 1995). However, these results do highlight, and encourage, the opportunity to more deeply probe the interviewees to gain even deeper insights into the perceptions, views and perspectives they have constructed from their own experiences of collaborating. This was a key ‘lesson learnt’ to take forward to my main research assignment.

The ‘communication’ statement seems a good example of the need to probe deeper as to what individuals mean, since the following different descriptions of communication were referred to by individual respondees/interviewees:

- “regular communication”
- “formal communication”
- “clarity of communication”
- “clear communication”
- “frank communication”
- “fruitful meetings”

The feedback to the open question at the end of each interview as to “How was the interview for you?” is set out below:
The majority of the interviewees stated they were “fine” with the interview process and, as with the questionnaire feedback, most found it “interesting” and “thought-provoking”. A consistent theme arising from the research interview process was seen to be the benefits of taking time to reflect on “what’s gone well and not so well”. One respondent said he found it “quite liberating to talk about these things” since, in his view, there was little “intellectual consideration” or analysis given to what works and doesn’t “and we don’t always know why”.

As with the questionnaire, these responses can also be categorised into 3 recurring themes. These are:

- the “it’s good to talk and reflect” theme outlined above;
- the difficulty in thinking of the ‘A, B, C and D’ examples quickly, and the merits of giving the interviewees time to consider these;
- the interview could have taken longer, gone deeper, into more detail.

Again, this was valuable feedback that I could take into account when shaping the interview element of my main DBA research study.

3.7 Results and reflections of pilot study

The pilot study, whilst successful in many respects, didn’t seem to go far enough or deep enough to the root of TCA’s problem and predicament outlined in Chapter 1.

From my reading I could see that not all research methods necessarily seek to quantify data, nor do they apply preconceived categories within which to group data. Neither
do they necessarily need to find casual relationships and I was looking to do all things as part of this pilot research. However, I was also using the research methods (questionnaire and semi-structured interviews) as tools to understand the views, perceptions and meanings as constructed by the various individuals engaged in the collaborating process and in including open questionnaire and interview questions I was at least allowing the research subjects an element of control over the direction the research took.

This is not to say that the research was entirely without merit. I took comfort from Silverman (1993) with any inconsistencies that might be perceived from my approach and other available approaches, since he considers “vices” any assumption as to right or wrong “models of societies or methodologies” and “taking sides on the many spurious polarities which still bedevil much of social science”. Indeed, my subsequent quantitative analysis gave me some fascinating results and insights, for example:

- I could derive a league table showing which factors were perceived to be the most important overall;
- I could compare and contrast at any individual, work-role and organisational level, which factors were perceived as being more important (and there were some interesting conflicting perceptions at and between each level);
- it supported some of the key elements and factors of successful business collaborating highlighted in the world literature, but ignored others;
- it supported some of these key elements and factors though using different language and terminology;
• it highlighted new elements and factors – new insights;
• some existing world view factors were highlighted by individuals from TCA and partner organisations, some from just one and some by more than one individual in the same organisation;
• some new elements and factors were highlighted from people within each organisation, others from just one, and some by more than one individual in the same organisation;
• I was able to show all this in a conceptual model.

However, the research study failed to provide any insight into why the respondents considered, perceived and held the positions and views they did. Neither could I fully understand what the respondents actually meant by terms like ‘communication’ or ‘control’, when discussing factors contributing to successful collaborating. Whilst I went someway to exploring these issues, and someway in shifting the balance of power to the respondents, with an open question at the end of each questionnaire and semi-structured interview asking, “In your own words, how would you describe successful collaborating?” it highlighted the limitations of quantitative analysis alone and the merits and benefits of including additional qualitative data collection and analysis. The analysis sought patterns across the participants and the interpretation of the data lost their association with context, space and time and the individual’s personal construction of meaning. Similarly, ‘successful’ business collaborating seems to be spoken of in the literature as an actual material entity. It isn’t. According to Burr (1995), researchers can see words as constitutive of social events. It follows that I do not need to establish a definition of what ‘successful’ collaborating is or what a ‘successful’ collaborator is doing. Successful collaborating is a social
construction, which can’t exist except from the ways people talk about it. This drives a need in my research to somehow capture the individual’s voice, natural language and discourse of the participants involved in such collaborating, and then to analyse and make sense of what they are saying.

The number of additional factors and element headings identified in the pilot study would seem to demonstrate that the etic approach (Kane, 1985, p. 65) adopted using factors taken from the literature is just the start of the research process. There is an opportunity and need to go deeper, to probe more - in my opinion to take a more emic approach in examining how the individuals see and categorise their world (ibid). An approach is needed that recognises the importance of talk, dialogue and interpersonal communication in the development of tacit knowledge and engages the learning interests of the research participants themselves (Devins and Gold, 2002).

Through the pilot study I had a better understanding of Kane’s (1985, p. 71) advice regarding interviewees and questionnaire respondents that “it is very easy to lose sight of the fact that it is actual human beings who are going to be on the receiving end of all this”. Given that my main aim as a researcher was “better human understanding” and interviewing, or any research technique is “enhanced by a proper perspective” it was useful for me to remember that other people might not be as passionate or as eager as I am about the research. Especially if at any time I found myself guilty of any dismissive thinking towards people as research subjects.

On a practical level, I learned that note-taking provides an instant record of the key points of an interview (Blaxter et al, 1996). However, I found taking notes interfered
with eye contact and engagement in the interview. It also restricted my listening.
There was also the impression that respondents may have thought that any comments
they made that I didn’t note were unimportant to me – though this may have kept the
conversation focused it risks inadvertently influencing the interviewee. Whilst all this
highlighted the benefit of tape recording, I needed to explore other note-taking
options to help the evaluation of notes versus tape recordings in my main research
assignment. My own shorthand and abbreviation helped where I used it and, in taking
notes, ensured I didn’t miss anything or become over-reliant on the tape. I learned the
importance of writing up my notes as soon as possible after the interview. I also
learned that writing up, and particularly the analysis, can take much longer than the
interview itself.

Using a tape recorder means that you only need to concentrate on the process of the
interview. You can focus your attention on the interviewee and engage in appropriate
eye contact and non-verbal communication. You can make a verbatim record of the
whole interview. However, the technical issue of tape recording and the security of
tapes is an issue. Given some of the problems and difficulties I had with the battery
operated hand held recorder (tape sticking on recording and jumping on play back),
and in trying to copy them, I decided to use a digital recorder in future and download
transcripts onto computer and store them electronically. This also affirmed the
benefits of also taking notes, since I would have missed some information otherwise. I
am not convinced that the tape recordings made the respondents anxious (as suggested
by Blaxter et al, 1996) but understand the risk of that, and concur that respondents are
less likely to reveal confidential information. Tapes also take a long time to transcribe
and analyse.
A challenge has been in recognising that whilst people in organisations holding similar views to the people in TCA as to what is important in successful business collaborating has benefits of cultural fit etc, the people in both organisations may be missing something important. Likewise, whilst people in organisations that do not hold similar views to the people in TCA as to what are important collaborative factors may have potential for conflict, they may also provide a useful balance for more effective collaborating. In either case, the exercise contributes to TCA's risk management strategy in that this knowledge helps mitigate risk, which is a key outcome requirement of the TCA Executive and Board in their role as sponsors of my DBA research programme.

This pilot research study had as its purpose an exposition of learning about the appropriateness to me of the constructionist perspective as well as the value, suitability and feasibility of the research methods – questionnaire and interview – both as data collection techniques and their fit within a constructionist perspective. Whilst I do not consider an etic approach based questionnaire to sit well with a constructionist perspective, the study did provide an opportunity to explore my sense of what the literature means, in terms of the 16 concepts/variable factors identified in the literature and of the practitioners’ connection to the concepts, the meaning they have of the concepts, and modelling a hierarchy of the relative importance of the factors. This has allowed some quantitative analysis which, whilst on its own has limitations, has benefit in ‘getting the attention’ of people within my sponsoring organisation, since they are more comfortable with this ‘bottom line numbers’ kind of conclusion. However questionable the assumptions behind some quantitative research, it tends to deliver apparently reliable and valid correlations between ‘variables’ that appear to be
self-evident (Silverman, 1993). Kirk and Muller (1986, p.10) argue that qualitative research “does not imply a commitment to innumeracy”. In suggesting that there’s nothing wrong in the qualitative researcher “dirtying their hands with numbers”, Silverman (ibid, p.161 – 164) takes the view that it “gives the reader a sense of the flavour of the data as a whole” and overcomes any doubt that “the researcher has selected only those fragments of data that support his argument”. The major limitations of the ‘numbers’ approach in my view, is that they are derived from answers to questions that I constructed and do not address the “so what?” question. Also, purely quantitative research may neglect the social and cultural construction of the ‘variables’ that they are looking to correlate. However, providing the researcher resists the temptation to count everything, and bases his analysis on a sound conceptual basis linked to the participants own methods of ordering the world, then both types of data can inform the analysis of the other.

Adopting a framework in working with people collaborating on a day-to-day basis suggested the importance of the creation of a ‘conversational space’ within which meaning between the collaborators and myself could take place (Devins and Gold, 2002). Silverman (1993, p. 22) considers there to be no principled grounds to be either qualitative or quantitative in approach. “It all depends on what you are trying to do. Indeed often you will want to combine both approaches”.

What hit me like a thunderbolt was the stark realisation that what embraces the vast majority of literature on business collaborating could be considered to be a naïve law-like notion that ‘the truth is out there’. However, the world of business collaborating is more ambiguous and complex than that, and so the challenge was to find a research
methodology that better reflected my own changing personal perspective, addressed the critical realist gap, and helped make better sense of the literature in general and the problems and predicament that individuals working for TCA are finding with business collaborating in particular.

I concluded that the issue wasn't one of quantitative versus qualitative approaches but a single objective reality versus multiple realities, which are co-constructed through interaction. This led to my subsequent acceptance of a social constructionist perspective and approach to the research study.
Chapter 4

Research Methodology and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This qualitative research studies the behavioural and structural factors that contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and perception of ‘successful’ business collaborating, with particular focus on the business collaborations of TCA with other public and private sector organisations. Originally my focus was on observing, interviewing and collecting data to evaluate the business collaborations carried out by TCA. My research became more to understand and appreciate the participants’ perceptions, thoughts and views as to ‘what’s going on’ and what works and what doesn’t work in TCA’s business collaborations and alliances and how they believe they can be improved.

Early in my DBA studies I considered the research technique choices available to me (Selltiz et al, 1964; ibid, 1985; Kane, 1985; Silverman, 1993; Blaxter et al, 1996; Berg, 2001), together with the administration of the techniques, and evaluated the relative merits and feasibility of these techniques and approaches in the context of this research study. However, learning the lessons of the pilot study outlined in Chapter 3, I have now accepted that social construction has driven my research method options. Consequently, I rejected any research and data collection methods that were inconsistent with that approach. Questionnaires and structured interviews would be inappropriate, although I recognised that there may be useful data within minutes of meetings and contract documentation that could help shape and clarify the context of the collaborating relationships.
According to Marshall and Rossman (2000, p. 22) a research proposal is a plan for engaging in systematic inquiry to bring about a better understanding of a particular phenomenon. In this particular study that phenomenon is the effective alliance management of TCA business collaborations and alliances and the participants’ perceptions of it. In summarising my research strategy, I used a critical qualitative and social constructionist approach in assessing this phenomenon that acknowledged that different people interpreted situations differently, that it was important to get close to people and to consider the views of others, in addition to the views of those having direct association with TCA.

4.2 Research approach and methodology

Observation facilitates the collection of data on social interaction. According to Murphy (2004, p. 13) the researcher interprets the meaning that people attach to the world around them and it is their interpretation of meaning, based on their experiences, that determines action rather than norms, values, roles and goals. In my research I needed to make sense of the business collaborating and alliance management phenomena and of the human behaviour surrounding it in my chosen field setting. Whilst direct observation would allow me to learn things from an emic perspective that would, maybe, be withheld in a formal interview, it could help make sense of what could be the focus of interviews and other data sources. It could also allow me to be open and not limited by pre-conceptualisations, however it would not allow me to capture historical content or see what wasn’t there. A dilemma to manage occurred as to whose account was the more valuable where different participants offered various accounts. If I simply sought consensus, I could then be ignoring individual’s views.
I incorporated a comprehensive reflective journal, as promoted by Janesick (2004), into the research process and used this as a qualitative research technique to provide a data set of my reflections during the study. I used the journal writing as a heuristic tool to complete the description and explanation of my role in the project, to write about any problems that arose and to generally make sense of the research story as it unfolded. It included my thoughts and feelings as well as facts. The interpretations based on the personalised narratives in the journal, almost by definition, reflected my implicit beliefs, values, philosophical assumptions and overall paradigmatic conventions. Whenever the opportunity arose to encourage other participants in the study to also keep a journal this helped my overall understanding of the study area and offered an opportunity to compare my perceptions with others.

Interviews are a very useful technique for collecting data that would be unlikely to be accessible using techniques such as observation or questionnaires (Blaxter et al., 1996). I believe they are a vital technique for any research from a social constructionist perspective. When people talk to each other “the world gets constructed” (Burr, 1995). My main research and accounts collection method was therefore a reflective diary and real-time thought capture from the participants during my period of immersion in the research setting, together with a number of unstructured interviews. The reason for the real-time thought capture stemmed from the fact that, in engaging with the various participants in this research assignment, it occurred to me that people’s perceptions and perspectives might be different during collaborating than when they’re looking back. It followed that there was some worth in the participants acting as informants immediately after people have behaved rather than reflected back on after 6 months or so. There was merit in following a group of
staff through a collaboration and capturing thoughts more immediately, for example, after project meetings. Not necessarily following a group for the whole length of a collaborative venture, time didn’t allow for this, but so as to gather some data that didn’t look back months or years and hadn’t been re-constructed by intervening experiences. I believe that adopting this approach added something to my overall understanding.

I believe that the social constructionist framework provides a way of looking at business collaborating that has been largely ignored in the literature to date. I also believe that analysis based on deeper, more probing conversation, including unstructured depth interview as a secondary data gathering method, supplementing my own reflective diary as my primary instrument, and the capture of real-time thought from the participants, through observation at their business meetings, as they engaged in their activities, and through talk and other interaction with business partners, had potentially useful practical implications and resulting application for all those involved in the business collaborating process. Even though my intention was to gather and present both quantitative and qualitative data, social constructionism drove my data gathering methodology and my analysis was carried out within a social constructionist context. Consequently, I included a number of one-to-one, unstructured interviews as part of the study, with the participants described in 4.3 below, since this would provide valuable in-depth data that I would be unable to get from my day-to-day observation and action-research role.

However, of more importance in the research context than the unstructured interviews carried out, was the thirty months engagement that I had within the research situation
in my role as Head of Customer and Commercial Services at TCA. During that time I have led TCA’s collaborating strategy with individuals and groups from other public and private sector organisations. This has allowed me unrestricted access to many facets of the collaborating process. This has included partner selection, mutual goal and objective setting, contract negotiation, project management, product and service development, conflict resolution and alliance management. A key source of research data was accumulated from my participation and reflection on the numerous meetings and other day-to-day engagements with people, where these collaborating activities were developed, discussed and resolved. Some of the collaborative work has proved successful, some significantly less so. Some of the work is still ongoing, whilst some new initiatives are currently being developed. Whatever the status of the collaboration, it has allowed me to feed much of this activity into my overall data gathering process, supplemented by the one-to-one interviews carried out with people working for some of the organisations that I have worked with during this time.

Direct observation would allow me to capture the natural context within which events, activities and interactions occurred naturally and to see aspects of which the participants were unaware of or were taking for granted. Aspects that may not become apparent from formal interview alone. In particular I intended to study and engage with people in their natural settings with a view to acquiring a better understanding of their perceptions, thoughts and views as to what was going on and what worked and what didn’t work in TCA’s business collaborations and alliance management and how they believed they could be improved. Whilst there could be time and cost advantages in the use of focus groups in contrast to one-to-one interviews as a means of collecting data, both options were open to me and both had other benefits. In
particular, individual interviews would allow me to explore an individual’s interpretations and perceptions of business collaborating and alliance management based on their experiences of it. Perceptions that I would not have been able to identify from direct observation or any other means. Whilst I would need to be aware that the opinion I was getting from an interviewee may be dependent on whether they were having a good day or a bad one, I felt reasonably comfortable with the natural response more likely with an unstructured interview, though I would have a mental checklist of the topics I considered important and wished to discuss, explore and probe in natural conversation rather than in a formal structured style. In my pilot study, however, I adopted a semi-structured interview approach, with the ‘check-list’ providing a questioning structure. This is described further in Chapter 3. I intended to keep the questions clear, singular and pointed, keep the discussion on track, in many ways consistent with the critical incident and deep interviewing technique described by McCracken (1988). I would not assume that I understood exactly what the interviewees’ meant but would encourage them to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences, seeking clarification from them as necessary.

I saw the interaction of group participants and the resulting ‘brainstorming’ dynamism as a main advantage of focus groups and workshop sessions though the more non-structured nature of such sessions needed to be managed to ensure all relevant data was collected for subsequent analysis. This needed further thought on my part. In managing the further dilemma as to whose account was the more valuable where different participants offered various accounts, I needed to strike an appropriate balance between seeking out the consensus as the participants created new knowledge and reality based on their discussions, and taking account of individual’s views before
they were perhaps unnecessarily and inappropriately influenced by the views of other
more strong-minded participants (Reason, 1994; Silverman, 2000; Tansley and
Watson, 2000; Simons and Peterson, 2006). I also needed to vigorously validate my
observations and any emerging themes and patterns that developed to maintain the
credibility of my reporting of the accounts. I used the advice of Merton et al (1956)
and kept any one person from dominating the proceedings, encouraged recalcitrant
respondents to participate and obtained responses from the entire group to ensure
fullest possible coverage of the topic.

The challenge of recording the interview and discussion data was met by a mixture of
tape/electronic recording (with the interviewees prior consent), brief note-taking
during or immediately after informal discussions, and writing up an outline of the
topics discussed in my reflective diary and journal immediately on finishing the
interview, discussion or group session.

My role as Head of Customer and Commercial Services within TCA facilitated an
‘action-research’ approach where my existing role allowed me to be both an observer
and participant in TCA’s collaborative ventures with our alliance partners’ teams.
This helped minimise the dilemma of how to minimise the Hawthorne effect (Mayo,
1933 as cited by Hart, 1998, p. 45), which is a common example of chance and
observation of related factors. When studying working conditions in a factory it was
noted that the act of carrying out the research influenced the behaviour of the workers.
However, in any dealings I had with colleagues within other TCA departments and
their alliance partners’ teams I became a more frequent presence in their environment
and setting in a ‘fellow senior manager and/or Head of Department and/or TCA
colleague’ supporting role with a view to them seeing me not just as a researcher. I feel it helped me control the interviews and discussions and make them natural. I hoped that this approach gave them time to observe me and to develop their trust. This was important to me from a practical and ethical point of view, since the research involving other TCA departments and their alliance partners’ teams needed to be more of an overt operation than that in my action-research role within my own department and our alliance partners, which could be more of a covert operation. The ethical considerations of this needed to be considered carefully and were discussed in Chapter 2, and also in section 4.5 of this Chapter.

The solution to the dilemma and predicament outlined in Chapter 1 involves TCA collaborating with other public and private sector bodies to provide its existing and new markets with additional property information services and products. The strategy and business case for delivering on this strategic objective represented a period of significant reinvention and change for TCA and for the purpose of this assignment affirmed my choice of the TCA’s HQ in Mansfield as a credible setting for the study. It was also consistent with my chosen field of analysis, i.e. a study of TCA’s business collaborating and alliance management, or more specifically, the social setting broadly defined by the managing process linked to the operating of the collaboration. Each collaboration was in its own social setting. Whilst both an ethnographer and social constructionist can use a view of the unit of analysis, the social constructionist would want to emphasise how the individual managers and other people construct their worldview and behave. The chosen research setting was ideal for me since I had easy access, immediate rapport with participants and could gather data directly related to my research interests. However, the setting also included engaging with
participants of TCA's collaborative partners. These included, amongst others, Earth Science Agency HQ at Lockworth, Nottinghamshire, the North West Subsidence Compensation Board HQ in Manchester, EPA HQ's in London and Rotherham, CapitalG HQ, Bristol, NIS HQ and Burdocks Ltd HQ, both in London, and Mapping Agency's HQ in Northampton (Note: The organisation names and locations are fictitious to protect and respect the privacy and confidentiality of the actual organisations and their locations). These settings, whilst typical, were less than ideal since I needed to negotiate access, gradually win trust building from my initial small number of contacts, and more slowly collect data that only sometimes fitted with my research interests.

In the circumstances, however, I felt able to justify these settings on the basis that they suitably met the requirements of the study and I had ready and sustainable access to them for the period of the study (from June 2004 to December 2006). The settings had the appropriate mix of processes, people, interactions and structures. Specifically the setting involved people in both the public and private sector actively working and involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis. The participants and their organisations and work are discussed further in section 4.4 below. As well as having the skills and resources to do the fieldwork in the time available, I was confident I would be accepted and trusted by the participants having already approached them in my role as Head of Customer and Commercial Services leading the delivery of the collaborating strategy on behalf of TCA. I felt this gave the choice of setting additional feasibility.
Whilst I'm not an ethnographer, it seemed that I could usefully borrow from the methods of the ethnographer to help me understand the implications of using my adopted research methods in my own study. For example, ethnography is a descriptive, qualitative research methodology for studying people in their natural settings. Sociologically, researchers spend time in the field observing people and their environment to acquire a deep understanding of the lifestyles or cultures as a basis for better understanding their needs and problems. Such a study provides a descriptive account of social life and culture in a defined social system, based on qualitative methods like detailed observations, unstructured interviews and analysis of documents, for example (Bowling, 1997). Berg (2001) describes various types of ethnographic research methods including participant observation, formal and informal interviewing, and document collecting and recording. He also distinguishes between microethnography and macroethnography. Whilst a macroethnographer attempts to describe the entire way of life of a particular group, a microethnographer focuses on particular sections or aspects of the overall group. On reflection, I suggest there isn't anything the ethnographer uses that isn't available to any qualitative researcher. On further reflection, it is the epistemology one has that influences the use of and meaning of observations and interviews. I have seen people construct reality while collaborating and have studied the reported perceptions, 'truths', explanations, beliefs and worldviews of the people involved (Patton, 2002, p.96) and the consequences of their constructing on their behaviour and for those with whom they interact. This brings me to social construction rather than ethnography.

In summary, the approach and methodology used in the study was social constructionist (Gergen, 1999), narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988; Rae, 2005) and
interpretive (Schwandt, 1998). Narrative was used to explore the business collaborating process as constructed by each collaborator. My two main data collection methods were:

1. My direct observation captured in my reflective diaries of the collaborating process and the accounts of the numerous players that I have engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process, from the participants in both the public and private sector involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting; and

2. The interview accounts of people from my own organisation – the Coal Authority (TCA) - and people from our alliance partners, who agreed to take part in separate, one-to-one, in-depth, unstructured interviews.

4.3 Research programme design

The foregoing analysis led me to conclude that the plan of work for implementing my research programme would comprise the following elements:

1. Completion of the structured and critical analysis of the prevailing theoretical literature and best practice studies, as discussed in Chapter 2, in relation to the areas of alliance management identified in the background analysis mapping of the research territory in line with the approach advocated by Orna and Stevens (1995, pp.32-73). A review of the major concepts and constructs were summarised from this literature review.
The literature review continued throughout the life of the research study.

2. Examination of documents and files (both paper and electronic) relating to the background, history and ongoing operational activities of each alliance organisation and participants was a source of valuable data, particularly where it negated the need to disturb participants unnecessarily or where it provided useful background data and verification opportunity.

This unobtrusive work continued throughout the research period, on an ‘as required’ basis, particularly whenever new units of analysis emerged during the fieldwork or the subsequent data analysis stage.

3. Direct observation of the TCA and alliance partners’ participants working within the collaborative ventures in the field setting in order to allow me to learn things from an emic perspective that would, maybe, be withheld in a formal interview. This direct observation subsequently helped me make sense of what could be the focus of interviews, further discussions and other data sources.

The direct observation process continued for the life of the research study.

4. My own role as Head of Customer and Commercial Services, where I was able to act as both an observer and participant in TCA’s ongoing and proposed collaborative ventures and alliance management activities.
My 'action-research' role (in the sense that in continuing in my existing role I was both an observer and participant) continued for the life of the research study and how this progressed was logged in my reflexive accounts.

5. A series of unstructured interviews (practice based study) and semi-structured interviews (pilot study), on a one-to-one basis, with those key individuals, respondents and informants within each alliance partner organisation that are responsible for the effective day-to-day operational working of the collaboration. The option was also available to me, as the opportunity arose, to carry out a focus group interview as a means of collecting data, particularly where this provided me with time and cost advantages.

I held the interviews for my pilot study in Spring 2005, and those for my main practice based research study in Spring 2006. I also gathered data before, throughout and after the intervening time as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting.

6. Analysis of the data derived from the literature review, examination of documents and files, direct observation, participant interviews and, significantly, my own reflective diary and journal. Whilst this was an ongoing activity for the life of the research study, the bulk of the conclusions derived from the analysed data was only properly formulated and written down after all the interviews and/or discussions had been completed.
The main strength and justification for my research and data collection methods is that they were wholly consistent with a social constructionist approach. Social constructionism recognises the importance of talk, dialogue and interpersonal communication in the development of tacit knowledge and engages the learning interests of the research participants themselves (Devins and Gold, 2002). Though I acknowledge that the flexibility of an unstructured interview can result in a lack of comparability of one interviewee with another (Selltiz et al, 1964, p. 264) and that the analysis is probably more difficult and time consuming than that of standardised or semi-structured interviews, nevertheless, as a supporting data collection method to my immersion in the research setting and reflection, the in-depth, one-to-one, unstructured interviews were useful.

Aside from an appreciation of different research techniques, my critical reflection and evaluation of the experiences and outcome of my pilot research process, and an earlier consultant research module assignment, provided a number of ‘lessons learned’ that I took into account in my main research. These included issues relating to the interview setting, arranging access, tape-recording and note-taking, interview style and the relative advantages and disadvantages of using an emic and an etic approach.

4.4 Participants

The various players and participants were chosen because of their expertise and experience of business collaborating, because I had ready access to them and their organisations, and because their experiences were likely to help me better understand the business risks relating to TCA’s predicament discussed in Chapter 1, including the public/private dimension. Whilst I recognised that I needn’t engage with people from
a particularly large number of diverse organisations for some sort of validity, given that social constructionism is not concerned with the triangulation of results and multiple sources of evidence, overall I engaged with over 50 people from 19 different organisations (24 from 6 public sector and 29 from 13 private sector organisations), which I believe represented a credible research sample on which to satisfy the aims of the study as outlined in Chapter 1.

The decision to go for people from TCA and its alliance partners was because I considered this represented a more diverse cross-section of collaborating teams and the research needed to be open to the impact of the diversity in their backgrounds and learning experiences, since the reality of what makes collaborating work is the world of those involved (Devins and Gold, 2002). It is suggested that only those persons immediately affected by organisational events (e.g. business collaborating) have sufficient knowledge of the precise circumstances to be able to suggest influences on relationships (Jennings and Beaver, 1997).

The participants and their organisations that I engaged with over the thirty months of the research study and from whom I collected views, outlooks, opinions and perspectives included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation *</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Work field</th>
<th>Participant *</th>
<th>Job role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TCA</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Government Agency (host organisation)</td>
<td>Bert Scowcroft Dilyns Jennerson Will Neilson Roy Philipson Sam Catson Wes Dickinson Nell Penston Greg Marsh</td>
<td>CEO Service Delivery Manager Technical Manager Mining Information Manager Head of ICT Project Manager Director Web Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Name</td>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Services/Position</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Hub Services Ltd</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Conveyancing Services Karen Richardson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Zoe Hewitt Jo Murphy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping Agency</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Henry Colinson Technical Advisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames Search</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Property</td>
<td>Mo Gower Marketing Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CapitalG</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>ICT Providers</td>
<td>Eric Barnes Martin Webber Gareth Paul ICT Technician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Signs UK</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>ICT Providers</td>
<td>Mark Talbot Penny Brand System Designer HR Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESA</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Earth Science</td>
<td>Chris Brown Jinny Welsley Mel Green Martin Unsworth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GroundStation</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Property</td>
<td>Stewart Hood Alan Beer Managing Director Business Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searchlight</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Property</td>
<td>Kate Major Marketing Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BeeRU</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Andy Grace Lindsey Taylor Pauline Mirks Managing Director Technical Director Practice Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Group</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Data Services</td>
<td>Malcolm Short Ian Sharpe Managing Director Business Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Salt Board</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>Richard Letham Paul Cookson Chairman Board Administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire County Council</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>County Council</td>
<td>Maureen Barlow Andrew Gold Business Manager Property Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdocks UK Ltd</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>Roy Graham Business Development Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency and Legal Co.</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>Neil Smith Insurance administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh &amp; Willis</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>Philip Andrews Martha Rogers Insurance broker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ScanTech</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td>Brian Shields Craig Allen Development Manager Business Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I’ve been in various meetings with all of these individuals, in both small and large groups, at one time or another and seen how a number of them work together as a group. I’ve also held one-to-one conversations with them at various times over the last thirty months as I immersed myself in the collaborative research setting. Their feedback was a vital ingredient of my research to complement my own observation.

My immersion in the research setting and reflection on it also helped me better understand the feedback from a number of additional in-depth, one-to-one, unstructured interviews that I carried out with six of the participants. These participants were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Job role</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Work field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry Stevenson</td>
<td>Development Manager</td>
<td>TCA</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Government Agency (host organisation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Saracen</td>
<td>Client Services Director</td>
<td>Burdocks UK Ltd</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Insurance Brokers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany Carlton</td>
<td>Commercial Manager</td>
<td>National Hub Services Ltd</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Online Conveyancing Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather Moore</td>
<td>Account Manager</td>
<td>Mapping Agency</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>National Mapping Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Coast</td>
<td>Account Manager</td>
<td>CapitalG</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>ICT Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Jameson</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>ESA</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Earth Science Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Profiles of these particular interview participants are summarised and included at Appendix 7. They were chosen for more in-depth one-to-one unstructured interviews because I felt they represented a credible representation of the larger group and
because I was keen to collect data that might not be readily accessible from my direct observation and from the various accounts from the participants to date (Blaxter et al., 1996). The unstructured interviews were another tool in my research armoury.

4.5 Ethical considerations and protocol

In carrying out this research I respected people’s privacy and sought informed consent as a matter of principle. I agree with Berg (1991) when he points out that a researcher must take ownership and responsibility for what is being reported. It is unethical to write something just for the sake of reporting it and not be responsible and accountable for any impact it may have on the participants, particularly when these include third-party individuals and organisations. A researcher needs to exercise caution in navigating the sensitivity encompassed in the study of any issue (see University of Derby research guidance and completed standard ethics approval form at Appendix 8). I do not consider there to be any relief to the ethical dilemma associated with covert observation, operation and research in the idea that this facilitates an unobtrusive research approach. I do not see unobtrusive equate to covert nor obtrusive equate to overt. I see obtrusive and overt operations potentially leading to time and process disruption to participants and it would be unethical to cause such impact without sound reason. I intended to manage this dilemma to ensure that such disruption was kept to a minimal level consistent with the necessary requirements of the research study. I agree with Murphy (2004, p.6) when he justifies covert data collection techniques as part of an initial fact finding exercise but to identify myself before any participant began to doubt my intentions. Berg (1991, p.141) suggests researchers should disclose their subjectivity, which he describes as giving a keen insight “about who is doing the research and why”. It may also give the participants
and subsequent report readers' better understanding as to why certain types of
questions were investigated and why others were not and help with the management
of the 'disruption' dilemma outlined above. The question I needed to ask myself was
“how am I going to ensure the quality of my research?” On reflection, I took the view
that I needed to discuss reflexivity or use the concept of reflexivity to structure the
discussion I had with participants. This linked too with the advice of Marshall and
Rossman (1995) with regard to the overall ‘goodness’ of my research.

The dilemma as to how best minimise the Hawthorne effect (see section 4.2 above) in
itself led to a further ethical dilemma arising from the opportunity to carry out a more
covert operation in my action-research role within my own department and our
alliance partners as against the (more practical) overt operation involving other TCA
departments and their alliance partners' teams. In needing to play two or more roles I
needed the ability to step in and step out of each as required and the wisdom to
recognise when there was the need to do so. On reflection, and taking into account the
responsibility and accountability for my research work, I felt justified in carrying out
a more covert research operation where this did not risk any negative impact on the
other participants. However, given the prior assessment of such risk is purely
subjective and only clear in hindsight after the research had concluded, I briefed my
own department colleagues and those of our alliance partners beforehand of the
research I was undertaking, its aims and methodology and ensured they were
comfortable with it. In the event they were not, I intended to reconsider the research
methodology and amend the approach accordingly. Early feedback from key
participants suggested, however, that this would not be necessary.
I intended to view my own and TCA's collaborative partners from as high an ethical standpoint as possible and take care not to impose my own cultural judgements and beliefs upon other cultures' meanings and participants beliefs. I did this by avoiding leading any of the participants and interviewees towards my own personal views and opinions, and did not interpret the meaning of anything said with which I was uncertain without seeking clarification from them. I believe I adopted the ethically and legally correct qualitative research approaches of the critical theorist and avoided imposing my own beliefs and opinions on the phenomenon of business collaborating and alliance management.

As an ethical protocol, I spoke with each of the interview participants about the research project and its purpose, thanked them for their participation, pointed out it was entirely voluntary and that they were free to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from any interview at any time. I affirmed that any research information and interview feedback would be kept strictly confidential and available only to my DBA supervisory team and me. I took the advice of Kane (1985) to keep my explanation clear and simple so that it 'travelled well' to reduce possible distortion of my purpose as the account travelled from one person to another. This was to avoid future interviewees forming an attitude in advance of my arrival, which might bias their responses. Any recordings of interviews were only made with the interviewee's consent.

4.6 Elicitation techniques

A study of the elicitation techniques for interviewing described by Johnson and Weller (2001) proved beneficial to me, particularly their methods for probing,
question framing and suggestions to help minimise researcher bias. To “uncover unarticulated informant knowledge…and personal experience” (ibid. p. 491). I was impressed too with Spradley’s (1979) description of the various steps in conducting exploratory interviews. I liked the idea of beginning an interview with a broad, descriptive question before moving to more focused questions to understand individual perceptions and experience, and sought to adopt this technique in my own interviews.

A key issue was how to frame questions so as not to influence the participants. I needed each interviewee to talk freely, openly, naturally, in their own language. I genuinely wanted to know what the people involved on a day-to-day basis perceived successful business collaborating to be; what works and why? Constructed from their own experiences. I carried out more open, deep, probing interviews. To avoid constructs, I tried to avoid using words like ‘collaborating’ and ‘success’ in my questions. I was more ‘interested in how people work together with people in other organisations’ and took it from there. I was interested ‘in how you resolve conflict’, i.e. I wanted the interviewees to touch on the ‘success’ factors - both new and existing.

The researcher needs to have ready access to the field setting, which should also be consistent with the chosen unit of analysis. Berg (2001) examines how to access a field setting and discusses the difference between overt and covert observation with particular regard to how the researchers’ presence can affect what happens in a setting. This had relevance to my own research, significant aspects of which were to be carried out within my own organisation (TCA) in both an action-research (where I
am both an observer and participant) and interviewing role. It also had relevance as I carried out my business collaborating ‘day job’ with people from, and within, other organisations. We see their influence in my analysis and presentation of my research data. A particular challenge was my desire to hold the accounts within the context (space and time) that the accounts were given to me. A problem that I perceive for social constructionists relates to how do you do that and produce a conceptual model of what you’ve understood in terms of how it relates to the structure / behaviour debate? I recognise, but accept, my corrupting stance when I’m interpreting the data.

A factor to consider with regard to the interviews was an assessment of how much, if any, influence I could have on an interview setting. Learning from Devins and Gold (2002) I did not intend to take up a position of outside expert or consultant, nor did I look to impose my values, judgements and perspectives. Instead I gave attention to what the participants themselves perceived to be important; paying attention to the way the world of business collaborating was constructed through what they said and valued. There was no question of ‘airbrushing myself out of the picture’ since it was not a question of keeping myself at a minimum but recognising the nature of my influence on the natural setting.

Operating within the University of Derby ethical guidelines, a number of the participants were invited to make a digitally recorded interview, on a one-to-one basis, which was transcribed and coded against categories generated through discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherall, 1987; Burr, 1995, p.15). The transcripts were analysed through generating and coding discursive categories (Riessman, 1993; Rae, 2005). Comparisons of the narratives, grounded in the data, were used to develop
a conceptual model to establish and represent the respondents’ perceptions of what constitutes ‘successful’ business collaborating.

4.7 Limitations

The limitations of the research were bound up in the focus and scope of the research study and these are summarised below:

1. In seeking to understand the ‘day to day’ I acknowledge that this is context and time specific. I acknowledge the limitations of my research study’s generalisability and the transferability of the findings to assist other readers.

2. The research study is limited to those engaged in by TCA during a relatively short time period of some 30 months from June 2004 to December 2006. Each setting and each individual is unique and I have to consider the impact of reduction in the analysis process.

3. There was insufficient time to carry out any extensive hypothesis testing of the conclusions derived from this research study.

I accept that this list is not necessarily exhaustive. There were further ethical and legal issues I needed to take into account and address and, whilst I recognise that the research has its limitations, the degree with which I have understated these is a further limitation in itself, since this may affect my ability to demonstrate that, on balance, I have made the best available choices relative to my research question(s).
4.8 Data Analysis

Wolcott (1994, p. 9) pragmatically sums up the data analysis, interpretation and management issues that my research project raised when he affirms that “the problem for first-time qualitative researchers is not how to get data but how to figure out what to do with the data they get”. His subsequent advice on data description, analysis and interpretation were helpful to me.

I was mindful that there would be recording and transcription issues in carrying out unstructured depth interviews. Issues with regard to ‘getting it all down’. Learning from my pilot research study I used a digital recorder as against a tape recorder. I also, unsuccessfully, explored the availability of a digital transcriber. In the absence of this I simply typed out each interview from the digital recording myself. There was then the issue surrounding my analysis of the text. I noted Hackley’s (1998) view that the character of talk is such that, when a personal recorded interview is transcribed, the grammatical incoherence of it as written text is usually very noticeable. I also noted Denzin (1994) and Poland’s (2001) views and concerns with the notion of a verbatim transcript of the oral record of an interview being taken as the undisputable record of the interview, given that the many aspects of interpersonal interaction and non-verbal communication are not captured in audio or digitally taped record. I accept and acknowledge the socially constructed nature of the research interview as a “co-authored conversation-in-context” (Poland, 2001, p. 635). More relevant seemed to be the notion of where I was going with the analysis, i.e. another step in researching the research question, and where my focus was going to be.
Poland (2001) usefully describes a number of challenges to transcription quality, and suggests a number of notational conventions to assist transcribers identify features of interest in the translation from spoken to written word (ibid, p. 629). He also deconstructs the notion of ‘verbatim’ and shows how data are “(re)constructed in the process of transcription as a result of multiple decisions that reflect both theoretical and pragmatic considerations” (ibid, p. 630). At a more practical level, Patton’s (1990) strategies for ensuring high-quality tape recording were particularly useful. Similarly, Silverman’s (1993) sample transcription notation system orientated to conversation analysis requirements seemed equally useful, though Poland’s (2001) alternative abbreviated instructions for transcribers offered a useful alternative to Silverman’s syntax of conversation analysis and called for less detail.

In looking at how reality was created, I looked at the interactions and analysed these. I recognised there was a need to sort the interview data into themes and categories, and to sort the key factors and elements, for example, into hard, soft, structural, behavioural, existing, new factors etc; as well as sorting into specific collaborating element terms – communication, trust, contract, performance monitoring, etc. Then I wanted to know and understand how individuals made it work? How they knew what they knew? What shaped and had shaped their world-view? How particular realities were socially produced and maintained (Deetz, 1996)? Social constructionism rejects the idea of explanations of social phenomena being from inside the person or from social structures, like the economy or a contract for example (Burr, 1995). Instead it regards the social practices engaged in by people and their interactions with each other, and the interactive processes that take place between people, as the proper focus of our enquiry. Watson (2001) suggests that these exchanges and interactions
have social, political and economic dimensions, hence his Strategic Exchange
Perspective.

Similarly we have the theory of structuration, which, according to Giddens (1984) and
as discussed in Chapter 2, notes that social life is more than random individual acts
but is not merely determined by social forces. Instead, Giddens (ibid) suggests, human
agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the
repetition of the acts of individual agents that reproduces the structure. This means
that there is a social structure - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established
ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to
ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently.

Prior to carrying out the research, I had reflected on whether my evaluation was to be
limited to an analysis of interviewee themes and related to a restructuring of a coding
structure derived from the literature review. I believed the inclusion of conceptual
diagrams and models after the literature review and after analysis of my research
would be beneficial. I recognised that I would also need an appropriate coding
structure and theme analysis. I had previously explored grounded theory as an
analysis methodology (Blaxter et al, 1996). This involves the coding of the interview
transcript in terms of key concepts, which are mainly developed during the work
itself. Whilst I was uneasy with adopting a research process where a clear
identification and understanding of the concepts of relevance was only reached as the
process itself unfolded, I recognised that this was almost an inevitable consequence of
open, unstructured interviews. Whilst I was more comfortable with the approach I
adopted in my research pilot of examining and comparing/contrasting the responses
given by a range of interviewees, and looking for significant statements, themes, patterns, views of reality, key factors and elements etc., I felt it was necessary for me to work outside of my comfort zones to achieve something more worthwhile.

4.9 Analysis of discourse

Having transcribed my interviews, I read the accounts and identified any principle themes that related to my research questions. I then designed a framework of analysis based on the 16 factors from the literature review (Chapter 2) and shaped by my pilot research study (Chapter 3). I developed a coding, giving each of the 16 factors a unique code. The coding structure gave room for growth, i.e. so that I could subdivide and expand factors, if necessary, using extra letters or numbers. I worked through the transcripts, looking for the themes and factors, noting the code in the left hand margin (see Silverman, 1993; Denzin, 1994; Wolcott, 1994; Hackley, 1998; Poland, 2001).

On completing the analysis and coding of all the transcripts, I realised that I had significant uncoded gaps in the transcripts. Gaps where the 16 worldview factors from the literature review did not cover the theme, element, view or opinion being expressed by the participants. Consequently I added more codes to each and every new factor or theme, and continued until all the gaps were filled. By this time I had increased the number of factors from 16 to 105. This was too many factors to make sense of. So I reviewed all the factors and themes and started to merge categories together, expanded some and reduced others. I was aware immediately of the subjective judgements I was making with regard to what words meant, and what I was considering were the same, for example, considering 'trust' to mean the same as 'integrity' so as to fall in the same category.
I continued with this approach and reduced the 105 factors to 78, then down to 62, until ultimately I reduced the categories back down to 16. However, it was a different 16 factor categories than the original 16 that I started with. I then went through the interview transcripts again, recoding them with the new 16 categories. I did this for consistency and saw an analogy in the same way that in my mining surveyor days I would calibrate my survey instrument, so here I was calibrating my framework and conceptual model, improving it, making it fit for purpose, making it work.

I carried out basic content analysis to help identify which factors and categories were arising more frequently than others. I also used this as a rational for eliminating redundant ones. In this way meaning was being created discursively. I created an electronic file for each category, coded for each interview and included extracts of each part of an interview that included some aspect of that category.

It was then that I realised that I wasn’t doing justice to all the base elements, the 105 individual factors. In my drive for simplicity I was overlooking the very essence of all my research data, i.e. each and every activity perceived by the participants as a vital ingredient in delivering successful business collaborating based on their experiences. I realised that it wasn’t appropriate to just think about the ‘top 20 hits’. I needed to consider all the others in order to reflect the complexity, independency and interdependency of all the factors and elements. I needed to cut the data differently, in different ways. More specifically I needed to cut the data from the point of view of what it means to be a social constructionist. I needed to consider how the participants were creating, evolving and sustaining meaning. I needed to consider what new social constructionist construct I could create.
Developing a conceptual framework and model, which helps make sense of the public sector collaborating process from an overall social constructionist perspective, would achieve this and represent half of the original research study proposition. Such a conceptual framework and model is introduced in Chapters 5 and 6. The journey to conceiving, formulating and creating such a model, and in reconciling the structural and behavioural elements, meant going back to the basics of constructionism, of learning, and to the structuration theory developed by Giddens (1984), which explained and integrated agency and structure (see section 2.9.3 in Chapter 2).

Whilst not claiming to be anywhere near as masterful as Giddens, I too have attempted to provide an all-encompassing theoretical view relating to the social behaviour and interaction, control systems and structures, and the political and cultural context surrounding business collaborating. With each of these I have attempted to solve my perceived gap in the literature of a holistic, social, economic and political multidimensional conceptualisation of public sector business collaborating, and some of the problems experienced in professional practice, with regard to business collaborating, by integrating the seemingly disparate behavioural and structural factors, theories and perspectives from the literature, into a conceptual framework and model that is grounded in social constructionism and makes sense of the public sector collaborating process.

The other half of the original proposition was that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern to those involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis as the economic and structural aspects. I believe that the research has demonstrated this, as evidenced in
the presentation of the research data in Chapter 5. It is no longer of any relevance to me as to whether an activity is 'hard' or 'soft', tangible or intangible, behavioural or structural. All these factors, elements and activities are interlinked with each other. They are no longer relevant as individual topics of analysis or discussion on their own - only as part of a discussion of the business collaborating process as a whole.

I found the answer to the behavioural/structural issue in what I have recognised from the research as being the four key perspectives of the public sector business collaborating process. Whilst I accept this categorisation is subjective, it is not random. It is derived from the analysis. Most of the writers in Chapter 2 consider the odd variable, not the holistic, when it comes to the collaborating process. They look at variables that are structural, or are behavioural. I don't show this. The perspectives 'clicked in my brain' as I wrestled to provide a holistic, social, economic and political multidimensional conceptualisation of public sector business collaborating in contrast to the list of key factors, either side of an inappropriate behavioural or structural divide, as found in much of the literature.

The rationale for each of these new perspectives is introduced below, is fully evidenced in the presentation of the research results outlined in Chapter 5 and in the interpretation of the data and conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 6. However, the rationale for the four perspectives together is that they marry to provide a holistic view of public sector collaborating. They are the lenses that people see things through. They are four perspectives that fuse to make one framework.
4.10 The four perspectives

From Giddens (1984) – as discussed in Chapter 2 - human agency and social structure are not two separate concepts or constructs, but are two ways of considering social action and are in a relationship with each other. There is a duality of structures so that on one side it is composed of situated actors who undertake social action and interaction, and their knowledgeable activities in various situations. At the same time, it is also the rules, resources, and social relationships that are produced and reproduced in social interaction. It is the repetition of the acts of individual agents that reproduces the structure. This means that there is a social structure - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently.

The outcome of recoding the interview and conversational transcripts from a social constructionist perspective was to subsequently identify and derive four key perspectives, which link to and incorporate agency/structure, and the elements of which together form the foundation to a new understanding of the public sector collaborating process. The four perspectives are:

- The context perspective
- The business and strategy perspective
- The delivery perspective
- The people perspective
The context perspective reflects the importance perceived by those people involved in day-to-day collaborating of understanding the context within which they worked. This includes the need to understand and adjust to both the political and business environment, to adapt to different public and private sector organisational cultures, and is often reflected in the nature and format of the partner selection and procurement process and in the nature, content and format of the legal vehicles themselves – the Contracts and Agreements – that provide the framework for the collaborating.

In the business and strategy perspective, those involved in day-to-day alliance management and relationships recognised the importance to them of the financial and economic basis for the collaborating. The delivery perspective centres on the language, talk and discussion surrounding the importance to the perceived success of collaborative ventures between public and private sector organisations of activities carried out to help ensure the collaborating delivered its objectives. The research unearthed numerous accounts from collaborators in this regard. Finally, the people perspective linked all the other elements that made up the context, business and strategy, and delivery perspectives with its own people related elements.

Taken together these four perspectives cover every element or factor perceived by any and all of the participants as positively contributing to successful business collaborating, and likewise, to those that negatively contribute to unsuccessful collaborating. The correlation and evidence for each is compelling, and was capable of being consistently applied to each and every view, opinion and perspective talked
about and perceived by the various players and participants based on their everyday experiences of the public sector business collaborating process.

Whilst I would be subsequently able to develop a conceptual framework based on these four perspectives (see Chapter 6), I could also develop a conceptual framework for each of the perspectives, made up of the various activities and elements that they comprise, i.e. the 105 elements of public sector business collaborating identified from the accounts of the numerous players that I engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting on a day-to-day basis. These are introduced, and their basis evidenced and justified, in Chapter 5.

The analysis allowed cross-case comparison of similarly coded speech extracts and theory building. The narratives were reviewed with the participants and compared, using the coding structure, to develop a conceptual model methodology to establish and represent the respondents’ perceptions of what constituted ‘successful’ business collaborating, especially in terms of how it relates to the structure / behaviour debate.

As expected, the accounts identified major common themes, which related to the participants’ constructed reality of ‘what works’ for them, based on their business collaborative experiences. Other subsidiary themes were identified. Both the major and subsidiary themes connected, or otherwise, with the conclusions from the literature review.

My justification of the appropriateness of my analysis methodology was that it was compatible with my overall social constructionist research approach and it generated
and delivered credible, useful knowledge, based on participant voice, that can be practically applied to address the dilemmas, problems and predicament that the individuals working at TCA (and in our partnering organisations) have and find themselves in with regard to business collaborating.

My unit of analysis is the individual, kept in the sense of context, time and space for as long as possible, via the identification of themes developed into a conceptual framework and model of my understanding gained from thirty months of immersion in activities involving TCA and its collaborators. My journey to this has been by collecting data from individuals, both directly and in my immersion in the research context. Whilst I kept with the individual for as long as possible, I’ve then moved to identify themes, and then taken these themes through to conceptual models, which can be adopted by the collaborating group.

4.11 Presentation of the data
I have considered the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches of presenting data and findings, and writing these up, as they apply to my research project. The literature raises a number of issues in evaluating the quality of qualitative research in general and the issue of transcription quality in particular (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Issues of voice, representation, authenticity, audience, positionality and reflexivity. I have concluded that I have particularly needed to address the problem of voice and keeping in context. There has been the opportunity to identify a dominant experience and predominant pattern - a general voice or viewpoint – with regard to ‘communication’ and ‘objective setting’ as consistently talked about key factors. In presenting the research results I have retained participants’ voice, using their direct
quotes, though recognising they were given within a particular context. I’ve also provided summaries of their constructions in my own language. This is more story telling than providing factual accounts: a mimetic process of transforming experience into narratives. This is consistent with the views of Denzin (1995) who considers a fixation on unstructured depth interview and its textual representation in the form of transcripts can detract from the possibility and value of other ways of capturing voice, such as through self-stories and personal experience stories. Reflection on the readers of this report, my audience, has driven and justifies my methodology and presentation format, which is also consistent and appropriate from a social constructionist perspective.

I was mindful that I could treat each individual as a case study, and write these up individually. I could also create a case environment, though that seemed to be no more reliable an option to deliver the aims of the study. The case study approach might have been an interesting option and worth doing anyway, i.e. write up a story about the interviews, for example. Writing about the meaning of themes, e.g. conflict, for example, but also writing about the views of the individual; the meaning of the individual. In any event, I have taken Watson’s (2001, p.224) stance of creating an account based on ‘what people say’. It is important to carry out the analysis at the individual level – context, time and space – and keep at that level for as long as possible. Once that is understood I could then take my understanding further by absorbing what each account is saying. The point about ‘what people say’ is that it recognises the need to maintain the context specific nature of what is being said in the way it is being said.
The quality of the research process is a high level concern and was discussed earlier in this Chapter. In considering ethical issues I adopted the University of Derby Standard Ethics Protocol. The ethical issues that might constrain my writing included the need to respect and protect the names and organisations of my participants, together with any references they made to other third party individuals and organisations. Consequently, all the participant and organisation names (other than TCA as an organisation) are fictitious representations of their real names. There was always likely to be an element of narrative analysis in my work as I provoked story telling, analysed and interpreted the stories, deconstructed them and put them together in my own story. An ethical consideration posed by Poland (2001) revolves around the realisation that verbal interactions follow a logic that is different to written prose, and can look disjointed, inarticulate or even incoherent when transcribed to a written page (ibid, p.633). The ethical position was to recognise this and resist any temptation to manipulate or tidy up the text based on my own notion of 'what the transcript should look like'. Likewise the potential for interviewees to be made to appear inarticulate as a result of the liberal use of verbatim quotes in my published results also had important ethical considerations (ibid. p. 634).

I have also needed to be careful about acknowledging the context, but at some stage, because of interpretation, I have inevitably moved away from the context. However, in remembering the context, I have taken care not to put words out of place. I have created little frameworks that say, “I’m being careful about this” with regard to what people say and mean. I have related what people say, and what I understand they mean, back to the theory, the literature. I have done this through my theoretical model. An option was to interact with the theory as I went along, providing few
quotes but using words as they are said. However, this was not helpful given I have presented my findings using their words.

In presenting the data I have retained the individual’s voice, and written dialogue based on that person’s life experiences and their view of reality, using their direct quotes, though recognising they were given within a particular context. I’ve also provided summaries of their constructions in my own language. This is more story telling than providing factual accounts. I recognise, however, that I may have compromised the position by deriving my view of reality based on my understanding of the research participants, in my attempts to present my research outputs to readers in a form that suitably clarifies and deepens understanding. Where I have subsequently recognised themes and patterns from the research, I accept that this reflects my construction of that particular reality and, consequently, I acknowledge and accept the limitations that this brings. I have recognised the care and appropriate quality process needed on my part here, as I have attempted to deal with the complexity that this involves. I have used Marshall and Rossman (2000, p. 22) to ensure the ongoing quality of my work (see Appendix 10), linked to a reflective/reflexive diary, since it was important that I had a process that forced an ongoing check on my actions as a researcher.

Finally, for the purpose of this dissertation reaching and being useful to a wider audience and following on from the discussion on learning theory in Chapter 2, there is also a need to ensure that the conclusions are presented in a way that makes sense to that wider audience in a clear, straightforward way that must ultimately belie the extent and complexity of the research behind them. Complex research findings do not
have to be explained in a complicated way (Plain English Campaign, 2007). My attempts to subsequently do this start in the next Chapter 5 and continue in Chapter 6.
Chapter 5

Research results

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, I explained how the outcome of recoding the interview and conversational transcripts from a social constructionist perspective was to subsequently identify and derive four key perspectives, which link to agency/structure, and the elements of which together form the foundation to a new understanding of the public sector collaborating process.

The four perspectives are:

- The context perspective
- The business and strategy perspective
- The delivery perspective
- The people perspective

These four perspectives, and the basis of my contention of them being the foundations of a new understanding, are covered in the next four chapter sections, based on the views, opinions, experiences, perceptions and voice of the interview participants and from the accounts of numerous other players that I engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process. Some of the views were expressed during the in-depth, unstructured, one-to-one interviews (by the interviewees identified in the previous chapter), but most of them were captured during discussions, often in the margins of meetings and other group sessions, with the other forty five or so individuals that I engaged with in the course of the day-to-day collaborating, mainly on a one-to-one basis. Comments from my reflective diary
intersperse the various quotes. Links to the literature are made, where appropriate, and highlighted by reference to the author.

5.2 The Context Perspective

A common theme in each interview, and apparent in my everyday collaborating experience, is the perceived importance of understanding the context within which the people (involved in the collaborating) work. This has parallels with Ancona et al.’s (2007, p. 94-95) identification of sensemaking, i.e. understanding the context in which a company and its people operate, as a key capability in their model of distributed leadership. The term ‘sensemaking’ having been coined by Weick (1995) for whom this meant making sense of the world around us. In the same way, people within collaborative ventures need constantly try to understand the context within which they are operating in. This links to the TCA Executive and Board’s wish for the organisation to survive, as outlined in Chapter 1, and affects how the people within TCA need to operate, i.e. within the relevant context of each collaboration, as shaped by the need to understand and adjust to both the political and business environment, to adapt to different public and private sector organisational cultures, and is often reflected in the nature, content and format of the legal vehicles themselves – the Contracts and Agreements – that provide the framework for the collaborating. This requirement is a ‘two-way street’ in that it also requires the people within the partner organisations to understand the context within which the people within TCA need to work.

The factors and elements that make up the context perspective framework are set out in figure 5.1 below. They are taken directly from the voice of the research participants. The number of occurrences is taken from basic content analysis of the
open, unstructured interviews and diary journal notes, and represents the number of occurrences of the element or factor making up the category made by the participants. The percentage figure represents the percentage of the overall aggregate number of occurrences of all four perspectives that each individual perspective represents.

(Should the reader be surprised at this quantitative analysis, as discussed in section 2.10 of Chapter 2, even though I might present both quantitative and qualitative data, social constructionism has driven my data gathering methodology and my analysis has been carried out within a social constructionist context).

The context perspective factors – 65 occurrences (8%):

Legal Vehicle - Contracts and Agreements (original factor L) – 47 occurrences
- contracts and agreements
- understanding and working within the regulatory and political environment
- flexibility
- avoid bureaucracy and red-tape
- understanding and managing the context, including Government and Regulatory restraints and expectations and formal governance requirements
- “walking the political line”

Organisational Culture and Self-Knowledge (original factor H) – 18 occurrences
- organisational culture and self knowledge
- shared outlook
- customer focussed approach
- agreed philosophy

Figure 5.1 The context perspective framework – factors and elements

Whilst the debate may continue in the literature as to the merits or otherwise of exit clauses in alliance contracts and agreements (Johnson, 2001; Kaplan and Hurd, 2002), I have concluded from my own observation of the public sector parties in the various alliances that I have observed and been involved in over the last thirty months, that they are considered to be vital by the public sector players. The literature suggests that the negative signals can overwhelm the win-win philosophy of a strong alliance spirit and outweigh the benefits (Spekman et al, 2000). However, the counter position for
including robust exit clauses is perceived as well-grounded, according to the majority of the public sector players, since they are important in protecting an organisation's interests going into the relationship and can avoid costly litigation later. In this regard exit clauses are seen simply a result of sound planning and, in any event, this also relates to the nature of the alliance, which in some circumstances can be expected to have a limited life.

That 'hard' factors like Contracts and Agreements, together with control and financial considerations, are important to the public sector players was demonstrated to me directly during a heated meeting with the business team from ESA in July 2005 in the early days of the TCA ESA collaboration on the introduction of a new ground stability property search. Jack Jameson, Director of Information at ESA, made it clear that “three key issues need to be resolved or the alliance fails”. Firstly, the legal vehicle had to be in place before development work started. Secondly, ESA wanted guarantees that they would retain control over their data. Thirdly, the royalty fees payable to ESA had to be significantly greater than those proposed by TCA. In this particular instance each of these three issues was resolved to the satisfaction of both parties and the new ground stability search was successfully launched to market in October 2006.

My own organisation, TCA, uses various legal vehicles to facilitate the various collaborative ventures in which it is involved. These include standard legal contracts, outsourcing contracts, service level agreements, memoranda of understanding, licensing documents, partner agreements, joint venture agreements and codes of practice. They also include agreements by simple exchange of letter, more formal 'letters of intent', 'good faith' practice and tacit understanding.
Those involved in day-to-day alliance management and relationships spoke about contracts and agreements, the importance of understanding and working within the regulatory and political environment, flexibility, the need to avoid bureaucracy and red-tape, understanding and managing the context, including Government and Regulatory restraints and expectations, formal governance requirements and about “walking the political line”. They also talked about organisational culture and self-knowledge, having a shared outlook, customer focussed approaches and the benefits of collaborators having an agreed philosophy.

Heather Moore is Account Manager with Mapping Agency, a public sector national mapping agency trading fund. Heather spoke about the different contexts that existed between the different types of public sector collaborations she worked in and deals with. Heather’s talk was often focussed around terms and conditions. She considered TCA and Mapping Agency were similarly motivated and had a shared purpose, whereas academic organisations sometimes aren’t:

HM: “The organisations that I deal with like TCA, NREC, EPA are not only using data for internal business use, but also they’re creating, becoming partners of Mapping Agency too. Motivated in doing a good job for the citizen. There’s talking about terms and conditions and becoming a partner, and the different licensing arrangements that are available to them. Collaborating in getting Mapping Agency data used within an organisation. Speaking to different people on those two issues. Some organisations that I deal with are very academic and therefore Mapping Agency’s direction is not particularly aligned with their directions. So it’s almost as an afterthought that they’ve created something and then for Mapping Agency to try and align with that none existent marketing plan is actually very difficult.”
Richard Coast is Account Manager with CapitalG, TCA’s major private sector ICT partner. Like Heather, Richard recognised the need to deal with each partner differently depending on the partner, especially between public and private sector, i.e. understanding the context. According to Richard “In business we deal with every organisation differently to understand the individual needs of an organisation as a separate entity. We treat them the way they feel they should be treated.”

Richard’s experiences of public and private sector collaborating had helped shape his views as to how he, on behalf of his company, could help the public sector get the best out of collaborating, and as to what, in his view, collaborating is and what it’s not. He felt he had an understanding of the differences between public and private sector approaches to collaborating and felt he also understood the concerns that the people working in public sector organisations had in doing business with the private sector:

RC: “Have that organisation define what they want and then we as a supplier simply deliver to that specification. That’s a very traditional supplier relationship. Collaborating is about actually working with the organisation at the absolute earlier stage to develop an idea and develop a strategy and a design. ‘Let the enemy through the gates. When we open the gates, they come running in. Are they going to rape and pillage this organisation?’ I think it’s often a real leap of faith as to whether they think we are genuinely going to help them deliver better services to their end-users. Public sector tends to play safe, governed by huge amount of audit mechanisms and oversights, committees and all the rest of it. Very few Government bodies want to be pioneering, because to be pioneering is to invite danger. Public bodies are quite averse to danger.”
In a similar vein, Richard spoke about his experiences of public sector mistrust of private sector profit making:

RC: “Public sector tends to be reasonably comfortable with the idea of a strategic partner. Their philosophy is ‘I have to do this in order to get a competitive price and the chances are I am getting the biggest bang for my buck’ but at the same time they feel uncomfortable that some of that taxpayers money is then going to shareholders. People in the public sector, in my experience, have got a very strong ethical view as to why they should work and why they do work in the public sector. They don’t want to make profit for an organisation. You’ve got all kinds of flavours in this spectrum of attitudes.”

Richard’s colleague, Gareth Paul, Account Manager with CapitalG, spoke about manufacturing firms being hard on suppliers and always looking to drive down costs, in the margins of a meeting held to discuss a proposed collaboration with a private sector financial services company. He considered financial services organisations to be “clued in and profit driven” and always with an eye on your costs, with the public sector too looking for value for money so they also had an eye on your costs. He gave the impression that there was a synergy between each of these organisations, though each seemed to approach it slightly differently.

According to Gareth, “Everyone wants roughly the same thing. They want a service or a product, as cheaply as possible, as efficiently as possible, with a view to increasing the quality and reducing costs over a period of time. But they want them for different ethical, political or whatever reason. But fundamentally, when it really boils down to
it, companies like ours deliver a very fixed number of services and they basically want to buy the same services.”

Tom Saracen takes a contrary view to Richard Coast and Gareth Paul. Tom is Client Services Director of Burdock UK Limited, insurance brokers. Whilst recognising the importance of the legal and regulatory framework, Tom considers this just to be the context within which he works. He does not consider it to contribute positively to the collaborating. He did, however, provide an interesting commentary on how he saw differences between public and private sector and on formal versus informal “ways of doing things”.

TS: “It certainly feels like we chat and everything’s set out as if they could be buying paperclips and it would be treated exactly the same way as what we’re doing, and generally, those kind of relationships tend not to flourish. Private sector will sometimes save things up almost to the very last day, whereas public sector likes to have things done and dusted a month beforehand, for example, and generally that wouldn’t happen in the private sector. One follows a more formal approach; one follows a more casual approach. One of the things that demonstrates a strong relationship is when a client feels they can pick up the phone, any minute of the day, just to ask a quick question about something they’re not too sure on.”

Bethany Carlton is Commercial Manager with National Hub Services Limited who provide online conveyancing services. Bethany stressed the need to understand the differences between public and private sector cultures, ultimately linking to the need for shared business objectives. Like Tom Saracen, she didn’t see that formal legal contract or Agreement necessarily made collaborating more successful.
The public sector, and it wouldn't be a surprise to most people, moves more slowly. Some sort of shared goal is important."

Bethany also talked about the importance of monitoring performance and how she considered this linked to the success of the collaboration. She said "I think it's important to have performance monitoring and measurement in any collaborating for it to be successful. It's very important to have certain goals specified up front. If they're not aligned then that collaborating isn't going to work."

By her remarks, Bethany was effectively agreeing with much of the literature as to one of the prominent reasons as to why alliances fail, i.e. the perception gap between expectations and results. Ring (2000) advises firms entering alliances to avoid "love at first sight" and to focus on setting and meeting mutually advantageous and realistic objectives. These objectives need result in benefits for each partnering organisation. There has to be enough in it for both partners (Mariotti, 2001).

Expanding on the concept of "shared objective" that she had previously talked about, Bethany also perceived financial incentives to be more important to the private sector than the public sector.

"Financial objectives to me would be important. I see a tendency for that to be more important to the private sector than the public sector, in my experiences."

A key factor that seems to shape the context of collaborating with, and between, both private and public sector bodies, is the legal contract or Agreement. Each of the interviewees talked about the various legal vehicles that provided a framework for the
collaborating to proceed. There were clear differences in the perceptions of the importance of the legal vehicle between the public and private sector representatives. There seemed to be agreement that a public sector partner preferred more comprehensive contract documentation than one from the private sector. Representing the public sector, Henry Colinson of Mapping Agency, seemed clear on the importance of contracts, and spoke too about difficulties, "the constraints" he experienced with "old contracts" that he didn’t put in place himself, i.e. contracts he had inherited from predecessors.

Henry also spoke about the difficulty he felt this posed for potential partners of Mapping Agency. Difficulty with licensing and terms and conditions, and how dealing with such matters was a continual part of his job. It seemed to affirm the importance of the harder structural elements of business collaborating to a public sector organisation like Mapping Agency. Henry said "It probably, again from me, would need to be explained much more often about what our terms and conditions are, and Mapping Agency itself has changed quite a lot and the fact that it works in three different markets, it’s direct market, it’s partner market and it’s collaborative collective agreement market."

Karen Richardson, business and legal advisor to National Hub Services Limited, representing a private sector perspective, spoke extensively on her view of the importance of the legal contract to the public sector during a contract meeting in spring 2006 between representatives of TCA and National Hub Services Ltd. She contrasted this with her experiences of successful collaborating based on just an implied contract. In response to Karen’s talk about formal legal contracts raised by her during our discussions, I asked her about the importance of them.
KR: "In my experience an implied contract is actually often just as successful as a formal contract. I have found that in a public sector type environment the contracts do seem to take on quite a high level of importance. In the private sector there's a great deal more flexibility contractually. Again, implied contracts are far more common. Both parties are often happy with a one, two page document as opposed to thirty."

JD: "Does that contract document include the goals and objectives?"

KR: "Often no. No, it doesn't. That's something that I've found quite problematic. If there's not a shared goal or objective then the team is likely to be unsuccessful."

Notwithstanding the perceived importance of legal contracts to the public sector parties, Jack Jameson, Director at ESA, a public sector earth science research agency, gave an example of collaborating that had "gone wrong" even with a formal Service Level Agreement in place. Jack recalled, "A recent example of collaborating that's gone wrong is where we have a corporate service level agreement to supply information, to exchange information with the EPA. And we thought we'd agreed with them that the fundamental unit of currency of this exchange was money. In other words there's no tit for tat. We give you all of the geological map data; you give us all of the flood risk data. It doesn't work. We may not want the flood risk data and how do you weigh the value of one to the other? So that's one that hasn't worked very, very well at all."

During a break in a project workshop session in June 2006 by TCA, ESA, CapitalG and Star Sign IT Ltd personnel designing the format, layout and content of a new
property search, Mark Talbot, System Designer with Star Sign IT Ltd, talked about the importance of the ‘softer’ factors in successful business collaborating and how he thought these are immeasurable as against the harder tangible Service Level Agreement type hard objectives:

**MT:** “It’s down to relationships, it’s down to perception. We all as individuals, as people, like to work with other people who we get on with, who we enjoy working with. At the end of the day we feel satisfied. We don’t feel dissatisfied. We don’t feel frustrated about our relationships. A good organisation to work with in terms of ease of use, ease of access, friendship.”

Each of the interviewees and other participants I observed and engaged with, shared their experiences of when business collaborating had been less than successful in their view. Collaborating had gone wrong. That was not working. Collaborating where the personal and / or the business relationship had been difficult.

Jo Murphy, Business Development Manager with National Hub Services Ltd, spoke about conflict resolution when negotiating contracts, and the importance of focussing on priorities and compromise between the parties. She spoke about how such difficulties arose and how she would deal with them.

**JM:** “I think the way that I would always try and approach it is to be willing to compromise to some extent. But to know what things really, really matter, and to focus on them. Not to get too hung up on some of the things of lesser importance. If both parties are a little unsatisfied by a contract then it’s probably a fair contract.”
Harry Stevenson is Development Manager with TCA. He too raised the topic of “things going wrong” whilst outlining the working relationship he has with TCA’s ICT partners, CapitalG. Based on his experiences, he thought that it was important to avoid a collaborating context that included any blame culture. According to Harry “Working within a blame culture is counter-productive in that you don’t get the problem solved. You’re relying on their specialism to make things right for you. Particularly if that individual becomes involved in another project this time next year.”

Harry also spoke about the need to cut through red-tape and bureaucracy, again based on his experiences with the TCA / CapitalG collaborating.

HS: “Having to jump through those sorts of hoops, for me, is counterproductive, because you spend so much time cutting through all the red tape before you actually get down and do the stuff that you’re supposed to be doing.”

Harry’s views parallel those of Starbuck (2005) who recognised a long-standing tension between innovation and bureaucracy. He contends that excessive layers of management and “Byzantine processes” often shoulder the blame when a promising idea fails to make it to market or “a nimble start-up thwarts a mature competitor” (ibid, p.17).

From my own observations, I’ve also experienced instances where conflict between the partnering organisations led ultimately to the failure of the collaboration. Some authors (Lorenzoni and Baden-Fuller, 1995; Gerlach, 1992), believe that competition between organisations is sometimes more destructive than beneficial, and argue that
building up durable partnerships with other organisations can often be mutually
advantageous. The planning of one proposed collaboration in particular, between
TCA, EPA and GroundStation (representing between us much in the way of direct
competitiveness in the normal working environment) deteriorated to such an extent
that it did not even complete an early planned pilot stage. In November 2006, after
nine months engagement, the parties agreed to disagree and the collaborating folded.
Talking to the participants at the time each felt too much threat from takeover, loss of
control and mistrust of the intentions of the other partners. This particular example in
many ways bore out the views of those authors (Hamel, Doz and Prahalad, 1989;
Porter, 1990), who are sceptical about the virtues of collaborative interdependence.

Martin Unsworth, co-Director at ESA with Jack Jameson, talked about the importance
to him and the people within his own and his national umbrella organisation (NREC)
of risk management. He reckoned that people who wanted to work successfully with
ESA and NREC needed to understand and take account of this as a fundamental factor
in the context of collaborating with ESA and NREC. According to Martin “Any major
business venture either commercially or reputationally would be vetted both at the
outset and during its life cycle. We just take ‘risk’ significantly more seriously that we
used to.”

Martin recognised the challenges that individuals working for private sector
organisations often found when working in a public / private sector context. He talked
of the benefits and otherwise of ESA’s and other public sector contexts to the private
sector partners:

MU: “Our corporate purpose and history impose boundary conditions that really
do affect the nature of the collaborating. The other side of the coin is that that is an
attribute of the badge that has the little crown inset in it (the ESA logo). The other
attribute of that crown is credentialising the organisation, impartiality, Government
body."

Richard Coast spoke of the difficulties posed by the public sector context. He said
"Its strength is its democratic basis and its philosophy of providing service, not
creating profit. But those strengths can be weaknesses in the sense that some of the
policies that it has to operate under may have made sense when the policies were
created, but when they're applied into the organisation on a day-to-day basis they
make less sense."

Bethany Carlton also picked up this democratic basis for decision-making. She spoke
of the differences between public sector and private sector decision-making and the
number of people involved and more documentation involved in the public sector.
She compared and contrasted this with her experiences of working with large global
private sector organisations like Nike, Wal-Mart and Coca Cola:

BC: "I can think of a major decision involving millions of pounds that was made
within a Nike setting that was made with three people in the room. And I can't
actually think of any decision made by those big private sector organisations that
involved thirty people. I just can't personally think of one. Even the Board members
might be there, but that might be just five, six people. And I can think of quite a few
examples in my relatively short public sector life that have involved many more than
that."
According to the interviewees, and backed up by my own observation of the changing environmental, political and business environment, the way that the private and public sectors work with those from the same sector and with each other is changing. Martin Webber, Production Manager with CapitalG, saw outsourcing as the main context and driver of change. He used a computer programme analogy to make his point:

MW: "In computer programming design we have sub-routines that do a particular job of work and they do nothing else. But you send some information to a sub-routine, which is a mini program, it does it and it sends something back. And the way we structure business these days tends to be very much the way we would structure a computer program."

The context perspective reflects the importance perceived by those people involved in day-to-day collaborating of understanding the context within which they worked. This includes the need to understand and adjust to both the political and business environment, to adapt to different public and private sector organisational cultures, and is often reflected in the nature, content and format of the partner selection and service procurement process, and in the legal vehicles themselves – the Contracts and Agreements – that provide the framework for the collaborating.

The factors and elements that make up the context perspective framework were set out in figure 5.1 above, as taken directly from the voice of the research participants.

In the next section we shall see how those involved in day-to-day alliance management and relationships recognised the importance to them of the financial and economic basis for the collaborating. This is the business and strategy perspective.
5.3 The business and strategy perspective

Those involved in day-to-day alliance management and relationships recognised the importance to them of the financial and economic basis for the collaborating. The collaborators spoke about costs, penalties, objectives and incentives, making a profit, driving costs down, value for money and cost effectiveness. Again this links to the TCA Executive and Board’s wish for the organisation to survive, as outlined in Chapter 1, and impacts directly on how the people within both TCA and our partner organisations need to operate.

The factors and elements that make up this business and strategy perspective, and the number of times they were referred to by the participants, are set out in figure 5.2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The business and strategy perspective factors – 33 occurrences (4%):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financials (new factor) – 21 occurrences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• financials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• penalties</td>
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<tr>
<td>• objectives and incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• making a profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• driving costs down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• value for money (vfm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cost effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Strategy Development (new factor) – links also to problem solving and how deliver objectives – 12 occurrences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• creatively working and planning together to develop strategy and to identify opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• marketing plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.2 The business and strategy perspective framework – factors and elements

Ian Sharpe, Business Manager with UK Group, who provide data and direct marketing services, talked about the different objectives between public and private sector, in particular his perception, based on his experiences, that the private sector’s need for financial objectives was not always shared by the public sector. Ian firstly explained what he understood made for successful business collaborating. He equates
this to there being 'shared objective'. He also spoke about the differences he perceived between public and private sector with regard to the importance of the financial side of the collaborating. Interestingly, this linked the business and strategy perspective with the context perspective discussed in the previous section:

**IS:**  "I guess what first springs to mind when I think about 'what makes for successful business collaborating' is that there has to be some kind of shared objective for both sides. Without that the collaborating would be somewhat one-sided and in my experience that's always resulted in a less than satisfactory result for at least one of the partners. Whether it's an individual or the individuals or the organisations concerned. So you've shared objective. A single objective maybe but it can be different, slightly different objectives, but there has to be some shared objectives in there."

Ian's Managing Director, Malcolm Short, went on to describe an example of collaborating that UK Group is involved in with a public sector organisation which he considers to be one-sided and where there isn't a shared objective:

**MS:**  "It's a little one-sided in terms of what each party is trying to achieve. The private sector organisation has very clear financial objectives that they're trying to hit, whereas the public sector side of the partnership don't have the same financial need to achieve certain things. For example, a licence fee is payable to the public sector entity regardless of how the private sector company performs. So in terms of being incentivised to do certain things, the private organisation is hugely incentivised to do that and share price will be affected. The public sector organisation is driven by other goals, and they're not financial ones. They're paid anyway. It doesn't matter on"
the performance. More politically it matters, and in terms of reputation it matters, but the objectives aren't financial ones."

In Malcolm's view, financial objectives were important to him, but, in his experiences, there was a tendency for that to be more important to the private sector than the public sector. He recognised that "It's a difficult square to circle and in the example that I'm thinking of it hasn't been squared and that is leading to some problems. He recognised that "Some public sector organisations are increasingly commercial in nature. But in the example I was giving it is a public sector department as opposed to a public sector business and, you know, the objectives are quite different really."

When it comes to "driving costs down" Martin Webber, Production Manager with CapitalG, reflected a view that took account of his experiences of working across a number of different public and private sector organisations and industries. Martin was giving an account of a time he had worked in a collaborative venture where he felt it wasn't easy to work. He also spoke about what, in his view, was making it not easy to work:

MW: "There's a certain kind of stereotypical approach to services and suppliers. Manufacturing industry tends to be very hard on its suppliers and you usually find a higher turnover of staff in the supplier organisations because the relationships are much more strained."

From a public sector viewpoint, Jack Jameson, Director at ESA, spoke at length about the importance of both sides in the collaborating needing to clearly understand what
JJ: “For successful collaborating, you need absolute clarity of what the objective is. I think unless one party knows clearly what the other party wants out of it then you’re sunk before you even start. And the objective doesn’t have to be a shared objective.”

Jack talked about ‘strengths and weaknesses’ and looking for a partner that would mutually help with the weaknesses. This suggested having some kind of knowledge of his own organisation and the people in it as a starting point:

JJ: “The process starts through establishing what our objective is and where our strengths are and where our weaknesses are as an organisation. Who can give us that competence that we don’t have in abundance in that area and move forward? With the TCA and ESA partnership it was fairly apparent that ESA could have reinvented a high volume delivery system. But there was already a public sector body who had it with whom we were having a dialogue anyway. Switching to something completely different, several years ago we wanted to move into e-commerce. We got into a partnership with Paqcom and they developed some Internet technology and back-office systems for us, on the basis of a percentage of our business. We were going to get an accelerated route into running an e-commerce business. They also wanted to credentialise their e-commerce development with an impartial government body. And they were right in that respect. They were wrong in the profitability of the business. They did their sums wrong. They overestimated the amount of money that would come
out of selling ESA products. But they did get political profile. Most of the business partnerships don’t tend to be ‘we’ve got a problem, we need a partner’. They actually tend to be evolutionary with a steadily growing recognition that there is a synergy.”

Jack also gave examples of international collaborative work he had been involved with:

“We know when we need support and partnerships. So let’s say we’re working out in Africa and we’ve a commercial proposition and we need, for instance, a piece of capital equipment or an expensive survey equipment, we won’t re-invent the wheel, we will establish a partnership with one of the main mine companies like Gufero or some of the others who are operating. Somebody to share the risk. We recently won a joint tender to establish for the Greek Geological Survey an equivalent information management system and a similar system to the one we have here. But it had to be given in Greek. We could do everything except work in Greek and we couldn’t deliver in Greek. That meant establishing a Greek partner, who also understood the Greek business, legal and statutory systems. It helps to have a local partner. We knew we couldn’t deliver unless we went into partnership with someone else.”

Earlier I described how Bethany Carlton seemed to link the context perspective with the business and strategy perspective. Mel Green, UK Business Manager with the public sector Earth Science Agency ESA, also did this when he spoke about the challenges of entering into commercial arrangements with other public sector organisations. What was interesting here is Mel’s reference to “organisational religion”, i.e. each organisations culture, as something that needed to be understood,
and his recognition of the importance of the personal relationships between the people involved in the collaborating:

MG: "I think what's made it difficult is the differences in organisational religion. If you've got a fundamental difference in philosophy then it's hard for any Agreement to overcome it. The other that I personally believe is absolutely crucial to a good partnership is a good working relationship. Now that doesn't have to be friendly although I think it helps profoundly if it does. But I think at a minimum it has to be honest. At an absolute minimum it has to be at a level where you come to the table and you say to people 'this is what we are, this is what we want, this is what we think you want'. And at some point you might even be saying 'and this is where I think you made a bad mistake and you were wrong and you did this'. I think it has to be robust enough. With our own business relationship I think we would have been on the rocks if you and I, and me and Bert, or others in the ESA had not had the closeness to be able to share things."

This overlap of the context, business and strategic, and a people perspective began to become a common theme throughout the various interviews. It was apparent again when Jinny Welsley, ESA’s Development Manager, talked about the differences she saw in dealing with another public sector organisation as against a private sector one:

JW: In the University sector we see huge differences. The goals are very different. The cultures are very different. There's no point in having over-prescriptive or over-strict disciplines, in fact that could achieve the exact opposite of what you wanted to achieve. They resent both of those things because this is pure research. The differences between the public sector and private commercial sector, in many
respects, are closing. In the best examples I don't think there's any difference. We deal with people professionally and with a good structure. We articulate what it is that we are intending to achieve between us. We're fair about it and there is equivalence about what we're trying to do. However, Government puts legislative and other boundary conditions on us. How we can compete or abuse our monopolies. Those things can introduce frictions. You've each got to understand your original mission and what your organisation can and can't do. I mean if we're dealing with GroundStation, they're easy. They're a commercial company. Objective, maximise profit for shareholders. It's not yours. Yours is to live up to your statutes and the 1994 Act or whatever."

As might be expected from the private sector participants, the financial elements of the collaborating were very important. Philip Andrews, an insurance broker with Marsh and Willis, summed it up when he said, "There generally needs to be real business bottom-line drivers that are important to the success of the overall collaborating." Bethany Carlton shared a similar view when she concluded that, when looking to collaborate, "obviously all the financials have to stack up."

Penny Brand, HR Manager with Star Sign UK Limited, another private sector participant, went further when she talked about the benefits of collaborating and of how a good working relationship could impact positively on profitability, as against a more traditional supplier arrangement. Penny was talking about how she expected to be treated differently if she was considered to be a partner as against a supplier, and how the collaborating would have been different:
PB: "If you've got an environment where it's stressful, it's difficult, your client doesn't give you the respect you deserve as an individual, they put a lot of demands on your time, they don't talk to you in a fair and even way, you would have a stressful traditional supplier relationship. The staff, who at the end of the day are people, emotional people with their own needs, will not want to remain on that type of engagement for very long. And although they're people related, soft issues you might argue, they have a very tangible effect on the organisation because it will cost more money if people are going off sick, if people are turning over, which means we have to do knowledge transfer, we have to do more recruitment. Recruitment's very expensive. We have a problem in trying to get people to go into a particular engagement if they know from the people who are in that engagement that it's a very difficult place to be. They have a very direct effect on the profitability and the operational delivery of that organisation. The company with a partnership strategy rather than a supplier strategy is always going to be more successful. The idea of strategy, collaborating and partnership is a win-win situation for both organisations. The more traditional approach, in the long run, is a lose-lose situation, regardless of what the statistics may show on a day-to-day basis."

But concern and respect for the 'bottom line' and 'things financial' was not just the preserve of the private sector participants. Harry Stevenson, Development Manager with TCA, has worked in the public sector for thirty years. Whilst he confessed to concerning himself more with the delivery of projects to time and specification, and leaving the delivery to cost to others, Harry had a clear opinion, based on his ten years experience and working relationship with TCA's ICT partners, CapitalG, of deciding on who should pay for 'failures':

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If what's delivered doesn't perform the way it's supposed to, it doesn't do what we expected it to do, that's a failing on CapitalG's part, because they've built something for us that doesn't do what we were expecting it to do. So the onus is on CapitalG to put that right for us. If everything's exactly as we were expecting it to be in the development environment, but when we put it into the service it doesn't fit the business process, it doesn't fit the overall service of TCA as operating correctly, that's a failing on TCA's part, because we haven't been clear enough in describing what our requirements were to CapitalG. It's a failing of the people who were going to use the system. They failed in their communication to us as a development team to describe accurately what it is that they wanted us to build for them. So that's at cost to TCA."

Wes Dickinson, TCA Project Manager, is also a keen lobbyist on the benefits of financial penalties in encouraging focus and keeping overall control. He shared his experiences of a particular collaborative venture that had started to "spiral out of control":

"When I recognised that the project was getting out of control I sounded the alarm bells. We'd given the project the benefit of the doubt and thought 'well it's making progress although it's sticky slow progress so we'll just carry on with things as they are.' We managed fortunately not to reap any financial penalties from dragging out the project. I think if we did incur penalties, then there would have been a tendency for TCA people to say 'no, this is as far as that particular piece of functionality goes. That's going to be bright red instead of bright green and you'll have to get used to it and now we're moving on to another part of the project.' But that didn't happen. We're aware of it now and everyone's in agreement that that was
Wes continued: "The existence of ‘financial penalties’ actually helps you to keep focussed and overall control. Absolutely. If it wasn’t for the financial penalties that were falling on CapitalG then I think we would still be doing SDSRM2 now. No doubt about it. It was only the fact that they were bleeding so much financially at the time that they pulled out all the stops to try and deliver what it was that all the users at TCA wanted to get delivered."

Harry Stevenson gave a flavour of how he takes the financial pressure out of his project work by concentrating on the project functionality side of collaborative work and taking things down to a common project-based denominator. When clarifying how ‘workshops’ and ‘change controls’ worked on a day-to-day basis Harry explained "Workshops tend to be an informal brainstorming session. Either just the folks at TCA, just the folks at the partner organisation or for a mixture of both teams. Change requests are where we at TCA put together a piece of documentation that requests a change to be made to the system. Now they can be very minor changes or they can be extremely large changes. The change for the production of the GSR, for instance, came across my desk this morning. Three hundred and fifty seven thousand pounds worth, but it's still a change request."

Picking up from Harry Stevenson’s discussion about “failures”, and still from this business and strategic perspective, Tom Saracen talked about how the business relationship impacts on when things are going wrong. Again this starts to link to a people perspective. Tom was talking about his experiences of how a dispute, a problem, an issue, had been resolved satisfactorily, as against one that was resolved in
a way he thought was less than satisfactory. Tom was exploring what was the
difference, and what was going on that was different:

TS: "We've had incidents in the past where the strength of the relationship with
insurers meant that we've got something that generally wouldn't have been available.
And it's because of the strength of the relationship. The strength of the account with
that particular insurer. And it's also about the trust between the organisations as
well. So that they have faith that we're not going to be milking this. That it's not going
to be set as a precedent for giving-in on future incidents. The relationship is
important in resolution, certainly."

Finally, Mo Gower, Marketing Manager at Thames Search, a private sector property
search provider, summed up another common theme that linked the context, business
and strategy perspectives, with a delivery perspective, when she talked about the
necessity, in her view, of having some shared goal or objective. Mo had experienced
what she described as a one-sidedness in a collaborative venture, where each
organisation had its own independent goals. Whilst she thought this was "OK on a
sort of macro level". She continued: "On the macro level it's OK to have different
goals and to be heading to different places. But in terms of specific initiatives, at some
level, whether it's at macro level or whether it's to do with a specific initiative, at
some point there has to be something shared. There usually has to be a win-win
somewhere. So it doesn't have to be throughout every single initiative or
collaborative piece of work that you're doing, but there has to be something shared
somewhere. It would be too much to think that every organisation is going to share all
the same goals and objectives. That's not going to happen. But the closer they're
aligned in trying to achieve a certain thing, then the easier an initiative or project or a task becomes."

In the business and strategy perspective, those involved in day-to-day alliance management and relationships recognised the importance to them of the financial and economic basis for the collaborating. The factors and elements that make up the business and strategy perspective, and the number of times they were referred to by the participants, were set out in figure 5.2 above.

In the next section of this chapter we discuss the contribution of what I describe as the "delivery perspective" to the perceived success of collaborative ventures between public and private sector organisations, which centres on the elements that participants perceived as helping ensure the collaborating delivered its objectives.

5.4 The delivery perspective

A key factor perceived by all the participants, and confirmed in my own immersion in the situation context through my continued process of participation and observation, is the contribution of what I would describe as the "delivery perspective" to the perceived success of collaborative ventures between public and private sector organisations. Since the Executive and Board of TCA believe that the future success of the organisation will be increasingly dependent on successfully collaborating with other public and private sector organisations, to provide its customers in existing and new markets with additional property information services and products, then this is a key factor. Much of the talk at interview, in meetings and workshops centred on the elements that participants perceived as helping ensure the collaborating delivered its objectives. The research unearthed a mass of data from collaborators in this regard.
There were also clear overlaps with both the context perspective and business and strategy perspective, discussed in the previous two sections.

Anslinger and Jenk (2004) consider that, whilst developing clear and common objectives and a definition of ‘success’ seems a straightforward practice, it is often the hardest to achieve, given that the collaborating parties rarely have the same objectives, metrics and definition of success. The talk by the participants seems to lend weight to this conclusion. Huxham and Vangen (2005) introduce the concept of ‘collaborative inertia’ which, in their view, captures the reality of many collaborative initiatives, which is slow (if any) progress with reports of successes achieved often accompanied by “tales of pain or hard grind” (ibid, p.4). This collaborative inertia was summed up in a quote by an energy industry consultant who told me “the partnership is working well but it hasn’t delivered anything yet”. Alternatively, the notion of ‘collaborative advantage’ (ibid) captures the idea that there is potential for synergy to be gained when people within organisations work together.

Ancona et al (2007, p. 98) use the term ‘inventing’ as their fourth key capability in their model of distributed leadership, meaning, “to transform a vision of the future into a present-day reality”. In fact, ‘inventing’ to Ancona et al (ibid) is similar to ‘execution’, but the label ‘inventing’ emphasises that this process often requires creativity to help people figure out new ways of working together. In many ways this parallels the delivery perspective of business collaborating proposed here.

The factors and elements that make up the delivery perspective, and the number of occurrences that were made by the various participants, are set out in figure 5.3 below:
The delivery perspective factors – 415 occurrences (52%):

Goal and Objective Setting (original factor N) – 158 occurrences
- setting and agreeing goals and objectives
- purpose
- alignment of clear direction and objectives
- clear description of business requirements
- balance of hard and soft objectives
- enhance reputation
- interdependence driving collaborating

Delivering (new factor) – 51 occurrences
- delivering on expectations, business requirements, objectives and targets
- focus, but avoiding too much focus on one element
- avoid distractions
- give work priority
- prioritised objectives
- people working on a full time basis
- contingency - not too rigid re staff and their time
- resources - sufficient time, effort, attention, money, people
- well designed products and services
- doing things on time
- quick response

Project Management (original factor P) – 45 occurrences
- project management
- keep it simple
- project control
- risk analysis

Performance Measurement and Monitoring (original factor M) – 22 occurrences
- performance measurement and monitoring
- reviewing and learning from each others experiences and mistakes

Conflict Resolution (original factor F) – 27 occurrences
- conflict resolution
- no blame culture
- willingness and ability to negotiate, especially on delicate matters

Communication (original factor E) – 93 occurrences
- communication
- contact
- effective decision making by empowered people

Problem Solving (new factor) – links to people and delivering – 19 occurrences
- problem solving
- finding solutions to a need or requirement
- mutual
- adding value (continually) to the overall business relationship

Figure 5.3 The delivery perspective framework – factors and elements

The collaborators talked about setting and agreeing goals and objectives, purpose, alignment of clear direction and objectives, clear descriptions of business
requirements, balance of hard and soft objectives, enhancing reputation and about interdependence driving the collaborating.

They spoke about joint strategy development and creatively working and planning together to develop strategy and to identify opportunities. This subsequently linked to other talk about problem solving and how to best deliver objectives. The problem solving involved finding solutions to a need or requirement, adding value (continually and mutually) to the overall business relationship and helping each other deliver on objectives. Beardsley et al (2006) contend that companies need constantly look for ways to improve the effectiveness of their people. They need people within organisations who interact with others and draw on experience and judgement to solve “the deepest business problems” (ibid, p.1). According to Beardsley et al (ibid) what makes these people valuable is their ability to work collaboratively, to leverage “relationship capital” and to improvise and improve new solutions within an environment that fosters trust and constant learning.

Participants spoke of performance measurement and monitoring, and of reviewing and learning from each other’s experiences and mistakes. Project management was perceived as a key contributor to delivery, from the point of view of both public and private sector players. They spoke about keeping it simple, project control and risk analysis.

Much talk centred around communication, contact and effective decision-making by empowered people. They spoke of conflict resolution, the benefits of a no blame culture, and a willingness and ability to negotiate, especially on delicate matters.
The delivery perspective talk was far-reaching with participants talking about delivering on expectations, business requirements, objectives and targets. They spoke about focus, but avoiding too much focus on one element, about avoiding distractions, giving work priority, prioritised objectives, people working on a full time basis, contingency, not being too rigid with people and their time. They discussed resources - sufficient time, effort, attention, money and people. Ensuring products and services were well designed, and the importance of doing things on time and being quick to respond to the demands of the collaborating in general and requirements of the front-end people involved in the day-to-day collaborating in particular.

Aside from research by the consultancy Marakon Associates, reported by Mankins and Steele (2005), that suggests that companies on average deliver only 63% of the financial performance their strategies promise, and Kaplan and Norton’s (2005) recognition of a disconnect in most companies between strategy formulation and strategy execution, I had recognised little emphasis on this delivery perspective in the literature, but here it was, almost consuming the majority of the thoughts and day-to-day energies of those involved in the alliance management process on a day-to-day basis.

Jack Jameson, Director at ESA, talked about the factors that contribute to successful collaborating, including having clear objectives and the right people and resources. His emphasis on delivery linked back to his business perspective talk about the collaborating. The following was an extract of a discussion with Jack as to what was going on, on a day-to-day basis, to build the trust and respect and to demonstrate the honesty that he had referred to earlier in the discussion:
JJ: "Genuine enthusiasm on a day-to-day basis for what is being attempted to be achieved for both organisations. I think getting the right structures and talking at the right level. People knowing what their objectives are, where they relate in the system, who they relate to. Some social element to just oil the wheels. You can do the whole thing as if it's a sort of mechanical process and it might work, but it'll work like a car with insufficient oil. Clunky. It'll get you there but if you really want it to purr and move faster then I think getting all of those intangibles, and I'm not just talking about social things, I think makes it better. One is oneness of purpose. Another is both being keen."

Jack also spoke about other factors that in his experience he felt contributed to the success or otherwise of business collaborating:

JJ: "Objectives worthwhile for both organisations. That you've got good structure, good communication, people who are committed and enthusiastic. Good interpersonal relationships between the organisations. Adequate resource available."

JD: "When you say 'adequate resources' what kind and type of resources?"

JJ: "Well, for instance, in our organisation there's no shortage of money for the project that we're jointly working on. That money breaks down into two types. Say one is the money to go and visit TCA. Expenses, travel, it's a minor thing. The other, the major thing is staff time. Now I've got money for staff time in the budget but unless within my organisation, because of the fixed complement of staff and because of the shortage of suitably skilled people across the whole organisation, unless the project is rated as priority, then having money doesn't deliver the individual to you. So one of the things we did some years ago was to rate this project as the highest priority and it takes whatever staff it needs when it needs them. Without that I think..."
we would have struggled here sometimes because, as we've gone through the process of developing the product, you needing GIS people from ESA then if you'd have had to wait three or four weeks... one may have had to have gone to Mozambique before he was available, that could have been embarrassing. So that's what I mean by resources."

Dilys Jennerson, Service Delivery Manager at TCA, described what it was that made a particular business relationship, based on a new joint residential property search with people from Cheshire County Council and staff at the British Salt Board, she had worked in "great". For her it was a combination of delivering and the people:

DJ: "First off, whatever you're working towards gets delivered, and to three criteria - the financial one, certainly to timescale and it meets the requirements. Enjoying that working relationship. If it's slightly wide of the mark or it's not quite delivered on time or it runs over, the relationship can be a little bit tarnished. It's hard work to get back to the type of understanding that's most productive and most beneficial. It's a team that we know and trust. These are the people that we enjoy working with. These are the people that know the business. Understand what it is that we're trying to achieve. Understand what the aspirations of TCA are. And are keen to help us to reach those goals and those objectives."

Heather Moore, Account Manager for the public sector organisation Mapping Agency, spoke about her views as to what successful collaborating comprised, and about not having enough "checks and balances" to really find out if the collaborating is successful:
HM: "It's a fact that it must be a success because you've signed on the dotted line, and you're in agreement. We don't really have many checks and balances do we?"

Heather also spoke about performance measurement and having key indicators to monitor performance against:

HM: "In my position they're around revenue, communication, migration. I have goals which are linked to key performance indicators of the contract."

Mark Talbot, System Designer with Star Signs UK Limited, another of TCA's ICT partners, took a contrary view to Heather Moore when he suggested that successful collaborating was maybe being more than a reflection of the monitored and reported key performance indicators. Mark was explaining what was going on in a collaboration he had considered to have been successful, that wasn't going on in the ones that, in his experience, had been less successful. He made an interesting analogy with school performance tables to clarify his view:

MT: "A public sector organisation could be deemed as being not successful if it doesn't hit its targets. So, for example, a school could be deemed as being unsuccessful if it didn't hit its exam pass targets and if it did it could be seen as being a successful school. However, it could be that the parents and the children themselves feel that a particular school whose exam results are not as good as another school still feel that they're getting a great service from that school if the quality of teaching is high, attendance is good, and the children are happy going there. I think there are measures other than the obvious objective measures, which determine where success is or where it's unsuccessful."
Continuing on this theme, Mark spoke at length about delivering to “hard and soft objectives”. In his experience, whilst aims and objectives and goals are important, and targets are important, on their own he didn’t think they reflected the overall success of the collaborating. He saw there to be a balance between the tangible and more intangible aspects of the collaborating: “There’s the soft objectives and there’s the hard objectives”. Mark also spoke about the limits of performance monitoring and statistics as a reliable indicator of ‘success’.

Will Neilson, Technical Manager at TCA, gave a personal view relating to trust and his perceived need “to keep an eye on things” to ensure that planned outcomes were delivered. He spoke of people “I personally can trust, and who I can rely on to perform.” He continued: “I tend to be involved more with the technical side of things. I don’t really hold a great deal of personal interest in the financial perspective. My interest is in making sure that whatever it is that’s being developed is as it should be and that things work the way they should do.”

Shaun Dicks, Project Manager at ESA, talked about what he expected the team of people he had responsibility for any collaborating to be doing on a day-to-day basis. He clarified what he saw happening between his own people and their counterparts in the partner organisation:

SD: “Well I see them carrying through the detailed tasks that the overall strategy has defined. We know that there are a whole range of things to be done. And they’re fleshing out the bones. And they’ve established a project plan. They’ve established a mode of operation. They’ve established who’s responsible for what. They can deal on a one-to-one level, so Jinny can deal with her counterpart and Mart can deal with his.
Those counterparts have changed through time and that's been a weakness, on both sides. Sometimes we can't help when they change. But keeping the project team together is a recipe for success. Keeping engagement. When for a variety of reasons we've had to adjust things it's altered the equilibrium of the project. The whole of the ESA team meets here as needed for a 'Let's go round the table. What are the issues? What are the weaknesses in the ESA thing? Is there anything we're collectively gathering together that's going to cause us a problem?''

Shaun also described a recent collaborative project that involved six European earth science agencies, and effectively highlighted the overlap between the context (culture and financials), business strategy (common goals and competences) and delivery perspectives (productively delivering on objectives), and, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, touched on the people perspective that glued the whole thing together:

SD: "And they've found the experience of working together ultimately productive, although it can be incredibly frustrating in six languages and with six different cultures."

The participants invariably considered problem solving capability to be a key requirement to delivering new products and services, project outcomes and delivering on objectives. Martha Rogers, an insurance broker with Marsh and Willis, discussed this in the context of the insurance and financial services industry and their dealings with the public sector:

MR: "...because insurers are after our business, they try to be as friendly as they possibly can to us. Obviously try not to upset us. If there are issues or problems, they
seek to manage that problem more quickly, because it has the ability to sour the business relationship.”

Christine Hall, Account Manager with EPA, a public sector Environmental Agency, followed up on this problem-solving theme when discussing interorganisational product development:

CH: “When a partner is using our data and has an idea that they want to work up, we work with them, understanding what benefits they can get from the data, and where it can be used, and being incredibly imaginative with them.”

JD: “Can you give me an example of how you work ‘imaginatively’? What does that mean?”

CH: “Michael was bringing some experience and some knowledge from other work that he’d done to help work up a better solution, which helped with the success of that particular collaborating. So that was him working imaginatively.”

From her perspective, Sam Catson, Head of ICT at TCA, spoke of the benefits of people from each of the partner organisations helping each other to deliver on objectives:

SC: “I think it’s important that each of the milestones on the project plan has an owner. We do what we can to help CapitalG hit their milestones. And what I found is that, providing we help in that direction, the folks in the CapitalG camp will equally help us hit our milestones.”
Tom Saracen introduced the idea of how personal relationships can help deal with potential problems, following his view of there being "real business bottom-line drivers" important to the success of the overall collaborating:

TS: "...quick meetings with them to put our side of the story and to show our knowledge and expertise. To try and keep the peace between the parties. The personal relationship that we have is important because it keeps any disputes to a minimum."

Maureen Barlow, Business Manager with Cheshire County Council, considered reviewing and learning from experiences, both in and out of work, as an important collaborating activity. She was reflecting on previous collaborative ventures she’d been involved with:

MB: "I think you have to draw on your experiences and ask 'why did that happen? what could have I done better?' That's how I personally get better."

Harry Stevenson, Development Manager with TCA, shared this view as to the benefits of learning from mistakes with regard to delivering on time, at cost and to specification. He also valued the interpersonal relationships that developed between himself and the individuals he worked with from the partner organisation. The following is an extract of a transcript of a conversation where Harry was recalling an experience he had had with a previous collaborative venture with CapitalG, global blue-chip ICT providers:

HS: "We tried a different approach. Brainstorm people off the shop floor and iterate a way towards the delivery. A dynamic collaborative venture. You have the end
users right from day one and they have sight of the development right the way through to delivery. It didn’t work. You need to deliver fully functioning, to cost and on time. And it was incredibly late because we’d spent so much time dwelling on minor aspects.”

Neil Smith, an insurance administrator with Contingency and Legal, perceived himself to enjoy a better relationship with the people in other organisations where he had engendered an ability to be more flexible in their joint collaborative approach, than with those people who insisted on working and collaborating “by the book”. He also talked about the need to differentiate yourself in the eyes of your partner so they want to do business with you:

NS: “If an underwriter won’t go that extra mile on something then you can’t get under the skin of them to build a relationship. If you’ve got a friendly underwriter you’ll be able to go that extra mile with them and you’re only going to do that with insurers where you have a good relationship. Adding value is important. It’s what we hope and believe sets us apart from other brokers that are out there, from our competition. We hope that gives the client extra confidence in our ability to look after their best interests.”

Having each, independently, unanimously agreed on the importance of ‘delivering’ to the success of any collaborative business venture, the participants – both during interview, in normal adhoc day-to-day discussions with them and with others involved in the collaborating process – each held strong views as to what factors and activities helped ensure delivery.
A common theme from each of the players was the importance of having goals and objectives to help delivery. Heather Moore was "really totally comfortable with goal setting." Nell Penston, Director of Information Services at TCA, summed up her view in this way when she talked about her perception of the people who she was collaborating with from TCA’s ICT partners, CapitalG, during a discussion about what motivates people to perform. Nell felt that taking pride in the work and in the delivery of the project was the ultimate reward:

NP: "CapitalG are working to make a profit, we’re working to benefit the citizen. The people who build and maintain the systems for us and provide the support, I think they get the same reward. I don’t think they’re in it just for the money. I think they see that it’s going to be a new nationwide system; it’s going to be a benefit to everyone. They say ‘I’ve been instrumental in getting that in place and I’m really proud of that’. It’s the goal of getting the particular process in place and seeing the service go live, that’s the bigger reward to them. They’re not driven solely by the pay cheque at the end of the month. It’s a refreshing sort of attitude to have, I think, towards your work. So having goals and the objectives is very important."

Kate Major, Marketing Manager with Searchlight, a private sector provider of online conveyancing services, also saw having mutual and shared goals and objectives as being a vital contributor to delivering a successful outcome to any collaborating. During a discussion following a presentation she had given to the TCA team, she talked about the benefits of full-time focus and adequate resources being available to maximise the chances of delivering a successful outcome. She talked about a previous collaborative venture she had been involved in and the lessons she had learned:
KM: "The people were working on a full-time basis. It was their only focus. I prefer not asking people to work on too many different things at once. Where things haven’t worked, it’s often because there hasn’t been enough resources devoted to it. It’s rarely to do with lack of intention. It’s often to do with just lack of time or lack of focus or other priorities."

From a public sector viewpoint Greg Marsh, Web Manager at TCA, talked about the need to avoid overly focussing on one element of a project and of the need to retain some flexibility. This was during a post project ‘lessons learned’ review session in October 2006. This was less of a contrary view than Kate Major, more an appreciation of the need to keep seeing the overall collaborating picture. Greg spoke too about communication and, in particular, lines of project communication. When pressed to clarify what he meant by “communication” and how the “dialogue” was carried out, Greg said it was by exchange of documents, by face-to-face meetings, by email, by telephone and by conference call. He clarified further:

GM: “What happens is, and this to me is the most beneficial way of working these collaborative ventures, is that the particular member of staff that becomes responsible for that one portion of the project can communicate directly to their counterparts here at TCA. And it’s that direct communication with the counterparts, with CapitalG, that I think really reaps the benefits.”

Greg also spoke of the benefits and better communication once a good working relationship is established between the people collaborating.

GM: “If you’ve got that friendship, if you like, that camaraderie where, although
we work for different companies, we're both on the same team and we're working towards, hopefully, towards the same goal. When I'm in that situation with a team of people, that's when I find it's definitely most productive."

References by the research participants to the importance of effective communication were frequent. This reflects much of the literature findings. Without effective communication between partners, the alliance will inevitably dissolve as a result of doubt and mistrust which accompany any relationship which does not manifest good communication practices (Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001).

Bethany Carlton suggested a preference for a more fluid, less hierarchical, structure, with a "fluid, challenging, rewarding, empowered type of environment" which she also saw as helping ensure and maintain more effective communication channels.

Project management was perceived as a key contributor to delivery, from the point of view of both public and private sector players. They spoke about keeping it simple, project control and risk analysis. However they each saw project management slightly differently, depending on their experiences of formal versus informal project management techniques they’d been involved with in the past. There was also a clear difference in the views of the public sector collaborators and those from the private sector, with the former preferring more formal project management arrangements being in place.

Chris Brown, Head of Information Services at ESA, touched on this in a conversation about finding work and collaborative partners, that led to a discussion about how he preferred to take collaborating forward:
CB: “If you look at the gestation of the ESA TCA partnership. It’s had a rocky ride. At some point it was going to dissolve rather than gel. But it’s come together. And it’s come together for... well you know well what your motives are and you know what ESA’s motives are, so I think it is win-win otherwise we still wouldn’t be doing it. ESA has the templates but it just doesn’t work like that. Some structure. Some sort of Agreement? Joint terms of reference. Some shared project methodology and structure. I’m not sure if it’s the exception, but I think that it is an example of very good practice. And people tend to cut that down to what is appropriate to the collaborating.”

From the private sector, Bethany Carlton took the view that the project management in itself did not determine the success of otherwise of the collaborating. Her view was in contrast with Chris Brown’s above and, as we shall see, also in contrast with Harry Stevenson’s:

BC: “My operation has always been to adopt a very common sense approach, to keep it simple, don’t try and complicate things, and so for me, in itself, I don’t think the project management methodology adopted determines the success or otherwise of the collaborating.”

In contrast, Harry Stevenson talked about the importance of project control and a formal project framework being in place. However, he did share some of Bethany’s views when he said the “framework needs to be more relaxed...down towards the shop floor”:

HS: “A formal governance framework is important and has to be in place because
there are large sums of money at stake here and customer facing business processes, and people’s reputations. But at the shop floor the framework needs to be more relaxed."

There is little doubt from my own experiences of working with people from other public and private sector firms and organisations on a day-to-day basis, that formal project management methodology is a core public sector requirement, cascaded by Government in general, and the Treasury in particular, in any public with public or public with private business alliance and collaborating venture. This is wonderfully captured in the following conversation with Harry Stevenson, Development Manager with TCA, during a discussion where Harry talked about “control” in any project environment. I wanted to explore what Harry meant by “control” and started by asking Harry about its importance:

HS: “It’s very easy to spin off at a tangent. So what I tend to do is, and I bounce this from the folks at CapitalG, we periodically through the project go right the way back to the requirements and just refresh ourselves as to what the high level requirements are so that we don’t lose sight of the wider picture. Providing you hit the milestones through the project, how those milestones are hit is of no consequence. PRINCE2 (Project Methodology) acts as a guide for us in describing how the project team is structured, what the project needs to achieve from start to finish, the milestones and what the key deliverables are.”

The preoccupation with project management methodology was demonstrated to me during a particularly challenging new product development I was involved with that included a technology upgrade. TCA’s Project Manager formally complained to the
TCA Executive because the project wasn’t following precisely the methodology agreed for adoption. The issue was whether it was OK to work to the spirit of the methodology or whether it was necessary to follow it ‘by the book’. It isn’t necessary to debate the pro’s and con’s of this argument here, nevertheless, it gave me much food for thought when considering the importance or otherwise of project management as a key factor for success as perceived by those involved in collaborating on a day-to-day basis. It also helped me better understand how different people deal with conflict.

Sarah Gower-Hill, Commercial Director at EPA, suggested that constructive conflict could lead to a new visioning, during a discussion on the nature of ‘failure’ in an alliance relationship, during which I queried how she went about resolving conflict, which we then explored in the context of a business relationship as against a personal relationship:

SGH: “Failure in a relationship can be measured in not hitting targets. In not negotiating on contract. Not negotiating on timescales. Forever putting proposals and having those proposals chucked straight back at you. I walk away from conflict. I don’t do conflict very well. So I try never to put myself in a position where I do get conflict. If I have, and it has happened within my working life that I have had conflict, I write things down. I get everything down and then try and refocus and revisit potentially where the conflict’s been and to try and come in through a different door. I think what we experienced today was constructive conflict, within our meeting with Michael. That was a total different way of looking at things. New visioning and I’m all for taking things like that on board. I do view conflict as negative.”
Sarah also talked about the need to adapt to people when she was talking about what she considered would be successful collaborating, and indeed what would be an unsuccessful collaborating, following a royalty payment negotiation we had just completed.

SGH: "You understand what their personal value is or what their motivation is and you change and adapt your style to suit that person. And I suppose one thing that I probably don't do, and should do more of, is ask 'did that work for you?'"

There is no categorical definition as to what constitutes 'success' in business collaborating, or as to the best ways to measure it (Kelly and Parker, 1995; Elmuti and Kathawala, 2001; Stanek, 2004; Vangen and Huxham, 2006). This is a subject area that seems to benefit from a social constructionist approach to researching the topic, since the views, opinions and perspectives of the collaborators themselves on this subject are many and varied. Yet through talk and dialogue it is possible to start to understand and make sense of what 'successful business collaborating' means to the individuals involved in business collaborating and alliance management on a day-to-day basis. It is relevant within this delivery perspective factor because ultimately it is the 'success' that the collaborators are looking to deliver, with agreeing goals and objectives, project management techniques, communication, conflict management, etcetera, all being used as tools to deliver this ultimate 'successful' outcome.

Heather Moore talked about the difficulties in tangibly measuring 'success' and how she relied upon more intangible "gut feel" much of the time. The following conversation also reflected her views of the need to adapt, which linked strongly with
the importance of the people involved in the collaborating and the relationships between them:

HM: “Success is interesting because someone’s success might be someone else’s failure. I mean I personally think at the moment I have a job to do and I will continue with that job. When I sit down at the end of the year and go, actually, TCA, as an example, has signed up to the Specific Use Contract and someone said to me ‘you know Heather they were the first one’s to have signed up’ and you think ‘that’s my job’ but actually it was deemed to be a success. You think ‘OK well how did that actually happen?’ And I have to come back to ‘well it was the relationship that we’ve developed over the last three years of working with one another.’ And not just you yourself, but the whole team here in TCA and also the team that you communicate with back in Mapping Agency. So success is a quite difficult thing to measure. I mean if I go to my own personal successes outside of working I do a lot of running, so, yes, I set myself goals and I go ‘right, I want to come top five in such and such an event, and I train for it, and if I do that then that’s great, but if I don’t then I have to readjust and work out what went wrong. But when you’re dealing with so many different types of people, and you’re trying to work with something that’s totally intangible, I believe that it’s quite difficult to measure success.”

Heather went on to discuss how she relied on more intangible measure of success, and then described one of her current collaborations that she considered to be “difficult”:

HM: “I’ve got one at the moment that is time consuming, very personal, between myself and a woman at CEH, and I don’t know if you’ve come across her? She’s a lady called Holly Hilger and she’s actually extremely hard work to deal with.”
Heather’s view was that if she’d reached an agreed end then that had been successful collaborating, even if she went through some difficulties to get there:

HM: “If you got to an agreed end, then it has to be successful collaborating, even though you’ve gone through a huge amount of conflict to get there.”

Wes Dickinson, is a Project Manager at TCA. His view was that ‘success’ linked directly to delivery. Wes explained this during a conversation where he was describing how he would define ‘successful’ collaborating from his point of view:

WD: “If we manage to roll something out into a production environment and from day one it’s 95% successful, then for me that’s a success. I say 95% successful because we’re always fine tuning things to keep pace with the changes on the business processes. But for me, what defines ‘success’ is when you actually implement something to a production environment and it works. It’s as simple as that.”

According to Wes, he would, with his partners and colleagues, decide and specify the requirements detailing what needed to be delivered. Then if he delivered that, that was successful. If he didn’t deliver that, then it had not been successful, by degree. However, if he delivered to the specification, but it was proving not to deliver the outcomes that the customer wanted, that too would not be successful from Wes’s point of view.

I asked Wes how he identified or established, compared and contrasted whether an outcome was 100%, 95%, 85% or whatever right or successful?
WD: “I think that’s probably easiest judged by the amount of support that you need to give from day one. So if at day one, when you implement something, you can more or less say then ‘well there you are then, that’s it, get on with it’ and things work the way they’re supposed to, that’s as good as it gets. If you implement something into production and straightaway you start having operational problems, then that’s something that you’ve not got right. When I say you’ve not got it right, it doesn’t necessarily follow that what we’ve viewed as being the requirements at the time, with the functionality that we thought we needed at the time, it doesn’t necessarily mean that that hasn’t been delivered. What it means is that what’s been delivered might have been slightly wide of the target, so we haven’t identified the target properly in the first instance. So there’s various degrees of failure. So you understand what it’s supposed to do, or what you build doesn’t quite do it. Or, what you thought you were delivering, you actually are delivering, but unfortunately you’ve delivered the wrong thing. So it’s somewhere between the two.”

It is interesting to contract Wes’s view with Bethany Carlton’s views as to what constituted ‘success’. Bethany linked it to goals and objectives. She also recognised that success could be at an individual or organisational level:

BC: “I think ‘successful’ can mean all sorts of different things. I think it’s quite an important thing to think about before one starts. What does success look like? My previous life was as a Management Consultant and the first thing that we would always do is talk about and determine goals and objectives and talk about what would a successful project be for the client? What would success look like for the individuals involved or concerned, and what would success look like for our own company. And in some respect, you know, some way of trying to take all of those different
perspectives into account. So you ask 'what does success look like?' It really depends on what everyone’s trying to get out of it. On an individual level success could be a promotion. Whereas success for an organisation could be whether it’s increased sales or reduced costs or something, depending entirely on what the initiative is."

Once again, the talk and dialogue was linking the various perspectives together. The context. The business and strategy. The importance of ‘delivering’. The talk also linked these perspectives and the various factors that they involved, to people. People made up the fourth perspective, as a factor in its own right and as a linkage of the other perspectives. This ‘people perspective’ is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

5.5 The people perspective

The fourth key perspective can be described as the People Perspective. This was not only a common theme throughout each interview and adhoc discussion with all players involved in collaborating on a day-to-day basis, it also seemed to gel all the other perspectives together. During discussions, people would link the elements that made up the context, business and strategy, and delivery perspectives with people related elements.

The factors and elements that make up the people perspective, and the number of times they were raised by the participants, are set out in figure 5.4 below:
The people perspective factors – 289 occurrences (36%):

Alliance management and relationships (original factor G) – 110 occurrences
- being friendly
- having a social element
- team working
- being reasonable and fair
- seeing the bigger picture re the relationship
- enjoyable
- avoid complacency
- influence and persuasion
- relying on each other

People – understanding and adapting (new factor) – 64 occurrences
- understanding people's different perspectives and business requirements
- adapting to work with people with different personalities and styles
- people getting on
- willingness to compromise
- benefits mutual and not one-sided
- win-win
- mutual obligations and requirements
- reciprocation
- looking after partner's best interests
- flexibility
- differentiate yourself in the eye of your partner
- developing

Right people and working environment (new factor) – 49 occurrences
- getting the right people (and partner) and keeping them together
- sustained
- delegated responsibility to key people
- right people
- empowered people free to use initiative and creativity
- keeping people satisfied
- challenging
- variety of work
- working on other projects together
- good working environment with ease of use and access

Trust (original factor C) – 43 occurrences
- mutual trust
- respect
- honesty
- openness
- personal integrity
- have utmost good faith
- personal values
- doing your best
- taking pride in achievement and work done

Commitment (original factor B) – 23 occurrences
- commitment
- enthusiasm
- keen
- interest
- positive outlook
- right attitude
- professional
- motivation
- dedication
- going the extra mile

Figure 5.4 The people perspective framework – factors and elements
Reflecting on my observations and day-to-day working within the research setting over thirty months, has impressed on me the view that successful collaborating is more to do with individuals working together to make things happen and working at making the collaborating work. I recall an instance where a particular Account Manager instructed his technical team to withdraw support for a particular product because of contract negotiation issues. Despite this instruction, and at no doubt some personal risk to themselves, they continued to provide necessary support. The reasons were purely due to the relationship they had developed with their counterparts in the TCA team. It was as though that relationship now took precedence in their minds over other considerations.

Alliance management and relationships were often seen as a key contributor to perceived success. This talk centred on being friendly, a social element, team working, being reasonable and fair, and seeing the bigger picture with regard to the relationship. Participants spoke about the need for the collaborating to be enjoyable. About the need to avoid complacency, the role of influence and persuasion, relying on each other, and the need, often, for compromise. This is an area being recognised and echoed increasingly in the literature as more companies come to specialise in core activities and outsource the rest, they have greater need for people who can interact with people in other companies, as well as with their customers and suppliers (Johnson et al, 2005).

Having the right people and working environment was another common theme. Stanek (2004) highlights the benefits of involving the right people early in the collaborative process and many of the participants shared this view. Getting the right people and partner, and keeping them together. The participants spoke of delegated
responsibility to key people, having empowered people free to use their initiative and creativity, working on other projects together and the importance of having a good working environment, with ease of use and access. The talk centred on topics relating to sustainability, challenge, keeping people satisfied and variety of work.

This point about key people also provided some interesting personal reflection based on what I observed. In many of the collaborations, the number of people involved from each organisation working together to make things happen was often minimal. TCA collaborate with some global companies, like CapitalG, and with major national companies like Mapping Agency, ESA and Burdocks. In the case of CapitalG it’s really just a dozen or so people out of an organisation of several hundred thousand that the TCA team engage with. With Mapping Agency it’s a similar dozen or so out of five thousand employees, but most of the day-to-day work is with one main contact. With Burdock’s it’s one main contact, dealing with his own network of contacts, who I dealt with. I never engaged directly with many other people within Burdocks, yet TCA and Burdocks reportedly have achieved many things together. TCA personnel never actually engage with these Burdock contacts. The position is similar when engaging with national trade associations and other major customer representative groups. From my observations and experience, it’s individual people that collaborate, not organisations; and it’s not necessary for many individual people from each organisation to engage and work together to make things happen. However, learning from my experiences, there is a need to regularly ensure that any single point of contact at an organisation continues to have the support and buy-in of the strategic decision makers at that organisation for the collaborating. The importance of this was demonstrated for me when it became clear that a particular point of contact of a professional trade association encouraged TCA to continue spending money, time and
other resources on a particular development initiative without the support of his Executive Board. This had significant consequences for the development and the resulting product has achieved only limited success, because a key stakeholder endorsement for the product was no longer available.

Another major theme related to understanding and adapting to people, their context and their environments. The players spoke of understanding people's different perspectives and business requirements, of adapting to work with people with different personalities and styles, and of people "getting on". Willingness to compromise, looking after your partner's best interests and differentiating yourself in the eye of your partner were seen as relevant activities. Benefits that were mutual as against one-sided were preferred, and talk centred on phrases like win-win, mutual obligations and requirements, reciprocation, flexibility and developing.

This 'people perspective' also included some of the personal behavioural attributes that were seen as being of positive benefit to the business collaborating and the alliance management and relationships. 'Commitment' was a term commonly expressed, but its meaning in the context of successful business collaborating was clarified with talk about enthusiasm, being keen and interested, having a positive outlook and the right attitude. Being professional, motivated, dedicated and "going the extra mile".

There is much in the literature about the benefits of 'trust' in a relationship, and the participants often seemed to include it as a key element necessary for effective and productive collaborative outcomes to flourish. When it comes to sustaining successful business collaborating, Bergquist (1995) contends that giving continuing attention to
preserving trust in the partners' intentions and skills is a critical condition. The talk
centred on mutual trust, respect, honesty, openness, personal integrity, have utmost
good faith, personal values, doing your best, taking pride in achievement and the work
done. On the converse side one participant said she was “wary of trust”, though her
commitment wasn’t that different. An interesting contrary view to explore later in the
chapter.

From the private sector, Lindsey Taylor, Technical Director with BeeRU, a private
sector analytical and consulting service provider, talked about successful
collaborating she had been involved with. She cited getting on with people and having
good clear objectives as being instrumental to this success, which is a good example
of the frequent overlap between the people and delivery perspectives:

LT:  “And it was an incredibly successful initiative for the organisation as a whole
and for the individual members of the team that worked on it. It was an initiative that
really did influence my thinking on the way in which successful partnerships and
collaborating work. We took a lot of time to understand what the retailer wanted to
get out of it. Certainly I spent quite a long time trying to get to know the individual
people and trying to understand what was important to them. Some people were
working on that initiative because they were told they had to. Some because it was
something that they dearly wanted to do on a full time basis and wanted to make it a
success. In some cases it did mean a promotion. It meant gaining additional
experience. For me it meant gaining really good feedback at the end of it. So in terms
of measurement process it was just to gain very, very good qualitative feedback from
the clients. There were very clear objectives set, financial objectives, to have an
enjoyable time. It didn’t mean not have any conflict. It meant have a challenging time.
The company did very well out of the project, and more than achieved the management objectives that they set. If they had said I was rubbish, on a personal level, then they would have said. They would have asked for someone else.”

When Lindsey Taylor said, “that didn’t mean not have any conflict” she was echoing another common theme of many players of the positive impact a good personal relationship can have with regard to conflict resolution. Tom Saracen, Clients Services Director with Burdocks UK Limited, picked up on this during a discussion about how the relationship he has with clients might differ from that with insurers:

TS: “They are probably over-friendly. They want the opportunity to look at the business that comes our way. The insurers you get on best with tend to see more of the risks that we have to broke to the market. To keep tabs on who you should be dealing with you pick up a knowledge of which insurers in the marketplace are best suited for a particular risk. They seek to manage that problem more quickly, because it has the ability to sour the business relationship. An unwillingness to work together to sort out an issue or a problem you sense it’s very one-way, one-word answers. They would always look at ways to build bridges and get things back on track.”

Jack Jameson, Director at ESA, considered the ability to have open and frank discussions as being a measure of the success of the relationship, and he admitted to having concerns if no conflicts arose:

JJ: “Open, frank, a constructive criticism, is a measure of success. A good working relationship. It’s like a healthy marriage is probably one that occasionally has areas of disagreement. And if it’s so damned rosy then what’s happening
In many ways Jack was echoing the views of Ohmae (1992) who summed up the necessity for good communications in building and maintaining a strong strategic alliance relationship by saying “An alliance is a lot like a marriage…both partners have to work diligently over time to make the union successful.” I explored this further with Jack and he talked further about the benefits of resolving conflict in good working relationships, and cited the current TCA and ESA collaborating as an example:

JJ: “Building in trust and respect. I don’t think you can do that instantly. If you don’t do that then the alternative is a very, very formalised, almost legalised relationship. Resolve any conflict. Hey we’ve got a great shared objective here. And then you build a relationship subsequently. So there are all sorts of models.”

We shall revisit the perceived importance or otherwise of trust within a relationship later in this chapter.

Harry Stevenson, Development Manager with TCA, took the personal relationship aspect even further when he described how he complained to his senior team when a partner company changed particular members of their staff team away from the collaborative work:

HS: “I was disappointed that someone was moving out of post, particularly if it was someone that I had come to rely on, I’d come to have this shared understanding of the way the system works. I’d complain to Nell, as it was in the past, and to Sam as he is now. Probably both to Nell and to Sam now.”
Zoe Hewitt, Marketing Manager with National Hub Services Ltd, also talked about the importance of personal relationships with people and clarified what she perceived as a good environment. She spoke of empowerment and the relevance of financial incentives. Again, highlighting the overlap, this time, between the people and the business perspectives:

ZH: “Having personal relationships with the people is extraordinarily important. Having the personal success and the personal enjoyment is extraordinarily important to me. An environment where those that I’m working with are empowered to do whatever it is that they’re tasked to do. Rewarded sufficiently financially for what they do. But, yes, so a challenging environment. An environment in which you have room to manoeuvre. You can be creative. You’re empowered. Not too dogmatic. A fairly fluid structure of an organisation. Not too hierarchical. Project type environments where everyone’s involved and it doesn’t really matter who you are. So a fluid, challenging, rewarding, empowered type of environment.”

In the earlier section of this chapter on the Delivery Perspective, a number of the players talked about what they considered made for successful business collaborating. They spoke about delivering on expectations, business requirements, objectives and targets. Philip Andrews, insurance broker with Marsh and Willis, whilst recognising the benefits of delivering on the purpose of the collaborating, thought that the relationship between the two parties was more important:

PA: “There has to be that need or requirement and an ability to provide a solution to that. The client likes to keep a distance and sees it purely as a business relationship. For the right cost, that’s it. You better understand the business, not in a heavy serious tone, but in a conversational tone. Insurance has a negative image but
if you can make that relationship a lot more pleasurable and bearable all round then it helps everybody I think."

Philip spoke further, about the benefits of striking up a friendship and developing a relationship where you could add value to it. Philip saw a direct link between the strength of the relationship and the success of the collaborating:

PA: "You can twist their arm a little bit. We may as well be just simply trading over the Internet or something like that, or some other sort of IT mechanism for purchasing insurance. We're not really adding value in that overall relationship between client, broker and insurer. And adding value is what we hope and believe sets us apart from other brokers that are out there, from our competition. The stronger the relationship, the better correlation likely for a successful relationship, and a weak relationship would correlate more frequently with unsuccessful collaborating, in my experience."

Dilys Jennerson, Service Delivery Manager at TCA, shared this perception of the benefits of striking up a friendship with people from the partner organisation:

DJ: "I work better with people who I can be friendly with and I find are friendly to me than people who you communicate with purely on a formal basis. Talking about family life, interests, things outside of work, outside of your professional connection, I think tends to strengthen your relationship with those people to the point where, when you come down to do the professional things, the trust's there. You understand these people. You understand how they're working. You understand about their background. What their goals are. What their aspirations might be. It enables you to
form a mental picture of their character. You know which ones to go to for a particular task. We end up having a far more productive environment between the two teams. I'm able to communicate on that sort of personal level."

Dilys also gave an example of a time when that more personal relationship has worked well for her. The example also highlighted her preference for a 'heads-up' approach and a no-blame culture when problems and difficulties occur:

DJ: "I always go straight to that person and say 'Look we've got this problem and I think this is what's going wrong'. 'Ooh, that's gone wrong and it's my fault'. And then suggest 'well how can we resolve the situation and make things better'. By working with the people to resolve the problems or solve the problems and resolve the situation, that's always the best way out. It's instilled in us here at TCA that we don't operate a blame culture. I'm always grateful if people do give me a heads-up."

However, Dilys also considered friendship to be a double-edged sword when things were maybe going wrong within the collaborating. I'd asked Dilys whether developing that friendship and relationship on a more personal basis, made it easier or harder when things got a little tough, or whether it didn't make any difference:

DJ: "It can be a double-edged sword in that it makes it easier to just communicate with people in the first instance. If not friends but certainly more than colleagues. It does make it more difficult to point the finger of accusation. I tend in those instances to get in touch with that person straight away. Let the person then recognise that they are responsible for themselves and let them take ownership of the problem. They're grateful for on this personal basis. This friendship basis."
Dilys’s talk of the social aspects of the collaborating, her previous talk of trust, of problem-solving, and Wes Dickinson and Harry Stevenson’s recognition of the importance of delivering to specification, time and cost, bears out the findings of Perry et al (2002) who concluded that both technical and social bonds contribute to relationship success within the context of information technology, which is Harry’s field. Perry et al (ibid) found that the technical bond of ‘competence’ to be the starting point for understanding relationships, since they considered it to be the driving force when deciding whether to invest in information technology, with the technical bond of ‘investment’ to be the ending point of this understanding. They also recognised that competence makes the people involved more committed – a social bond. They found that the social bond of trust also enhances commitment, with commitment providing the ongoing foundation for long-term benevolence – another social bond – about the relationship. They found the technical bond of competence to also have a direct influence on equity and fairness – another social bond – and, to close the loop, competence to be a key driver of the important bond of commitment. Harry’s views, and those of Perry et al (ibid), provide further evidence that the behavioural (social) and structural (technical) elements and factors of business collaborating are not only of as much concern as each other, but become aggregated together within the collaborative mix.

Tom Saracen of Burdocks UK Limited, supported Dilys Jennerson’s views on the benefits of getting to know about people’s families, hobbies, etcetera. This was during a discussion where Tom spoke about the importance of understanding people and ‘getting on’, for the benefit of the collaborating. I asked if he could clarify what he meant by ‘getting on’?
TS: “Where you get on first name terms, know a bit about each others families, and likes and dislikes, and hobbies and what have you, it allows discussions to flourish into all areas and fully understand our clients business. There's only so much you can pick up from reading brochures, looking at websites and initial discussions.”

Unlike Tom Saracen and Dilys Jennerson, Richard Coast, Account Manager with CapitalG, took more of a balanced view when he spoke of how, in his experience, even having good relationships in place doesn’t in itself guarantee success because making a profit is still important. Here we again have overlap between the people and business perspectives. Richard also talked about his perception of ‘what’s quality and what’s not’ with Richard considering this to be a subjective concept. The conversation allowed Richard to highlight what he saw as friction between the public sector and private sector with regard to the private sectors need to make a profit:

RC: “Having good relationships in place doesn’t in itself guarantee success. But in a business context, having the relationship, having those skills, having good communication and a respect of your peers and of your clients, is key but having that alone is not enough, and in business you are trying to sell services, you are trying to sell products. Also make success for your client, and that can only be achieved if the services and the products and the people who stand behind you are competent and are well-designed services and products. It’s very difficult to be totally objective about the quality of a product or a service. One man’s rubbish is another man’s superb product. Client perception is everything actually. I say ‘client’ I mean all the way down the line. If all the way down the chain the services and products that you provide have created a perception, at each level of the chain, of quality, then it’s a successful product. Your aims and goals are very different to theirs. If they perceived
that your only desire, your only motivation, is maximising profit, but they as an organisation, their primary motivation is, for example, providing a service to the public, I think there can be too big a mismatch between the objectives and desires and motivations of the two organisations. It's difficult for them to identify with each other because they have very different values. It's finding a happy medium where the public sector organisation can be comfortable that the private sector organisation is not trying to undermine its own values."

However, the recurring theme was the benefits perceived by the participants of good working relationships. The talk also helped clarify what constituted 'a good working relationship'. Harry Stevenson recalled another recent example:

**HS:** "I work better with the people from CapitalG than the people from TCA, because I'm focussing so much on CapitalG because they are our biggest business partner. These people do genuinely take an interest in what it is that we're doing and genuinely do try to do their best for us. To make things work for us."

Having the right people working together was a common theme. Michael Warner, Operations Manager at EPA, a public sector Environmental Agency, alluded to the benefits of this when he spoke of his own lack of reflexivity:

**MW:** "It's been the third iteration. Finally we've now had the right people sitting around the table and having the correct discussion."

Michael also spoke of how he adapted his style to fit with a partner or collaborator:
MW: "Talking to them and meeting with them you understand what their personal value is or what their motivation is and you change and adapt your style to suit that person."

And later in the same conversation:

MW: "I need do quite a lot of work about trying to understand the person, which is why I like meeting people rather than doing things over the telephone, which is why I don't particularly enjoy email. Then try and adapt to their style. Give them what they want and also by still trying to keep your own style."

Helen Barker, Sales Manager with GroundAspect, a private sector data holder and property search provider, took this further when she promoted the benefits of having a positive outlook and building a relationship with people to make the collaborating work. Like Harry Stevenson earlier, Helen also talked about the benefits of adopting a no-blame culture, and, like Heather Moore, spoke of the need to understand things from the partner's perspective:

HB: "You have to try and make it work. A positive type of environment is a good one. Lucky enough never to work in an environment where there's a 'blame culture'. I do my best to try to change it. A very positive outlook. Get something positive from each situation. To go into something thinking that you can make it work rather than the opposite. To try and understand another person's frame of reference. Their perspective on a situation. I think shared objectives is important. To understand what someone personally wants out of an initiative is incredibly important. It's not something that you can realistically hope to gain on the first time that you meet"
someone or even the second or third or fourth or fifth. I would always try and do that over time. Over time I could have a quite open conversation with them about what they're trying to achieve themselves.”

The importance and need to build a relationship is highlighted by Pauline Banks, Managing Director at GroundAspect, when she talked about choosing a partner to collaborate with, and how it was, on balance, mainly a formal structured approach, though she recognised a qualitative aspect of whether “they’re decent people to work with”:

PB: “There are always boundaries on who you need to work with. So in choosing a partner I think we’ve taken, or certainly I’ve taken, a fairly structured approach to choosing them. That doesn’t mean there’s not a qualitative aspect in there, because ultimately whether they’re decent people to work with is very important. All the financials have to stack up and their mode of operating and so on. And they have to be able to do the job.”

Martin Unsworth, Director at ESA, also talked about choosing a partner, particularly as to the reasons behind the need to establish in the first place that there was a partner out there that had an objective that would be compatible with his. He also spoke about how that process started with recognition of gaps in his organisation’s competences that the right partner might address:

MU: “Establishing at that time what our objective is and where our strengths are and where our weaknesses are as an organisation. Who can give us that competence that we don’t have in abundance in that area and move forward?”
In this regard Martin was echoing similar views as Aitken and Hage (1968), Porter and Fuller (1986), Johnson (2001) and Bryant (2003) in their discussions on the primary reason organisations enter strategic alliances. From my observations of various collaborative ventures during my thirty months research study, my perception and understanding of two main reasons are:-

1. To gain access to the benefits of the other organisation's assets, in particular technology and market access, and

2. To reduce risk by sharing it, not just in terms of capital requirements, but also in relation to new product and service development and the pursuit of new market opportunities.

The sum of the competencies amongst the alliance partners perceived as being greater than those of any partner acting alone (Kelly and Parker, 1995).

There is much in the literature about the benefits of 'trust' in a relationship, and the participants talked about it in many of the discussions about day-to-day collaborative working. Martha Rogers of Marsh and Willis talked about trust and good working relationships being more successful. She talked about the importance of having 'the right people', so I asked her what would constitute 'the right person'?

MR: "It's about establishing a trust. There's an element of trust from the brand of that particular company. Trust to reflect in the personnel which you're dealing. We're working to fairly tight deadlines, needing quotations, needing feedback. The better insurers, the ones we have the better relationships with, the person at the other end
comes back with it within reasonable time-scales or promptly if you ask them for the next day response or something like that. Speed of response. Whereas there's others who'll have a more flexible approach, view things in terms of our business relationship with them, the profitability of our account with that particular insurer and view things on a wider basis rather than just focussing in on a particular risk, whatever that might be.”

Bethany Carlton also talked about the importance of the human factors of trust and interdependency and a good working relationship during a conversation where she shared her experiences of working in what she perceived as being a successful collaborative venture. This despite (or because?) there being no formal contractual agreement in place:

BC: “Nothing formally in place. A lot of that relationship was built on trust. Interdependency of the two organisations and the individuals concerned. Interdependency, that links in with a single goal and mutual objectives, shared objectives. If it was a very controlling collaborative environment, in terms of one organisation having control over the other, that doesn't strike me as collaborating as such. Governance over or regulation, so that's a very different kind of relationship. Even if an organisation had control over another then a good working relationship, a trusting, mutually beneficial working relationship could be made to come to the fore. People have different ways of working. There are colleagues for who getting on with the people that they work with is not of the paramount importance. If you're in something for the long-haul then the human factor would be important.”
This particular piece of conversation from Bethany is a good example of how the context, business and strategy, delivery and people perspectives can all overlap. This particular collaborating worked well according to Bethany and the reasons for that can be found within the elements that make up each of the four key perspectives, working effectively together to produce positive collaborating outcomes at the organisational level and at the personal level (Bergquist et al., 1995; Garrow et al., 2000; Stanek, 2004).

Following a routine service review meeting, I spoke with Tom Saracen of Burdocks UK Limited, about his views as to what could influence the success of a collaborative business relationship. Tom cited the strength of the relationship and an honesty between the parties. Again picking up on the themes promoted by the other participants in the research study:

TS: “An honesty between the parties. Where everything is tendered, they tend to not be such good relationships, and their premiums tend to jump about a lot more because it keeps the price down during the good years, but during the bad years, when claims occur, the market over-reacts and then they don’t get the competition between insurers, because they know that it gets shown around every year.”

Eric Barnes, ICT Technician with CapitalG, also picked out people, relationships and trust (“personal integrity”) when talking about what he considered made for successful business collaborating:

EB: “It really boils down to people and the relationships they develop. Particularly at the more senior levels. It’s the perception of personal integrity.”
Everything I do is to genuinely help the client but at the same time to further the aims of my company and me as an individual.”

However, on the converse side, one participant, Heather Moore, Account Manager with Mapping Agency, said she was “wary of trust”, which provided an interesting contrary view to most of the other collaborators. Heather felt that ‘commitment’ was a positive behaviour, but she felt ‘trust’ was totally emotive:

HM: “I think commitment is important, but trust is totally emotive. I think commitment to achieving something together, you know, 'yes we will do this, yes that is our end game, our end game is to get to... ' That's how you communicate with one another to get there. I'm both representing me, but I'm also representing my organisation.”

Heather’s comments about ‘commitment’ are interesting in light of Kauser and Shaw’s (2004) research conclusion that commitment is found to positively influence strategic alliances performance and managers’ satisfaction with the relationship. Her reference to ‘communication’ and its role in helping towards effective delivery, was another collaborative factor that each of the participants talked about in their various individual contexts. Tom Saracen also talked about ‘communication’, its relevance within the collaborating, and how he communicated within his own collaborative working life:

TS: “We’re an industry that loves paperwork and things to be backed up on paper. Tends to be the general format for paperwork. Also there’s lots of discussion over the telephone, and, with most clients. There’s some where we would prefer to meet with
that client just to keep that relationship, keep that face-to-face contact and
relationship going. Insurance policies then come through in a hard format; be sent in
the post with a letter. You'll have insurers Marketing Department, that will be selling,
sending you glossy brochures or emails with colourful attachments setting out new
products, changes to current products, that kind of thing, or changes in their
organisation etcetera. But generally, you'll have a Relationship Manager who will
visit us. It can be anything from quarterly to annually dependant on the insurer.
They're just updating you in terms of any personnel changes, running through
changes in their products, what their appetite is for particular classes of business.
We'll have some more unusual risks to look at, and you need to pick up the phone and
meet face-to-face to discuss that and see whether they're an interested party. There
can be facilities or certain niche covers in the market and they'll need far more face-
to-face discussion to ensure that they know fully what's happening. If they don't want
to see us every year then we're not going to force them to. If they want to see us three
or four times a year then generally speaking we'll see them two or three times a
year."

Tom also showed a degree of realism and acceptance when he acknowledged that
some relationships were not going to be long-lasting ones:

TS:  "Nothing is absolutely right for every particular client. We need to be flexible
so that we can modify our approach and services to that particular client, depending
on 'the nature of the beast'. You know that they'll switch for a penny, and no matter
how close you can try to get to them, they'll always have this 'keep things at arms-
length' way, and it might be successful for them but it's not successful for us as a
business."

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The overlap between the elements considered to positively contribute to a perceived successful collaborating, and the overlap particularly between the delivery perspective discussed in the last section and the people perspective, were highlighted in a conversation with Harry Stevenson, Development Manager at TCA. Harry was talking about his experiences working on a day-to-day basis with people from CapitalG, TCA’s ICT partners. He talked about the importance of getting the right people and keeping them working together, of building up a mutual understanding of each party’s objectives. This was also an opportunity to explore what Harry meant when he spoke of ‘communication’, which he also talked of as a key factor contributing to what he understood as successful collaborating:

HS: “Not just building, for instance, a computer system, but understanding the service that that computer system needs to support. That’s where partnerships grow and where partnerships become more beneficial. The partner’s only able to understand the business and the business processes in so far as you’re able to describe them. With the passing of time and the experience of the people who work in support of the systems, that grows, and they get to a point where they understand our business, almost as well as we understand our business ourselves. Once this partnership is in place then you can build on it. That’s the importance of keeping some key personnel in post at the far side. They do rotate the staff, they move the staff around and give the staff different duties and they don’t like to see staff too long in the same position. That’s the way they run their business. For us, in the early days, that gave us a distinct disadvantage in that we were just training people to the point where they understand not just the systems but the business processes that the system’s supporting. They just get into this position where you could impart a piece of, or a request or piece of information against a counterpart at CapitalG, knowing full well
that they fully understood what it is you are after, and just where they get to this level of understanding. CapitalG management can just whisk them away onto some other project or some other post and you find yourself addressing a new counterpart and you have to go through that learning curve all over again. I complained about this in the early days. So now there are some people in post who've been there for a good number of years, who do understand the business and that works much more efficiently for me. I don't know how that reflects on CapitalG and the way they run their business, but certainly, from our experience, that's a much better position to be in.

If we didn't describe our requirements absolutely precisely, then there was the danger that that could get interpreted incorrectly. Through document exchange, document reviews, right now we've got this common understanding. We struggled to get that degree of accuracy when we were describing things to them. Once people had been in post for a while, they almost second-guess what it is that we're heading towards or that we were asking for. So, the ability to communicate accurately probably becomes less of an issue.

They'll have some form of workshop and explain the idea to the people who develop the systems or who are responsible for overseeing the development of the systems here at TCA. Those personnel are able to go away and document the requirements for us on our behalf. We then review, our own requirements if you like, but these are requirements that have been documented by CapitalG. There might be some iteration of those requirements. Those requirements would then be signed off the back of those requirements in the design document. All the software, the hardware, the infrastructure, the environments, the way that that system will plug into the processes
that are already in place, that level of detail goes into the detailed design document that again comes out to CapitalG."

Richard Coast from a private sector perspective echoed Harry Stevenson’s public sector views on the importance of communication, with the conversation able to explore what exactly Richard meant by ‘communication’. This was always an area where the critical realist research approach had limited application. Many people spoke of ‘communication’ but the critical realist research methodologies seldom led to a deep understanding about what the participants actually meant by it. In the following conversation, Richard talks about how he sets about developing a good working relationship, the importance of communication, in particular face-to-face communication, and his view that people are either born to it or not:

RC: “It relies on the fact that you’re a good communicator, if you’re good with people, if you find it relatively easy to speak to people or convey your ideas and I think it’s something that most people can either do or they can’t do. Training and shadowing, mentoring, can bring out those qualities but I think actually fundamentally it’s something that’s in your personal make-up, that you’re either a good communicator or you’re not. The communication has to be real. You have to be able to operate across different media. So either written media, telecommunications, face to face. Face to face is the one that matters. Looking a person in the eye. The body language. The body language is apparent, that’s clearly the one where you need to strive to find success in that area. You can never develop a good relationship by telephone or by email. You can only enhance the relationships by those types of media.”
Michael Warner of EPA echoed the view as to the importance of communication, and talked of his dislike of email and preference for talk, when we explored what he meant by "good communication":

MW: "Just keeping in touch with people on a regular basis. Whether you've got good news or bad news. Not communicating by email. Communicating over the phone. Letting one another know where you are, what your timescales are. People can bury themselves behind an email. I find it much easier to tell you when things are happening, or give you a ring and say 'this is coming'."

This apparent questioning of the benefits of modern communication and information technologies echoes the research carried out by Perry et al (2002) who questioned whether increasing use of these information technologies benefited or harmed the quality of the social relationship between people in a business system. Information technology is introduced into many business systems to enhance business processes and to facilitate communication. However, the trend to invest in information technology to replace telephone and face-to-face contact may improve business processes in a technical or economic sense, but does it affect relationships between business partners in undesirable ways by undermining social bonds? Perry et al's study was designed to investigate that question. Their conclusions were discussed earlier in this chapter.

The business and strategy, context, delivery and people perspectives were all evident again when Roy Graham, Business Development Director of Burdocks UK Limited, talked about how a good business relationship helps make collaborating successful, and more innovative. This contribution to more innovative product and service
development was a view expressed earlier in the chapter by Heather Moore from a public sector collaborators perspective:

RG: "There's a need or a requirement from one party, and then a second party able to fulfil that need or requirement. But there has to be that need or requirement and an ability to provide a solution to that. Those that are successful are where a relationship develops whereby mutual trust through both parties and it helps, from my side of the fence, it helps because you better understand the business with which you're working, and can often come up with innovative ideas, which potentially wouldn't have come about if you'd had this cooler relationship as it were. But we can help and assist in managing those uninsured areas by monitoring and recommending certain risk management to help manage those risks."

We discussed earlier how Bethany Carlton cited getting on with people and having good clear objectives as being instrumental to successful business collaborating, which was a good example of the frequent overlap between the people and delivery perspectives. This overlap was in evidence again when Bethany spoke about how, in her experience, understanding how different people like to work can help deliver the targeted outcomes of the collaborating. The discussion also provided the opportunity to explore Bethany's preferred method of communication and her interesting views on the differences between the public and private sector when it comes to meetings:

BC: "Verbal communication is of paramount importance actually. If you work with someone for an amount of time you become attuned as to what works for the individuals concerned, and whether if they're very verbal people or they like written communication. I would always try and accommodate that. The written word just
does not work for them. It's a real blocker. Whether it's a five or ten minute chat, everything can be resolved. Other people I know that they work best and think better if they see a written document and they want things laid down in that way. Then nine times out of ten you'll get their support. I think recognising the way in which different people prefer to work is something that can be extremely valuable."

“A communicating styles approach. Like intuiters, feelers, sensers. I would just ask people if I wasn’t sure. I’m not really hung up on verbal or written. It depends what it is and it depends on the nature of what’s being communicated. Anything legal ends up in a written, or tends to end up to be far more written. In developing a relationship, certainly in the early stages, I think verbal communication is extremely important. At the start of any sort of collaborating I would always try and have more meetings, physical contact. As collaborating, as a relationship develops, the emails can get shorter and briefer and less formal. Documentation, more documentation and more lengthy documentation tends to be the norm in the public sector. Meetings that I would go to in a private sector environment that probably wouldn’t be minuted. I personally find action lists really, really helpful. I can understand that there are reasons for that. Public accountability and that.”

This common theme from all the players as to their observed link between what they perceived as a good working relationship correlating more with successful business collaborative outcomes was evident again when Tom Saracen of Burdocks UK Limited, insurance brokers, when he talked about his experiences in this regard:

TS: “So the relationship correlates to the success. Generally they don’t want to move unless we’ve done something to upset them, or the insurer’s done something to
upset them from a claims perspective. In which case we can use the feedback to twist the arm on that particular insurer to get the price down, and then the client have got what they wanted, which was to stay with that insurer, because they've got a good experience with them. And the broker that they like dealing with, they've then got the right price that they're happy with. So those kind of relationships tend to work stronger."

In this final section of this chapter we’ve explored the fourth key perspective - the People Perspective. What is becoming increasingly self-evident is that this is not only a common theme amongst all the players and collaborators involved in collaborating on a day-to-day basis that I engaged with during the course of my research study, it also often seems to gel all the other three perspectives together, linking the elements that make up the context, business and strategy, and delivery perspectives with the people related elements.

5.6 Conclusions

In Chapter 2 we discussed how Spekman et al (1998) maintain that there is a huge gap in our understanding of alliance management. Equally, Park and Russo (1996) maintain that there is a lack of research on why alliances fail and advocate more research to clarify the basis of alliance failure. I believe this research study has gone some way to addressing the gap in the literature for a holistic model that takes account of the social, political and economic context and environment of the people involved in the public sector collaborating process.

It also confirms the research study’s original proposition, in that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as
much concern to those involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis as the economic and structural aspects.

The following chapter explores this further with the development of a conceptual framework, which makes sense of the public sector collaborating process from an overall social constructionist perspective.
Chapter 6

Application of the data and conceptual framework

6.1 Introduction

In reflecting on the strengths and limitations of different approaches of data interpretation as they might be applied to my research project, my concern was with the notion of sensemaking in general, and in making sense of the literature in particular. My aim in interpreting the research data was in deriving my view and perceived reality based on patterns and themes, particularly any dominant experience or patterns, from the analysis of the multi-realities derived from the interviews and from the accounts of the numerous other players that I engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process. This reconstructing of knowledge and making sense of what is going on links back to the fundamentals of social construction as discussed in Chapter 2.

Whilst the view is held that social constructionist arguments are not easily expressed in conceptual language (Hosking and Bass, 2001), I have attempted to provide a summary of my interview and discussion feedback, to make sense of the existing world literature view of the key elements of successful business collaborating, together with the new insights perceived as important by the respondents. In light of the outcome of my analysis I am in a position to do this by developing a theoretical model and conceptual framework. I initially considered basing this on an extension of the framework developed following my pilot study outlined in Chapter 3, i.e. based on the type shown in Figure 6.1 below. I held the view at that time, though not subsequently, that this was a better approach than adopting structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) or Strategic Exchange Perspective (Watson, 2001).
Whilst individual responses from the respondents/interviewees gave some insights into successful and not-so-successful business collaborating, they more usefully identified those characteristics that were considered important to the successful and less-successful ones. It would be possible to compare and contrast these individual results within the group results as a whole and with the best-practice advice in the literature. The pilot study had also highlighted which of the ‘harder’ structural and ‘softer’ behavioural factors were perceived as being more important, and more specifically and consistent with the study’s original proposition, whether the participants considered and perceived the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process to be of as much concern as the economic and structural aspects highlighted.

I also anticipated the possibility of feeding the research results into the creation of a conceptual model highlighting, generally, the key links between ‘successful collaborating’ on the one axis and contributing structural and behavioural factors on the other (though, alternatively and depending on the outcome, the latter may have formed an axis each). I intended to conceptualise this using matrices or 3-dimensional grids or charts, in a similar way to the Boston Consulting Group’s growth-share analysis technique for business strategy (Henderson, 1970). Stanek (2004) usefully

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_Figure 6.1 – matrix of new and existing key factors and elements_
attempted to develop such a model approach to measuring alliance value and risk with a view to prioritising alliance projects, though whether it is realistic to expect 'one size to fit all' seems doubtful.

Until now, no theory of public sector business collaborating based on social constructionist thinking has been advanced. Although cognitivism is pervasive and influential in the literature, as Gergen (1999) observes, there is a strong case to be made against accepting this and it is equally valid to propose a social constructionist alternative (Rae, 2004). The conceptual model subsequently proposed is an original and distinctive concept, which will advance understanding of public sector business collaborating, and address the dilemma of TCA as outlined in Chapter 1, both in the context of public sector collaborating, and beyond it, using the conceptual tools of narrative and social construction. It allows a participatory worldview and offers new and varied insights into relations and social interactions (see Reason, 1994). The model is outlined in the next section.

6.2 Conceptual model

During this research study I have explored and tried to make sense of the public sector business collaborating process. From a structured review of the available literature in Chapter 2, I identified 16 factors and categories that contributed to successful collaborating. However, this alone did not help me make sense of the public sector collaborating process, nor particularly help me deal with the specific dilemma and predicament of TCA as outlined in Chapter 1.
I then adopted an approach that can be more associated with critical realism and research methodology (questionnaire and semi-structured interview based on repertory grid [Peters, 1994]), in an attempt to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the collaborative process. This too only had limited success, in that whilst it gave me some fascinating results and insights as outlined in Chapter 3, the research study failed to provide any insight into why the respondents considered, perceived and held the positions and views that they did. Neither could I fully understand what the respondents actually meant by terms like ‘communication’ or ‘good working relationships’, when discussing factors contributing to successful collaborating.

There was a need for the research data to be considered afresh, moving away from the analysis, which had a high level of a priori instrumentation, i.e. the 16 categories were derived from those from the literature and the pilot investigation. This led to the adoption of a social constructionist approach and research methodology, based on my reflective diary and real time thought process from the participants in both the public and private sector involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting, supplemented by transcript analysis of open unstructured interviews and on the accounts of numerous other players that I had engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process.

The outcome of recoding the diary reflections and the interview and conversational transcripts from a social constructionist perspective was to subsequently identify and derive four key perspectives, the elements of which together formed the foundation to
a new understanding of the public sector collaborating process. The four perspectives are:

- The context perspective
- The business and strategy perspective
- The delivery perspective
- The people perspective

The context perspective reflects the importance perceived by those people involved in day-to-day collaborating of understanding the context within which they worked. This includes the need to understand and adjust to both the political and business environment, to adapt to different public and private sector organisational cultures, and is often reflected in the nature and format of product and service procurement processes and the nature, content and format of the legal vehicles themselves – the Contracts and Agreements – that provide the framework for the collaborating. It mirrors in many ways the conclusions of the multinet management research, which established the management context of local economic development as collaborative (Agranoff and McGuire, 1998). It also puts collaborating in context, in a way that builds on the work of content management professionals as they seek to create and share information through content management (Ryan, 2003).

In the business and strategy perspective, those involved in day-to-day alliance management and relationships recognised the importance to them of the financial and economic basis for the collaborating.
The delivery perspective centres on the language, talk and discussion surrounding the importance to the perceived success of collaborative ventures between public and private sector organisations of activities carried out to help ensure the collaborating delivered its objectives. The research unearthed a mass of data from collaborators in this regard. It paralleled the increasingly common business process management practices that recognise that the need to deliver requires solutions that start with mutual objective capture that cascade through work flow, business process and context management culminating in solution delivery (Jeston and Nelis, 2006).

Finally, the people perspective linked all the other elements that made up the context, business and strategy, and delivery perspectives with its own people related elements.

Taken together these four perspectives cover every element or factor perceived by any and all of the participants as positively contributing to successful business collaborating, and likewise, to those that negatively contribute to unsuccessful collaborating. The correlation and evidence for each is compelling, and was capable of being consistently applied to each and every view, opinion and perspective talked about and perceived by the various players and participants based on their everyday experiences of the public sector business collaborating process.

The outcome is a conceptual framework of collaborating that has overlapping circles of a) context, b) business and strategy and c) delivery, with all three surrounded by d) people. The centre where the circles overlap marks the collaborating. This is shown in figure 6.2 below:
The red circle represents the context perspective. The blue circle represents the business and strategy perspective. The yellow circle represents the delivery perspective. The purple shading represents the overlap between the red context perspective circle and blue business and strategy perspective circle. The green shading represents the overlap between the blue business and strategy perspective circle and the yellow delivery perspective circle. The orange shading represents the overlap between the yellow delivery perspective circle and the red context perspective circle. The people perspective embraces all three perspectives. Where all four perspectives overlap, we have the 'white light' of successful public sector business collaborating at the heart of the conceptual framework model.
In Chapter 4, I discussed how using a social constructionist approach and research methodology increased the original 16 factors of successful business collaboration, as taken from the literature, to 105. I described how I subsequently rationalised these 105 factors into sub-elements of 16 new success factor categories. These 16 factors, and the elements they comprise, all relate to the conceptual model since they form the basis of the 4 perspectives that together fuse to make the single, holistic conceptual model and framework. For example, the 6 elements that comprise the ‘legal vehicle’ success factor, together with the 4 elements that comprise the ‘organisational culture’ factor (as set out in figure 5.1 in Chapter 5), together form the Context Perspective of the conceptual model. Similarly, the 8 elements that comprise the ‘financials’ success factor, together with the 2 ‘joint strategy development’ elements, together form the Business and Strategy Perspective (see figure 5.2). This also begins to link to problem solving and how to deliver objectives. The goal and objective setting, delivery, project management, performance monitoring, conflict resolution, communication and problem solving success factors comprise 35 different participant feedback elements that together form the Delivery Perspective (see figure 5.3). Finally, the 50 elements that between them make up the alliance management and relationships, understanding and adapting, right people and working environment, trust and commitment success factors, together comprise the People Perspective (see figure 5.4).

The participants perceived each and every one of the 105 activities that make up the 16 factors as a vital ingredient in delivering successful business collaborating, based on their experiences. The independency and interdependency of all the factors and elements highlight and reflect the complexity of the business collaborating process, and the need and practical usefulness of a holistic model to help make sense of it all.
The four perspectives that provide the framework for the conceptual model are the lenses through which the participants see their world, make sense of it, and how they create, evolve and sustain meaning.

The model links back to the fundamentals of social construction discussed in Chapter 2. In taking a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, historical and cultural specificity, and a focus on processes, especially interaction and social practices, and language as a form of social action, we are echoing the key assumptions of social constructionism as noted by Gergen (1985). At the ontological level there is a belief in multiple realities, which are constructed through the kind of interactive research adopted for this study. Gergen (1999) calls this 'collaborative inquiry'. The framework model reflects the social constructionist view of reality in that people have constructed it between them through their daily interactions in the course of social (collaborating) life (Karatas and Murphy, 2002, p. 15).

The main link between my model and the fundamentals of social construction is in its mirroring my inquiry from a social constructionist view into how certain forms of collaborating are carried out by people in interaction. The model is also underpinned by its reflection of the emphasis on the everyday interactions between people and relating as an ongoing process of construction; with language having a social function rather than private one (see Watson 1994, Burr, 1995 and Shotter 1995).

The conceptual framework also links and reflects Giddens' (1984) assumptions that human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents that reproduces the structure. This means
that there is a social structure - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently. Business collaborating, like some self-reproducing items in nature, is recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by the people within collaborating organisations, but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as collaborators. In and through their activities the people involved in business collaborating reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible (ibid, p. 2).

The conceptual framework is similar to the concept of a feasibility set, which originated in relation to contingency control (Schirik, 2003). However, I believe that by retaining the voice of the participants, and written dialogue based on their personal life experiences and their views of reality, the social constructionist stance is maintained and not slipped into systems thinking. It is also important to re-emphasise my immersion in the situation context through a continued process of participation and observation as well as interview-involved parties. The research design was not just six open, unstructured interviews, which might appear too few, though from a social constructionist standpoint I recognised that I needn’t engage with people from a particularly large number of diverse organisations for validity. The open, unstructured interviews were limited to six participants to enable depth rather than breadth of coverage. However my overall understanding was more primarily shaped by my experiences and what I’ve seen over thirty months engagement with numerous other players involved in collaborating on a day-to-day basis. This is a personal conceptualisation of what I’ve found.
To make sense of the day-to-day collaborating process and its related activities required a conceptual framework that encapsulates the research methodology that took me close to the people themselves, and which allowed close attention to the way people used language and to the context within which they worked. As a researcher I influenced the research in the very process of studying it (Karatas and Murphy, 2002). This raises an interesting conflict. By standing back and telling the reader what I’ve learned, and presenting that learning as an abstract conceptualisation, it can be argued that there’s no need for individual voice in my presentation, since I’ve absorbed all that. This raises the question: “how does social constructionism stand with that conflict?” The answer is that I’ve done two things:

- Firstly, I’m presenting here the accounts that I’ve gathered and I’m giving the reader as trustworthy an appreciation of what happened during that process by paying attention to the time and space context in which they were given to me.

- Secondly, by helping the reader understand the learning experience I was engaged in. What is happening now is that I’m telling the reader about my learning rather than the individual accounts. As a member of this process I’ve been absorbing, learning and engaging with myself as a practitioner, and this is the understanding I’ve arrived at.

The nature of what the numerous academic references mean is what I’ve captured. However, they are explaining it their way, I’m explaining it this way.
6.3 The business collaborating / cake analogy

But why didn’t my knowledge of the 16 factors derived from the original literature review help me get to the essence and make sense of the collaborating process? The answer can be usefully found by analogy of ‘successful business collaborating’ with a ‘cake’. What is a cake? What makes for a good cake? We can list the ingredients that go into make the cake. But this in itself is not enough. Clearly we need to know how much of each ingredient to include in the cake-mix. We need to understand how to best make that mix. How long do we bake the cake for? What kind of cake is it?

There are different types of cake, for different occasions, preferences and tastes, and each has its own set of ingredients and mix and baking requirements to produce ‘a perfect cake’. We may follow a recipe in a cookbook or we may work on a trial and error basis, or a gut-feel basis, or based on our previous experiences, or what our mother and grandmother taught us.

There is little doubt that the cake metaphor is well bedded within the existing academic literature. Weiszmann (2006) uses a similar cake analogy when making her case for how an existing customer service operation can support innovative product design in a manufacturing industry. She uses an analogy of the subsequent improvement in baking instructions that could occur following a complaint from a consumer using a cake mix, who follows the package instructions, but the cake fails. There’s frequent metaphorical analogy in the literature with “the icing on the cake” (Paradiso, 2002; Wysocki, 2003) and “the size of the cake” and “cutting the cake” (Warner et al, 2006) and with “recipes for business success” (Clark, 2006). Even Heller (2006) analogises on the cake metaphor when he talks of how “you can have your creative cake and eat it, blending the fruits of innovation into a continuing
business that can expand securely into a richer future. The alternative is to have no cake." Thompson (p. 183, 1995) also uses a cake analogy is his discussion on phenomenology, in particular his explanation of Husserl's (1900 and 1901) contention that, for certainty, we had to start with our own conscious awareness. What is it that we actually experience? Husserl suggested that every mental act is directed towards an 'intentional object', what the mind is thinking about, whether or not that actual object exists. Thompson gives the example "I want to eat cake. I need a physical cake if I am going to eat; but thinking about a cake requires only an 'intentional object' - indeed, I am especially likely to think about a cake when there is no actual cake to be had!" As I say, there is little doubt that the cake metaphor is well bedded within the existing academic literature.

In my analogy, business collaborating is the cake. Successful business collaborating is the good or perfect cake. The original 16 factors are the cake ingredients. Clearly, simply knowing what these factors are, describing in depth what they are, even developing a deep meaningful understanding about what they are and mean, doesn't necessarily mean we understand or describe or can implement successful business collaborating. In the same way that simply knowing what ingredients we need to make a cake necessarily guarantees or results in us producing a good or perfect cake.

Talking about communication, legal contracts and trust as individual topics and expecting that in itself to lead to an understanding and to make sense of the successful business collaborating process and experience is like talking about flour, eggs and raisons and expecting this to lead to an understanding and to make sense of what constitutes a good Eccles cake. Likewise, all collaborative ventures are different.
Adopting a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. Depending on the nature of the collaborating, the amount and mix of collaborating factors and elements can change, and having too much or too little of any particular element can influence the outcome achieved. Whilst some cakes call for less or more sugar in the mix depending on the nature of the cake, adding too much or too little can dramatically affect the outcome. This too can be analogised with many of the perspective elements and their impact on the outcomes achieved from any particular business collaborating.

I am equating the cake to collaborating as an act of becoming, rather than collaboration which can be seen as an end product. The cake analogy also helps me better understand and make sense of the public sector business collaborating process, but more importantly my hope is that it helps others understand too, i.e. it helps in my research study’s transferability to the reader to their personal situation.

6.4 The successful collaborating / good cake analogy

The analogy doesn’t end there. What is ‘good’ as in a ‘good cake’? If we wanted to explain what was meant by the colour red or orange, we could show someone a range of red or orange things. But how do you show someone a range of ‘good’ things. ‘Good’ is elusive. It’s intangible. It’s difficult to define. Moore (1903 as cited by Thompson 1995) argued that the term ‘good’ could not be defined. He likened it to describing the colour yellow, and contended that in the end you just have to point to things and say that they are yellow without being able to define yellow. You know what yellow is by intuition. In the same way, Moore contended, you know what goodness is, even though it cannot be defined.
In the business collaborating context, the analogy of a 'good' cake can be made with 'successful' business collaborating. 'Successful' is difficult to describe and define. An individual's views and perceptions of what constitutes a good cake may differ from someone else's. In the same way, different people have different views as to what they deem to be successful business collaborating. And in the same way as we can show a range of red or orange things to show what we mean by red or orange, so the collaborators have shown by way of example and based on their experiences what they understand constitutes successful business collaborating, what contributes towards its achievement and what they consider to be the important activities, both behavioural and structural, both tangible and intangible, both hard and soft factors that contribute to a successful collaborative business experience.

So we can see that in the same way that a cake is made up of certain ingredients, but those ingredients in themselves don't on their own or together help define or make sense of 'what is a cake?' so it's the same with business collaborating. Knowing the factors that contribute to successful business collaborating doesn't in itself help us understand the essence, nature and process that is successful business collaborating.

In the same way that a cake is produced by mixing different amounts of the various ingredients up in a certain way, to a certain texture, so successful business collaborating is achieved by mixing different amounts of the various factors and elements, the various activities included within each of the four key perspectives. And in the same way that a cake is then something entirely different and new, so is the successful business collaborating.
Some cakes don't look particularly good, but on eating them they taste delicious and are wholesome and nourishing. So too particular collaborating may not seem to follow the accepted norms or rules of the worldview perception of business collaborating, particularly when they seem to omit perceived best practice approaches with regard to project methodology or contract provisions. Nevertheless, these apparently dysfunctional business relationships seem to thrive and often exceed the expectations of the collaborative partners. Alternatively, a cake can look delicious but be without much in the way of substance and taste. Similarly collaborating that follows the perceived worldview rules does not guarantee itself to be successful, as evidenced by the experiences of the interview participants and as confirmed in the accounts of other people that I have spoken with during my thirty months involvement within the research process.

Further, in the same way that different mixes and different ingredients will result in different cakes, so different types of business collaborating in different contexts will need different mixes of the four perspectives and the elements and activities that they comprise.

6.5 The people perspective / flour analogy

Holding a cake together is the flour. If you leave out the butter or the eggs or some vanilla extract, you'll still produce a cake, it won't taste quite right but it will still be a cake and could still be edible and nutritious. However, if you leave the flour out it can never be a cake. The remaining ingredients don't have enough between them to produce a cake. You'll produce something, but it won't be a cake and certainly not a good cake. Holding the four perspective together is the People Perspective. If you
leave some of the activities relating to the context, business and strategy or delivery perspectives out, the collaborating might not be quite as successful but it will still be business collaborating and could still achieve some results. However, if you leave the people perspective elements and activities out, the remaining perspective activities don’t have enough between them to produce successful business collaborating. You’ll be producing something, but it won’t be business collaborating and certainly not a successful one.

From this we’re able to develop a conceptual framework and model, which helps us make sense of the public sector collaborating process from an overall social constructionist perspective. This in itself achieves half of the original research study proposition. The other half of the original proposition was that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern to those involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis as the economic and structural aspects. I believe that the research has demonstrated this to me. It is no longer of any relevance as to whether an activity is ‘hard’ or ‘soft’, tangible or intangible, behavioural or structural. All these factors, elements and activities are mixed up together, in the same way as the ingredients of a cake - a combination of hard and soft ingredients all mixed together. They are no longer relevant as individual topics of analysis or discussion on their own; only as part of a discussion of the business collaborating process and structuration as a whole.

Understanding and taking account of the conceptual framework and model can, I believe, take much of the risk, frustration and perceived failure out of the public sector business collaborating process. Its adoption by the people working for TCA is
beginning to address the risks and dilemmas outlined in Chapter 1. Whether this is
with people from other public sector organisations, or with people from the private
sector, or with both at the same time as increasingly is the case for TCA. These
changes in the behaviours and practices now adopted by my colleagues within TCA
and myself are described further in the next Chapter.

6.6 The application of the conceptual model and framework within TCA
The conceptual framework and model introduced in this Chapter 6 reflects an original
and distinctive conceptual understanding of public sector business collaborating
through analysis of collaborators’ experiences, based on a social constructionist
perspective. Understanding and taking account of the model can, I believe, take much
of the risk, frustration and perceived failure out of the public sector business
collaborating process. I am now seeing this start to unfold in practice as it is adopted
by the people working for TCA and begins to address and resolve the business
problem, dilemmas and predicament faced by the Executive and Board of TCA with
their strategy of increased collaborating with other public and private sector
organisations, and the risks they perceive that brings them, outlined in Chapter 1.
Whether this is collaborating with people from other public sector organisations, or
with people from the private sector, or with both at the same time as increasingly is
the case for TCA. A number of changes in the behaviours and practices have now
been made and adopted by myself and my colleagues within TCA based on the
literature outlined in Chapter 2 in general and the results of the research in particular,
and especially based on the four perspectives introduced in Chapter 5. These changes
are now described further, though at this point I am only able to give little snippets
and examples. Carter and Jackson (1993) contend that research results might take up
to 25 years to be incorporated into practical knowledge. I hope it does not take this
long for the people within TCA. However, in starting to see this now unfold in
practice, the next thing is to capture changes in practice and behaviour over a longer
period, as I remain a reflective practitioner researcher.

That said, my research has already begun to have a positive impact on myself and on
my colleagues at TCA. We are doing things differently as a result of the research and
my conclusions. We’re thinking more about the context, business and strategy,
delivery and people aspects and perspectives of each ongoing and proposed
collaboration. We’re thinking more about alliance management and relationships, our
partners’ needs as well as our own, and focussing on the specific goals and objectives
of each collaboration. As a team, we seem to be more focussed. There’s more of a
‘buzz’ about the place, which colleagues say is due to the conceptual model providing
“a plan to work to”, i.e. we are not just ‘winging’ it. In my experience, the people
working in public sector departments and agencies, and certainly those within TCA,
are generally uncomfortable with any idea that things are working simply to or by
chance; even if some of the participants perceive that they often are. Whilst the people
within TCA see it as a plan, I see it as a way of making sense (Weick, 1995). This
links to my discussion on learning theory in Chapter 2, in that there is an ongoing
learning process going on within TCA, which I will continue to observe and reflect
on. Things are being adapted and modified as people begin to get to grips with the
research findings. This links specifically to levels three and four of the Kirkpatrick
(1967) model of learning. Level three of the model considers changes in how learning
outcomes from the research are applied in the workplace. In this regard, I have
introduced my colleagues at TCA to the model through a number of discussions and
briefing sessions following a summary presentation to the Executive members. I have also held open discussions with members of my own team, on both a one-to-one and group basis. We have agreed to adopt the findings in an iterative, more gradual way rather than in a ‘big-bang’ way. In many respects this is consistent with Czarniawska (2003, p.354) when she reminds us of research that shows that only piecemeal, iterative changes have a chance to succeed.

Level four of the Kirkpatrick model considers changes in organisational practice and the evaluation of the organisational performance improvement as a result of the application of the change/gain that can be attributed to the research. This will be an ongoing process, however from an operational perspective we are already starting to see tangible benefits as a result of doing things differently in light of the research and its findings. We have always had a degree of due process and procedure in place, which acts as a framework on which we hang our corporate and business strategy. However, in focussing on the four perspectives and the conceptual model, we have made various changes to our behaviour and practices with regard to the way we interact and collaborate with people from other organisations. The changes we have made on a practical basis are set out in table 6.1 below under each of the four perspective headings.

<table>
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<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Changes and improvements to behaviours and practices</th>
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<td>Context</td>
<td>• Empathy – there is a proactive desire to ‘stand in our partner’s shoes’, especially our private sector partners, so as to better understand what they want and need out of collaborating. This is a ‘two-way street’, in that partners are invited to participate in the same full corporate-wide induction process as new TCA staff. This covers all aspects of who we are, what we do, what we want, need and aspire to. This is something we have never done previously.</td>
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• We have improved our strategic analysis process. The senior management and Executive team have undertaken a corporate-wide PEST, SWOT, capability, resource, customer, competition and market analysis, so as to better understand the current political, business and economic environment and market we're working in. Previously such analysis was carried out on a more departmentalised basis.

• In parallel with this we have also carried out a root and branch examination of any perceived constraints re vires, political expectations, social, economic and technological constraints. With the support of DTI we are seeking a Regulatory Reform Order to extend our powers under the 1994 Act to address any vires issues, so as to minimise restrictions and to maximise commercial opportunities. Previously we have been guilty of simply skirting around this issue. This will benefit TCA and our partners, in that we can commit fully to collaborative ventures without risk of successful litigation or other challenge from competitors that we are acting ultra vires. TCA's current address-based marketing collaboration with BeeRU has seen benefit here, where previously BeeRU questioned TCA's commitment to the ongoing business venture because of TCA vires concerns. The ongoing scanning service collaboration with iScan has similarly been able to start from April 2007 because of this initiative. Positive relationship management can often contribute to an alliance project by having the right emphasis placed on personal interaction, often leading to stronger commitment (Stanek, 2004). This is important in light of Kauser and Shaw's (2004) research conclusion that commitment is found to positively influence strategic alliance performance and managers' satisfaction with the relationship.

• Partner selection - there is now more of an analytical process with regard to the identification and scrutiny of potential partners (Kaplan and Hurd, 2002), with open communication and strong rapport amongst the players seen as key partner selection attributes. We are now relying less on just the product/service specification of our procurement process to deliver this key collaborating factor. Also, the research has helped us focus on the process to adopt and characteristics to look out for in determining the most effective partners. For example, whilst falling short of sending a due-diligence team to any potential alliance partner to formally evaluate the partner's resources and capabilities (Dyer et al. 2001), we now follow an objective, analytical identification and scrutiny of potential partners, focussing on finance, strategy, assets and capabilities, before considering such matters as cultural fit and personal rapport (Kaplan and Hurd, 2002).

• Finally, Contracts and Agreements are still seen as a vital ingredient to TCA
but have been made more robust, specifically in protecting TCA's IPR and early exit provisions, which we now seem more obsessed with (e.g. BeeRU, ESA and CapitalG contracts). That said, there seems to be more recognition (from Spekman et al, 2000) that as alliances mature, circumstances change, so there is as much emphasis on regular (not more than six monthly) reviews, not just out-clauses. The format of the contracts has been improved to comprise a tight legalise contract with bespoke schedules attached to detail actions, tasks, fees and other payments, targets, goals and other key performance and marketing objectives and monitoring arrangements. The schedules are jointly drafted with the respective partner, and aim to balance minimum bureaucracy and red-tape and maximum flexibility with robust protection of TCA's best interests. Further, we are also now prepared to initiate collaborative ventures on the basis of 'letters of intent' whilst formal contracts and agreements are finalised, rather than delay the start and miss early adopter benefits. The TCA Board and Executive are also more likely to insist on demonstration of successful pilot collaborating, with ruthless withdrawal should TCA and partner expectations not be met. This was demonstrated in late 2006 with the swift ending of the proposed TCA EPA collaborating following a perceived unsuccessful pilot and trial. Learning from Ernst and Bamford (2005) there is a tendency now to ask more penetrating questions about the performance, risk and future prospects of each collaboration (e.g. ground stability report and related business volume statistics). Many of these changes fit and link with lessons learned from Elmuti and Kathawala (2001) and Kaplan and Hurd (2002) with regard to setting clear goals and objectives and improving the co-ordination between the management teams. This links too with some of the changes described in the following Business and Strategy note.

<table>
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<th>Business and Strategy</th>
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<td>• All collaborative ventures and projects can now only proceed once a detailed business plan has been prepared and agreed by the Executive and Programme Steering Group (see Delivery below). Previously a business plan was only required for large projects. The business plan is bottom-line driven, with a checklist of headings that must at least include the following:</td>
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Business and Strategy continued

- Strategy is now linked to new High Level Objectives, introduced in September 2006, as follows:

**High Level Objective 2** - To expand the provision of coal mining reports and records and public sector information to meet the needs of the market and to use our resources and expertise to distribute electronically a range of other information.

**High Level Objective 4** – To seek out and exploit commercial opportunities, in accordance with the Government’s Wider Markets Initiative, which are within the Authority’s vires and ambit.

More importantly, learning from Garrow et al, 2000, these high level objectives are subsequently translated and cascaded into clear, short-term goals at corporate, departmental, team and individual level. Whilst this was always practised previously, the more general nature of the previous HLO’s (“to be a centre of excellence” for example) meant that any links to them were often subjective and lacked focus.

- The business case for any collaborative venture must now include clear marketing objectives, targets and measures, which represent a definition of success against which the collaborating will be monitored and judged. This is a new requirement arising from the research findings.

- Financial incentives, including profit and risk sharing arrangements, have been introduced, where appropriate, for both TCA and the partnering organisation, as a means of encouraging profit maximisation and as an incentive to minimise costs. These were previously frowned on, with the word ‘profit’ not being part of the language used. An example is with the TCA ENVision framework contract with Minewater and Reed, which provides for mutual profit sharing, cost control incentives and risk management.
Clear boundaries have now been made between traditional supplier relationships (security, postal services, etc.) and partner/collaborating relationships, which are recognised as justifying having strong alliance and relationship management processes and procedures in place consistent with the 4 perspective conceptual model and framework approach identified by this research.

- The performance of all existing and new collaborative ventures are regularly and routinely monitored, measured and reviewed to ensure delivery expectations are being met. Remedial measures are put in place to mitigate any under-performing collaborative projects and ventures. Previously, such monitoring and review occurred on an adhoc and inconsistent basis.

- A Programme Steering Group comprising senior management representatives has been formed with powers to prioritise, initiate and abandon ineffective projects and collaborative ventures, TCA corporate-wide, if room for improvement and/or targets/goals/objectives and related expectations are not being met and/or delivered. Learning from Kaplan and Hurd (2002) the senior management teams from each party periodically jointly review the overall alliance objectives, and modify these if necessary, especially in response to changing market circumstances (e.g. ground stability report initiative). This parallels the recommendation of Inkpen (2000) to carry out regular reviews given alliances can tend to evolve in ways the parties did not predict when the alliance was formed. An example is with the TCA CapitalG collaborating, which started as a supplier contract before moving to become a true partnership, but which has moved back, recently, to a supplier contract when the partnership suffered with lack of trust, changing personnel and a move to each party developing its own different aims and objectives.

- The corporate risk register and related procedures and processes have been reviewed and amended to ensure that business collaborating issues are taken into account. All risks to unsuccessful delivery are identified, quantified for likelihood and impact, and controls put in place to tolerate, treat or transfer the risk. The controls are then monitored and reviewed. This is an extension of the existing risk management process.

- Goals and objective setting has become further embedded within the collaborating paradigm, driven by business case/plan and marketing objectives [links to business and strategy perspective]. Learning from Ring (2000) the objectives aim to be mutually advantageous and realistic. We are also setting objectives to track success, with specific performance measurements and targets (e.g. BeeRU and GSR collaborations), defining processes (BeeRU), and planning to enhance interpersonal networks (ESA),
which links to some of the People changes discussed below.

- There is also now more effort put into managing the perception gap between expectation and results, caused by both over expectation and under delivery, with the aim of avoiding both. This links directly to goals and objectives setting and is a new practice arising from the research findings.

- The project management resource has been increased and improved by the recruitment of 2 full-time professional project managers. The 2007-08 training needs analysis has identified and put in place increased project management training for existing staff, particularly PRINCE2 project methodology and management training. This particular project methodology has been used most recently in the successful TCA, ESA, BSB and CCC collaborating on the development and introduction of a new single, national mining and ground stability report for homebuyers and sellers.

- Whilst TCA already operate a no-blame-culture, conflict management resolution has been improved by a proactive 'talk-talk' approach to problem solving and conflict resolution, and particularly to actively manage conflicting aims (see Vangen and Huxham, 2005). An example of where this has been successful is with the ongoing collaborating with ESA; where it has been less so was with the collaborating with GroundStation and EPA. Whilst this particular collaborating was given every chance, in the end it was decided better to ‘agree to disagree’ and the collaborating was terminated in late 2006. It was also less than successful with the TCA CapitalG collaborating, which is now more of a supplier relationship than a true partnership following recent difficulties. An ongoing issue with ESA about copyright and IPR protection is currently testing the relationship, though both parties are working hard to keep the conflict more constructive than negative it is noticeable that both organisations are increasingly referring to their own lawyers for advice and solution. Spekman et al (2000) would probably disagree with this approach. They suggest a number of conflict resolution techniques including their patented No Blame Review process, which is a collaborative process of conflict resolution, during which, as the title suggests, fault or blame is completely absent. The No Blame Review process encourages the partners to examine the whole of the alliance, in an objective fashion, to jointly assess and deal with areas of concern and disagreement. Least effective of the other conflict resolution techniques suggested are using external mediators, resorting to harsh words, having lawyers craft solutions and referring to contracts for remedy. Most effective is working hard to resolve problems, talking openly and honestly, joint problem solving and trying to convince partners. However, conflict resolution does not necessarily ensure a sustained relationship. Successful
<table>
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<td>• The science and art of effective alliance management and relationships is being given much more thought and consideration from the earliest stages in our collaborating processes. This has never happened before. Previously we simply relied on our standard public sector based procurement process. Existing ventures are also being critically reviewed to improve performance in this regard.</td>
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<td>• More time, effort and care is taken to ensure each collaboration has the right people working on it and that these are kept together, in both the TCA and partner organisations, for the duration of the collaborative venture. Changes in personnel now only follows an extensive knowledge transfer and induction programme for replacement team members. Previously this knowledge transfer was only carried out where specific ICT or other similar specialist knowledge was required and formed part of the operational process.</td>
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<td>• Providing it is clearly quantified and justified in the original business case, sufficient funding is available for collaborating, including contingency funding where this can be critically demonstrated to be justified. This is not really a change over previous practice, however, the research work highlighted a common theme amongst participants that insufficient funding and contingency was occurring regularly, so facilitated a review of how funding was identified and agreed.</td>
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<td>• A new programme of in-house training and coaching is proposed, following ‘train the trainer’ courses where required, by those people perceived to be the best re effective interaction and positive collaborative behaviours, for example discussing what we each mean by terms like trust, commitment and openness in the context of the collaborating and the perceived practical importance of them in maximising delivery. Previously we have always relied on outside trainers. Now we only do this where we do not have our own trainers and coaches in place.</td>
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<td>• There seems to be more recognition that alliances are about people, with lots more social get-togethers (learning from Spekman et al, 2000) especially between the management teams (from Kaplan and Hurd, 2002). People from the respective partnering organisations get together earlier in developing strategy and identifying opportunities. Recent examples include the ongoing collaborating with BeeRU and ESA, where both parties jointly prepared the business case, including the objectives, delivery outcomes and performance measures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Each partnering organisation has a main point of contact for each specific resolution might be alliance dissolution, as with the recently unsuccessful EPA collaborating.</td>
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People continued collaboration to ensure communication is channelled, focussed and effective. Previously this has not always been the case. I am the point of contact for a number of our ongoing collaborative ventures, including those with BeeRU, Mapping Agency, and our new insurance brokers. Learning from Berquist (1995) the dialogue is frequent and open, with a respect for differences of opinion. Notwithstanding the comments made about contracts in the Context section above, there seems to be an acknowledgement from the people within TCA (learning from Harrigan, 1986) that alliances often fail because operating managers do not make them work, not because contracts are poorly written. More effort seems to be being taken learning from the advice of Harper, 2001, that there is a need to agree how best to work together.

- There has been an attempt to proactively reduce the number of people attending routine meetings, which, balanced with thoughtful communication channels attempts to minimise the time spent in meetings whilst maximising the output and momentum of the overall collaborating process, particular during the early stages where it is possible to get bogged down in detail and information overload. The professional project managers and experienced senior managers are leading this initiative.

- The product and service procurement process, whilst fully meeting public sector due diligence requirements, has been improved to ensure that the people at TCA only deal with those people who will be involved in the collaborating on a day-to-day basis, and not dealing with just a negotiating team as has sometimes happened previously. The recent re-tender for insurance broker services piloted this particular initiative. This parallels Stanek’s (2004) approach to ensuring that the right people are involved in the collaborating process from conception.

- ‘Getting to know you’ sessions are being piloted within certain new and ongoing collaborations, with a view to getting everyone involved in the collaborating on a day-to-day basis together more regularly in more social settings. Previously people simply got to know each other as and if and when they were required to physically work together on a particular task or project. This links to the Context perspective re our attempts to encourage and improve mutual empathy and understanding between the people within each partnering organisation.

Table 6.1: Changes in behaviour and practices within TCA with regard to the way the people within TCA interact and collaborate with people from other organisations.
The conceptual model and framework has been used as the foundation and focus of a critical review and analysis of TCA’s ongoing collaborations. As a consequence, various changes have been made in our behaviour and practices with regard to the way we interact and collaborate with people from other organisations. These have been described in table 6.1 above. Each ongoing and proposed collaboration has been individually considered in the context of the four perspectives, i.e. against the context, business and strategy, delivery, and people aspects and perspectives. Where gaps in collaborating best practice have been identified, whether as taken from the literature or the research participant feedback, these have been addressed as described in table 6.1. In certain instances, changes were made in general, i.e. to a number of collaborations, or adopted as corporate-wide best practice. In other instances, bespoke changes were made in the working practices of specific collaborations. Whilst each collaboration was considered in isolation, for practical purposes I have merged them in table 6.1 under each of the conceptual model and framework perspective headings, i.e. context, business and strategy, delivery and people perspectives, so as to give the reader a better overall flavour of the types of changes that have been made through a focus on each of the perspectives of the conceptual model.

6.7 The wider application of the conceptual model and framework

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the independency and interdependency of all the many and varied factors and elements that need to be taken into account in order to maximise the chances of collaborating success, highlight and reflect the complexity of the business collaborating process, and the benefits of adopting a holistic approach to help make sense of it all. The purpose of the model and framework is to help practitioners in the wider public sector arena make such sense of the public/private
sector business collaborating process. On a practical level, those public sector individuals, and their private sector partners, involved in collaborating on a day-to-day basis should review each of their proposed and ongoing business collaborations against the conceptual model and framework. This work should be done together, since, based on the fundamental principles of social constructionism, new, useful, shared knowledge and insights will be constructed between the collaborators. They will also better understand the context within which each of them separately needs to work, and empathise accordingly in developing their joint working approach.

Firstly, the collaborators should consider the context within which the business collaboration will work, and identify the critical issues, risks and key elements that will have the greatest impact and influence on the collaboration and their aim for a successful outcome. This includes the need to understand and adjust to both the political and business environment, to adapt to different public and private sector organisational cultures, and will often be reflected in the nature, content and format of the legal vehicle itself – the Contracts and Agreement – that provides the framework for the collaborating. Issues such as the public sector body statutory requirements, core competences, internal and external stakeholder issues might also be usefully considered. Overlaps with the business and strategy perspective might be recognised as the collaborators carry out market, competitor, and resource and capability analysis.

They can then focus on the financial and economic basis for the collaborating - the business and strategy perspective – and again identify and address the critical issues. These may be concerned with various financial issues, for example, income
generation, funding decisions, pricing policy, bonuses and penalties, objectives and incentives, profit levels, return on investment, value for money and cost effectiveness; various legal issues, including vires, governance, probity and practicality; together with issues surrounding feasibility, IPR and copyright, and business plan requirements. It will impact directly on how the people within each organisation need to operate. Often it will link with the delivery and context perspectives as and when issues such as procurement, consistency with public sector mission and spending limits are discussed. This overlap is inevitable and highlights the practical benefit of the model and its recognition of overlapping perspectives.

The experiences of the collaborators involved in the research would suggest that consideration of the delivery perspective will highlight many relevant issues, risks, factors and elements that the collaborators need consider and address to maximise the chance of the collaboration successfully delivering its objectives. This might include issues concerned with clear and common objectives and a joint definition of ‘success’, represented by performance targets, marketing objectives and monitoring arrangements; clear descriptions of business requirements, conflict resolution and project management; operational issues, control, and risk analysis and mitigation. Where financial objectives and appraisal is considered, this links back to the financial elements of the business and strategy perspective.

Finally, the collaborators need consider the ‘people perspective’, which will link the elements that made up the context, business and strategy, and delivery perspectives with people related elements. This will include issues relating to alliance management and relationships, team working, the availability of key personnel and the right
working environment. The talk may centre on topics relating to sustainability, challenge, keeping people satisfied and variety of work.

The conceptual model and framework in itself does not seek to provide a prescriptive one-size-fits-all collaboration checklist. Instead, it provides a practical tool that can assist public and private sector collaborators conduct a bespoke assessment (between them preferably) of potential collaboration issues and success factors, and create their own checklist for each of their individual collaborations. This links to one of the fundamental principles to remember in adopting and utilising the conceptual model and framework, i.e. to use it to identify key issues, risks, factors, elements and variables for each and every separate collaboration. Whilst certain elements relating to the four perspectives may present a common theme, each different collaboration context, business and strategy, deliverables and people involved in it are likely to differ, by lesser and greater degrees, such that it is not practically useful to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach.

The second principle to keep in mind is to regularly review each collaboration against the model, so as to best reflect the inevitable changes in the external business and political environment (context), financial and economic (business and strategy) and delivery and people aspects and elements. This is a continuous process. The advantage of the model here is that, by keeping just the four perspectives in mind, it is possible to continually and insightfully reflect on all the vast and complex elements, factors, variables, risks and issues that make up the complex nature of the business collaborating process. Using the holistic model to make sense of the collaborating process and the four perspectives to identify and address problems, dilemmas and
predicaments as they inevitably arise. In this way, it is possible to minimise the risk of collaboration failure and maximise the chances of collaborative success.
Chapter 7

Research Conclusions and critical reflection

7.1 Research Conclusions

The conceptual framework and model introduced and described in Chapter 6 reflects an original and distinctive conceptual understanding of public sector business collaborating through analysis of collaborators' experiences, based on a social constructionist perspective. Understanding and taking account of the model can, I believe, take much of the risk, frustration and perceived failure out of the public sector business collaborating process.

I have described in Chapter 6 how I am now seeing this start to unfold in practice as it is adopted by the people working for TCA and begins to address and resolve the business problem, dilemmas and predicament faced by the Executive and Board of TCA with their strategy of increased collaborating with other public and private sector organisations, and the risks they perceive that brings them, outlined in Chapter 1. The changes we have made on a practical basis were set out in table 6.1 under each of the four perspective headings.

The study also offers significant and original contributions to professional knowledge and practice, with reference to existing knowledge, through a deeper exploration of the social construction processes of public sector collaborating. Even though I have gathered and presented both quantitative and qualitative data, social constructionism drove my data gathering methodology and my analysis was carried out within a social constructionist context.
In recognising that individuals have personal perspectives, and that knowledge and learning is being created and sustained by social interaction, my research study has needed to demonstrate a reflexive understanding of their adopted research position (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Reflexivity has been integral to the nature and meaning of quality and credibility within the study. My interactions with and subjective perceptions of the research process and data have been part of the interpretive process, and I remain a reflective practitioner researcher.

I contend that the social constructionist framework provides a way of looking at public sector business collaborating that can both complement and broaden the 'world view' literature research to date. I also believe that analysis based on deeper, more probing conversation, as part of the researcher immersing themselves within the research environment, including unstructured depth interview as a secondary data gathering method, supplementing one’s own reflective diary as the primary instrument, and the capture of real-time thought from the participants, through observation at their business meetings, as they engaged in their activities, and through talk and other interaction with business partners, had potentially useful practical implications and resulting application for all those involved in any business related research process.

I believe this approach has generated credible, useful knowledge that can now be practically applied to address the dilemmas, problems and predicament of the individuals involved in business collaborating at TCA and a wider application within the public sector arena overall. I have structured this dissertation submission to outline my research strategy, design and collection methods, analysis and interpretation methods, and presentation and write-up, to deliver this outcome. I have
used Marshall and Rossman (2000, p. 22) to ensure the ongoing quality of my work (see Appendix 10), linked to a reflective/reflexive diary, since it was important that I had a process that forced an ongoing check on my actions as a researcher.

This research assignment has also considered the strengths and weaknesses, and critically assessed the appropriateness, of different approaches to research, analyse, interpret and present knowledge derived from a research study, carried out from a social constructionist perspective, into the behavioural and structural factors that contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and perception of 'successful' business collaborating. The phenomenon of business collaborating from the perspectives of those who experience it has formed the focus of my enquiry. This dissertation has outlined the data management, analysis and presentation issues raised by the research project and has sought to justify the appropriateness of the methodology and management processes adopted to address these issues. I have also included critical reflection on the type and nature of the research questions, the choice of methodology, the data management processes and the writing processes used in the research project.

Throughout the dissertation, reference has been made to my literature review and pilot research project, and in particular, on the lessons learned from that pilot project that I have taken into account in my research study. I was mistaken in my belief that a full and comprehensive literature review would provide me with all the answers to improve the outcomes of the business alliances that the individuals working for TCA (and in our partnering organisations) propose entering into. There were still significant gaps in the knowledge needed to find the solutions to their predicament and dilemmas previously identified with regard to business collaborating. The
collaborating knowledge gap analysis diagram at Figure 7.1 highlights this diagrammatically.

Figure 7.1: TCA collaborating knowledge gap analysis diagram

The vast majority of literature is presented from a perspective that embraces what I consider now to be a naïve positivist notion that scientifically factual fixed reality is 'out there'. The challenge to me was to find a research methodology that better reflected my changing perspective and that could help me make better sense of the literature in general and mine and my colleagues' problems and predicament with business collaborating in particular. I believe that perspective has subsequently been provided by social constructionism.

I was also mistaken in my subsequent attempt to conduct quantitative research during my pilot research study carried out to test the feasibility of the research methodology used (questionnaire and semi-structured interviews), as a precursor to the same research methodology being used more extensively and comprehensively within my
main DBA project research work. It failed to provide any insight into why the respondents considered, perceived and held the positions and views they did or what they actually meant by terms like ‘communication’ or ‘control’, when discussing factors contributing to successful collaborating. It highlighted the limitations of quantitative analysis alone and the merits and benefits of including additional qualitative data collection and analysis.

There was an opportunity and need to go deeper, to probe more - in my opinion to take a social constructionist perspective and more emic approach in examining how the individuals see and categorise their world. I believe that the social constructionist framework provides a way of looking at business collaborating that has been largely ignored in the literature research to date. I also believe that analysis based on a social constructionist framework of deeper, more probing conversation, including unstructured depth interview as a supplementary data gathering method, supporting a reflective diary and real-time thought capture from the participants, has potentially useful practical implications and resulting application for all those involved in the business collaborating process.

The original literature review provided 16 factors that contributed to successful business collaborating. My research increased this to 105 factors. I rationalised this further to 78, then to 62 factors and finally back to 16 factors – albeit a different 16 factors than I started with. It was then that I realised that I was not doing justice to all the base elements, the 105 individual factors. In my drive for simplicity I was overlooking the very essence of all my research data, i.e. each and every activity perceived by the participants is a vital ingredient in delivering successful business collaborating based on their experiences. I realised that it wasn’t appropriate to just
think about the 'top 20 hits'. I needed to consider all the others in order to reflect the complexity, independency and interdependency of all the factors and elements. Each individual participant has their own perspective, and whilst these may follow certain patterns to some extent, they do not necessarily do so completely. I needed to cut the data differently, in different ways. More specifically I needed to cut the data from the point of view of what it means to be a social constructionist. I needed to consider how the participants were creating, evolving and sustaining meaning. I needed to consider what new social constructionist construct I could create.

I believe I have found the answer in what I describe as the four key perspectives of the public sector business collaborating process. These are:

- The context perspective
- The business and strategy perspective
- The delivery perspective
- The people perspective

Taken together these four perspectives cover every element or factor perceived by any and all of the research participants as positively contributing to successful business collaborating, and likewise, to those that negatively contribute to unsuccessful collaborating. The evidence of the connection between each and every different element and factor and its link to one or more of the four perspectives is compelling, and was capable of being consistently applied to each and every view, opinion and perspective talked about and perceived by the various players and participants based on their everyday experiences of the public sector business collaborating process.
I was subsequently able to develop a conceptual framework based on these four perspectives (see Chapter 6), and a cake analogy that helps me better understand and make sense of the public sector business collaborating process. More importantly my hope is that it helps others understand too, i.e. it helps in my research study’s transferability to the reader to their personal situation.

I could also develop a conceptual framework for each of the perspectives, made up of the various activities and elements that they comprise, i.e. the 105 elements of public sector business collaborating identified from my observations and the accounts of numerous players that I have engaged with and interviewed during my thirty months involvement within the research process, as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting on a day-to-day basis.

There was a need for me to be ruthless with the amount of ‘voice’ that I presented in this final written dissertation of the research project. Otherwise it made the dissertation far too long and I recognised the need for me to be more succinct, to be more to the point, to get across the problematic issue that I’m trying to get across to the reader. However, I couldn’t do that without giving full voice to the research participants first. In being ruthless with the voice, I hope to have explained the process more pragmatically and more effectively.

In the final analysis, my personal reflexivity leads me to the view that successful public sector business collaborating, however it’s defined, is more to do with people working together to make things happen and making the collaborating work, than it is to any other single or mixture of factors. My justification of the appropriateness of my research and analysis methodology, and my results and conclusions, is that it is
compatible with my overall social constructionist research approach and perspective. My journey from critical realist to social constructionist has generated and delivered credible, useful knowledge, by means of the conceptual model and framework, that can be practically applied to address not only the dilemmas, problems and predicament that the individuals working at TCA (and in our partnering organisations) have and find themselves in with regard to business collaborating, but it can help others working in both public and private sector collaborative contexts address their similar dilemmas, problems and predicaments. I believe that the new knowledge and what has happened with TCA is transferable because the source of the new knowledge was grounded in the experiences of the various participants from both the public and private sector based on their experiences, between them, of working with numerous organisations other than TCA. In this way the research study has contributed new insights and unique knowledge to extend the boundaries of both the existing academic and the management policy literature on business collaborating and alliance management.

7.2 Critical reflection

7.2.1 Introduction

Linking to the discussion in Chapter 2 on learning theory in general, and on the processes and development of reflection and reflective practitioners in particular (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Schön, 1983; Smith, 2001; Czarniawska, 2003), I have recognised a need to reflect on my research process and on the knowledge I have achieved and present these in a systematic manner which provides clarity with respect to the rigor and integrity of the research. This final section of the dissertation aims to do this. It is written in the first person, consistent with the personal nature of the reflection, and starts from the time I decided to undertake the doctorate study.
Two events inspired my decision to undertake a doctorate. The first was the completion and award of my Masters degree, which in itself had been the realisation of an ambition shaped by my having left school at eighteen with unfulfilled academic achievements and a feeling of guilt and dissatisfaction that stayed with me for some considerable time. Whilst this was addressed to some extent when I subsequently achieved Chartered Surveyor status in my work life, my subsequently successful journey through a business management programme, a post-graduate degree in business management and my MBA left me with the realisation that with ‘one more step’ I could reach what I considered to be the pinnacle of academic achievement – a doctorate. I would never again feel academically inferior to those Grammar School friends and colleagues who went to Oxford, Cambridge and the like.

Secondly, I had a problem at work with a number of collaborative ventures that were not delivering what I was tasked with delivering for my organisation. The journey to my MBA had delivered significant benefits to me personally, in the sense of career progression, and I’d also successfully made the transformation from specialist surveyor to more generalist business manager. It also delivered real, tangible, bottom-line benefits to my organisation, through improved overall business performance, product development, sales and service delivery, delivered on the back of the proactive application of my new found knowledge and skills.

Consequently I put together and presented a proposal to my Executive for sponsorship of a doctorate research study into public sector business collaborating. I was prepared to carry out the research on the win-win negotiated basis that ‘I’d put up the time if they put up the money’ and presented my track record of achievement delivered on the back of my previously sponsored journey to MBA. My Executive agreed to the
proposal, on condition that I focussed on identifying ways that minimised the risk of
TCA's collaborating and strategic alliances with other public and private sector
organisations failing.

7.2.2 The DBA programme

As a philosophical perspective, social constructionism is something that I only
developed an awareness of as I progressed the research, rather than having a firm
view on at the beginning. It is a perspective that subsequently permeated my whole
research process and is constantly referred to throughout this dissertation. However, at
the start of the doctorate programme I was confused as to whether I was and would
adopt a social constructionist, positivist realist, narrative, interpretive,
phenomenological or even ethnographical stance. I struggled with the meanings of
these terms and with other doctoral research language and terms. I understood from
my tutors that I would subsequently need to relate the purpose of my research data to
my own epistemological, ontological and axiological stance, however I did not even
begin to properly understand what these words even meant let alone relate the purpose
of my data to them! This raised early questions and doubts as to whether I could meet
the challenge of this new level of thinking. I realised too from my MBA experiences
that, whilst I seemingly had three or four years to discover my perspective, stance and
research character, time would pass very quickly.

I was also guilty of trying to research too wide a subject area. I knew that 'business
collaborating' was the area of expertise that I wanted to master, but my research
questions were too wide and impractical to work to. This became most clear through
my literature review when the vastness of the topic area became plain. I am indebted
to my tutors for pointing this out to me early in the programme and helping me to
focus down to a more credible, manageable and meaningful boundary of research question.

A further area of the doctoral process that I struggled with in the early days was the practical concept of personal reflection. This was something that I was quite uncomfortable with. I am fine with the concept of critical review, lessons learned and double loop learning when it comes to business, operational and project work. However, I have always been uncomfortable with the idea of personal reflection. I haven’t the time. It’s too selfish of my time. Too self-centred. Most of all it’s too uncomfortable. I’d much rather be doing than thinking and reflecting. And if I do indulge in a little self-reflection, I’m certainly not looking to share my feelings with anyone else! However, the importance of reflection, and in particular self reflection, was stressed early on by my tutors and it became something that I worked at, persevered with, developed a habit for, and subsequently gained a tremendous amount of satisfaction, knowledge, learning and personal insight as a result. I believe it has helped me to develop, grow and improve at a practical work and operational level, but more importantly, at an intellectual, behavioural and personal level.

I believe that the Kirkpatrick (1967) model for the evaluation of learning and development outcomes provides a useful theoretical framework for my personal reflection on the doctoral programme. This model defines four levels of outcomes:

1. Learners’ reactions and evaluation of the educational and development experience;
2. Learning, conceptualised mainly as the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the evaluation of the change/gain as a result of the development experience;

3. Behaviour change, including the evaluation of the application of the change/gain as a result of the development experience and the application of learning to the work setting; and

4. Results, assessed in relation to intended outcomes and in particular the evaluation of the organisational performance improvement as a result of the application of the change/gain from the development experience.

The advantage of Kirkpatrick's model is that it focuses attention on different levels of evaluation and rightly implies that a comprehensive approach should be concerned with all these levels. Thus, it would be insufficient for me to simply reflect and evaluate the doctoral programme according to whether or not I enjoyed the presentations and found them informative (the satisfaction questionnaire), or to assume that it is adequate to establish that I acquired particular skills, in research methods, for example, without investigating whether or not I am now able to transfer those skills to practice.

The model is a linear progressive one which I can use to reflect on how the doctoral programme has enhanced my professional competence and contributed in turn to improved organisational effectiveness. Reflection based on these four levels also helps me to demonstrate that the learning outcomes, competences and attitudes the doctoral programme has sought to engender have become embedded.

Reflections at each of the four levels is outlined and discussed in the next section.
7.2.3 Reflection based on the Kirkpatrick (1967) model and approach

7.2.3.1 Level one reflections

Level One of the Kirkpatrick model encourages me to explore my reactions, satisfaction and feelings about my doctoral journey and development experiences. The highlights and the low points. These are delineated, clarified and explained using the following learning chart.

Figure 7.2: Reflections on learning experience, satisfaction with doctoral programme and feelings and emotions based on Level One of the Kirkpatrick model (1967).

I started the programme and first module, Leading Edge Management, in an optimistic mood, buoyed by the excitement of the development journey I was about to embark on and with the full financial support of my employers, TCA, and moral support of my family to depend on, I simply had to find the time! My research topic – business collaborating – was something that I am passionate about and enjoy, so the idea of being able to spend time researching the world literature about it was something I really looked forward to and attacked with relish. The late nights during the week and long hours at weekend were bearable because I was finding out so much that was new to me. The learning experience was a little disconcerting however, with so much new language to understand. At this stage the doctoral programme was everything I had been advised it would be. I had good support from my tutors, whom I
knew from my earlier MBA studies, and in whom I had complete confidence. My resultant B grade, “a good opening barrage” and “sound foundation for the study” was encouraging, tempered by the realisation that there was so much literature on business collaborating and alliance management that I needed to focus as tightly as possible on a much smaller area more specifically related to TCA’s problems and predicament. I also realised that I needed to tone down my critical appraisal of other writers when my critique started to become more personal than constructive. My tutors duly clarified the difference and expectations of me with regard to achieving a more effective and balanced critique, for which I was grateful.

Incentivised by my B grade, I applied myself to the Management Research Methods Module and quickly realised the quantum leap in writing at MBA level to that expected at doctoral level. I enjoyed the three-day module, particularly the practical work. The “examination of the pigs can fly hypothesis in a Scottish context” was both enjoyable and constructive and I learned a lot from the exercise. However, I found the challenge of understanding the many and varied research methods available for studying problems in business settings, then identifying, justifying and giving a clear coherent account of a specific programme of research for my particular research project, to be tough. Because of this my resultant grade B was particularly satisfying and I was pleased that my new tutor, Bill Murphy, considered my work to be “of good quality, revealing perceptive and critical insights into the design of a research programme and the application of discipline-related research methods.” My learning experience, satisfaction with the programme and personal feelings and emotion were all on the up. This despite a degree of inconsistency that was coming into my thinking and work as I struggled to decide which research ‘camp’ to put myself into. I took some comfort in the fact that I was at least finding value in appreciating the many
aspects of the research design from various research perspectives...or maybe I was just deluding myself.

My sense of emotional wellbeing and enthusiasm would seem to have peaked during and immediately following the next Research Practice and Consulting Module. I found myself in my element with the practical research consulting exercise carried out at Abacus Lighting of Sutton-in-Ashfield in Nottinghamshire. I feel I learned more in the three days of this particular module and exercise than I had in the previous three months. One of the key lessons that I learned from meeting, talking with and listening to the various different people at Abacus, was that there is no one story or reality as to ‘what works?’ or ‘what’s going on?’. On reflection I believe that this, together with the lessons learned from my subsequent Negotiated Module Assignment, went a long way to my adoption of a social constructionist perspective and approach to the research study. My learning experience and satisfaction with the doctoral programme increased accordingly. My resulting Grade B was the icing on the cake, though my tutor, Bill Murphy, kept my feet on the ground with his opinion that “the potential for more is evident”.

Year two started with the Negotiated Module Assignment and the opportunity to carry out a self-managed research project using practical work-place research methods within the work-place environment. I used this research project as a pilot research study to help me explore and better determine the value, suitability and feasibility of my (then) proposed research methods – questionnaire and interviews – as data collection techniques useful to gather data to analyse and interpret on a more extensive and comprehensive scale within my main DBA project research work, such as to provide answers and solutions to my doctoral research questions.
My learning experience and satisfaction with the doctoral programme continued to increase, since again I was learning so much from the practical application of the theoretical knowledge I had acquired so far through the programme, with my research skills being honed through the practical real-life research work I was carrying out and experiencing. Learning also resulted from the critical reflection required at the conclusion of the research study. However, the positive emotional high that I experienced carrying out the research plummeted on the realisation that, after five months of hard work, the pilot study didn’t seem to go far enough or deep enough to the root of TCA’s problem and predicament outlined in Chapter 1. This is not to say that the research was entirely without merit. Indeed, my subsequent quantitative analysis gave me some fascinating results and insights, as discussed previously in Chapter 3, and I achieved a Grade B for my assignment submission. However, the research study failed to provide any insight into why the respondents considered, perceived and held the positions and views they did. Neither could I fully understand what the respondents actually meant by terms like ‘communication’ or ‘control’, when discussing factors contributing to successful collaborating. Whilst I went some way to exploring these issues, and some way in shifting the balance of power to the respondents, with an open question at the end of each questionnaire and semi-structured interview asking, “In your own words, how would you describe successful collaborating?” it highlighted the limitations of quantitative analysis alone and the merits and benefits of including additional qualitative data collection and analysis. The analysis sought patterns across the participants and the interpretation of the data lost their association with context, space and time and the individual’s personal construction of meaning. Similarly, I was beginning to realise that ‘successful’ business collaborating seems to be spoken of in the literature as an actual material entity. It isn’t. Successful collaborating is a social construction, which can’t exist

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except from the ways people talk about it. This subsequently compelled a need in my research to somehow capture the individual’s voice, natural language and discourse of the participants involved in such collaborating, and then to analyse and make sense of what they were saying. The challenge was to find a research methodology that better reflected my own changing personal perspective and helped me make better sense of the literature in general and the problems and predicament that individuals working for TCA are finding with business collaborating in particular. I concluded that the issue wasn’t one of quantitative versus qualitative approaches but a single objective reality versus multiple realities, which are co-constructed through interaction. This led to my subsequent adoption of a social constructionist perspective and approach to the research study.

The downward spiral in my mood continued throughout the Managing Change and Transformation Assignment. So to, for the first time, was my satisfaction with the doctoral programme and learning experience. Ironically, transformation and change is a subject that I have a passion for. It is a continuing theme within my work environment and formed the backbone of my Masters dissertation. This is where my problem with the module lay. I felt that the module did not contribute to the doctoral journey I was on with. It was a distraction. It was old ground. I felt I wasn’t learning anything new and that my time could be better spent in getting on with the more pressing task, in my mind, of putting my research methodology and perspective back on track following the significant conclusions arising from my Negotiated Module Assignment and my journey and evolution from critical realist to social constructionist. I was grateful for the B grade for my work, since this showed to me that I had still worked diligently, acted professionally and produced work to a good standard. However, my downward feelings were further exacerbated by the
constructive feedback and insight from my tutors who, whilst happy that I'd met the learning outcomes, were “not wholly convinced you have internalised your own perspective, but this essay must have been an important event in thinking about ontological and epistemological issues.” This was somewhat of an understatement.

Recovery began with the Praxis and Academic Writing Module, which provided an opportunity to critically assess the appropriateness of approaches for managing knowledge and undertaking particular types of research analysis. It was also an opportunity to ‘out’ the mistakes and lessons learned along the way in previous assignments. The systematic approach to reviewing the work so far provided, according to one of my work assessors, David Rae, “an insightful and reflective integration of the progress made”, and I again achieved a Grade B for my submission. A minor hiccup with the doctoral programme process occurred when my original submission was lost at the University, which meant I needed to resubmit further copies so only received my grade and feedback five months later. Given that I expect these things to happen occasionally, this didn’t impact too severely on my satisfaction with the doctoral programme. However, the experience did act as a precursor to another downward trend in my emotional state and feelings, and with my satisfaction with the doctoral programme, when circumstances meant that I lost the services of my main University tutor and mentor, Bill Murphy, for a number of months during 2006, at the time of my work on the Practice Based Assignment.

As a learning experience, the Practice Based Assignment ticked all the boxes. All the hard work and effort, and the knowledge and skills that I had learned over the previous two years, could now be focussed on my main doctoral research investigation into public sector business collaborating from a social constructionist
perspective. I feel that it was during this time that I made the quantum leap to doctoral level research, thinking and writing. However, my emotional state and feelings were at a low ebb for much of the post-research and analysis period because of my frustration at my perceived lack of consistent support from my tutors and mentors because of challenges and changes in their own working environments and personal circumstances. I believe I am very skilled at using my initiative and working on my own, however, at such an important part of doctoral journey I would have much preferred, for purely selfish reasons, support ‘on tap’ as and when I needed it. Clearly the reality of the business and academic world is not always able to facilitate this, though I’m probably a stronger person for surviving the times when I needed advice and direction, especially when I was drowning in research information and struggling to make sense of it all. My first Grade C mark was a blip on my straight B’s to date, and affirmed for me that whilst I was on the right lines for a doctoral award there was room for improvement and I couldn’t be complacent. Fortunately, complacency isn’t in my nature. I was pleased that my assignment feedback confirmed that I had met the learning outcomes and criteria for the Practice Based Assignment with a “significant piece of work” that “demonstrated the presence of an original contribution to professional practice in the field of business collaborating.” This was important and encouraging feedback because the new conceptual model and framework, which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process, is something that I am both excited and proud of. The biggest challenge I had was a requirement to completely re-write my literature review for my final dissertation from a social constructionist perspective, as against my original critical realist perspective adopted back on the initial Leading Edge Management Module.
The final dissertation has seen everything back on track from a learning perspective, my satisfaction with the doctoral programme and from a personal point of view. My enthusiasm was rekindled, my resolve hardened, and with the excellent support of my University mentors, Bill Murphy and Christine Jones, and my fellow doctoral companions, I was focussed on the challenge of the final dissertation write-up. The benefit of submitting an early initial draft of each of my module assignment submissions for review and feedback has, to my mind, always helped ensure that the quality of my final work meets all the necessary academic requirements and doctoral standards. I continued with this practice for the final write-up through to submission of a final draft in good time ahead of the deadline for completion and final viva. On submission I felt an immense sense of fulfilment, pride and achievement, and a sense of belonging to the academic world, not just the business and commercial world.

7.2.3.2 Level two reflections

Level two of the Kirkpatrick model is an important part of the reflection process because it considers the change or gain attributable to my completing the doctoral programme, with the outcomes relating to the changes in my attitude and perceptions, the skills, knowledge and behaviours I feel I have acquired and developed, and my feelings as to how I may have changed.

I now confidently believe that I have developed the skill and knowledge to carry out research at a doctoral level. I am no longer put off by any perceived academic or intellectual complexity. My research work will be thorough, well-evidenced and grounded in best-practice and academic rigour. I feel that I not only perform at a higher level, I believe that I project a more confident image that I am doing so.
I have learned the skill of critical review and appraisal, of seeking substantiating
evidence, and the knowledge and confidence to constructively challenge the thinking
of others, regardless of who they are. I am comfortable working to tight deadlines
whilst maintaining a high standard of research work, analysis and reporting. I am also
increasingly comfortable working within the often ambiguous, constantly changing
public sector environment, particularly with the drive towards increased
commercialisation of the public sector and the relationships with the private sector
that are becoming progressively more important.

I am now more practically aware of the sources of research information, and can
better differentiate and assess the difference in the quality and reliability of and
between various sources of information and research data. Establishing and
understanding the different ontological and epistemological assumptions and
researcher perspectives helps me better understand and make sense of the results and
conclusions that different people, not just researchers, derive and hold as reality. I am
also more optimistic about the helpfulness and support of the world in general,
channelled through the World Wide Web, and of mankind in particular, given the
relative ease and positive frequency with which people, often total strangers, will help
with advice and solution to research problems and enquiries. I have resolved to be as
helpful as I can in return. I am convinced that my personal and business network has
never been more widespread, varied and comprehensive, and I am more effective as a
consequence.

There is little doubt in my mind that my increased knowledge and skills have helped
bring about an increased confidence in my personal and working life. I am able to
achieve more. People are able to rely on me to achieve more, and as their confidence
in me increases, they rely on me and expect even more so and provide more opportunity to demonstrate the application of my skills and knowledge. This increases my confidence further and I improve my skills and knowledge further. It becomes an ever-increasing circle of personal improvement opportunity and learning for me.

7.2.3.3 Level three reflections

Level three of the Kirkpatrick model considers changes in my behaviour and in how I have applied the learning outcomes from the doctoral programme in the workplace. From an operational perspective this has been considered in depth in the first part of this Chapter, and to some extent in the level two reflections above. Here I will concentrate on the changes in my personal behaviour as a result of the research and my conclusions.

I find that I am thinking more about the context, business and strategy, delivery and people aspects and perspectives in everything I do, i.e. using my conceptual model and framework, particularly with each ongoing and proposed collaboration. I am thinking more about alliance management and relationships, our partners needs as well as my own, and focussing on the specific goals and objectives of each collaboration. I empathise with other people’s business and personal wants and needs and act appropriately. I am also more balanced in my handling of the structural aspects of the collaborating, particularly with regard to having robust and effective business proposals, contracts and agreements in place, and the behavioural aspects surrounding alliance management, like regular, open communication, demonstrating enthusiasm and commitment, and placing people at the centre of everything that I do. I now ask more penetrating questions about the performance, risk and future prospects
of each collaboration, and address any under-achievement and inappropriate under or over-expectation swiftly, jointly and effectively.

Finally, I seem to be doing much more talking, listening, coaching, persuading, encouraging and facilitating than I ever did before. This is really what I should be doing and am paid for. In the view of many of my colleagues, peers and the people I am responsible and accountable for, I seem to be leading more and managing less. More effective than just efficient. I seem better able to carry people with me based on the sheer power and persuasiveness that comes with knowing and demonstrating that what I am proposing and doing is underpinned by robust professional research work.

7.2.3.4 Level four reflections

Level four of the Kirkpatrick model considers changes in organisational practice and the evaluation of the organisational performance improvement as a result of the application of the change/gain that can be attributed to my undertaking and completing the doctoral programme. From an operational perspective this has been considered in depth in Chapter 6, particularly in table 6.1. Here I will concentrate on the changes that my newfound skills, knowledge and personal behaviour have contributed to improved business performance.

In 2003 at the start of the doctoral programme, TCA had a number of supplier contracts in place, much as any other public sector company. The liabilities side of the business relied on grant-in-aid funding (taxpayers money) to fund its operations; the information and property search side of the business simply recovered its costs. Through increased collaborating with other public and private sector organisations delivering a number of new products and services, and in line with the conceptual
model and framework developed through this research programme, TCA's property
search and information services made an operating income surplus of £1.25 million in
2005-06 and £1.5 million in 2006-07 (TCA Annual Report and Accounts, 2005-06
and 2006-07). This surplus helped make up any shortfall in Government grant-in-aid
funding for liability work – a key delivery of the collaborating strategy.

To date TCA has not surrendered its status as the leading national public sector data
holder and service provider of property search information – a key delivery of TCA’s
high-level corporate objectives up to March 2007. Looking ahead, the new high-level
objectives as detailed in table 6.1 above are in place and all our work and effort are
focussed on delivering to these objectives, continuing to focus on the four
perspectives and the conceptual model. By these means TCA will maintain its
position at the forefront of the information delivery sector, by a drive for increased
search volumes and alternative revenue streams facilitated by new product technology
and innovation, successful interaction and collaborating with other public and private
sector organisations and focus on a changing customer base (TCA Corporate Plan
2006-07 to 2008-09).

The survival of TCA does not seem in doubt. As the future business environment
within which the people within TCA will compete continues to be fluid and uncertain,
it will be important to monitor closely the events and changes in the external
competitive and political environment as they unfold, so that the members of the TCA
Executive and Board can not only keep their strategy under review, but also be
prepared to implement fundamental change if the circumstances dictate this. The
Executive and Board of TCA still believe that the future success of the organisation
will be increasingly dependent on successfully collaborating with other public and
private sector organisations to provide its customers in existing and new markets with additional property information services and products. The changes in organisational practice and the evaluation of the organisational performance improvement as a result of the application of the changes made and attributed to my undertaking and completing the doctoral programme, will, I believe, continue to contribute towards minimising the risk of current and future collaborating going wrong and maximise the potential for perceived successful collaborating.

7.3 The learning outcomes

There are six learning outcomes of this doctoral programme and each is discussed in this final section. Table 7.1 below supplements the subsequent narrative and demonstrates to the reader how and where to locate evidence of the achievement described from the body of the dissertation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcome</th>
<th>Chapter 1</th>
<th>Chapter 2</th>
<th>Chapter 3</th>
<th>Chapter 4</th>
<th>Chapter 5</th>
<th>Chapter 6</th>
<th>Chapter 7</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate significant and original contribution to professional practice in the discipline of the field of enquiry</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate command and confidence in the application of practice based and discipline-related research methods and in the discussion of methodological issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate a deep understanding of ethical and professional considerations in the context of the discipline or field of enquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate highly developed personal and presentational skills in presenting and discussing data, ideas and the application of professional practice</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate accomplishment in the organisation and management of independent studies in the form of a project or generating creative works</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate an ability to reflect critically on the experience of professional practice and in producing insights relating to the research approach</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.1: Location of evidence of achievement of learning outcomes
Demonstrate significant and original contribution to professional practice in the discipline of the field of enquiry

I believe that my foregoing research will make a significant and original contribution to professional practice in the discipline of business collaborating. As well as generating credible, useful knowledge that can be practically applied to address the dilemmas, problems and predicament of the individuals involved in business collaborating at TCA, the study also offers a significant and original contribution to professional knowledge and practice, with reference to existing knowledge, through a deeper exploration of the public sector collaborating processes.

The completed study offers two major contributions to professional practice. The first is that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern as the economic and structural aspects. The second is a conceptual model and framework, which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process, and highlights and recommends perceived best-practice in collaborator behaviours and practices, so as to beneficially minimise the risk of inter-organisational collaborating failure.

This research provides an important extension to current theoretical perspectives on behavioural and structural factors in inter-organisational collaborating and relationships, to complement existing research, and provides new insights and a greater contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon of success in strategic alliances between a non-departmental public body like the Coal Authority and other public and private sector organisations working within the U.K. so as to minimise the
risk of such collaborating failing to meet the expectations of the people within the collaborating organisations.

In particular, it addresses a literature gap since a holistic, social, economic and political multidimensional conceptualisation of public sector business collaborating doesn't exist. This study aims to address this gap from a relational, social constructionist perspective by focussing on the nature, substance and perceptions of the relationships between individuals involved in public sector business collaborating on a day-to-day basis; the interactions, the reconstructing of knowledge and making sense of what is going on. The world of business collaborating is ambiguous and complex and this study helps make better sense of the literature in general and the problems and predicament that individuals working for public sector organisations are finding with business collaborating in particular.

The broader research question was to determine and make sense of what people involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis perceived 'successful' business collaborating to be and what they perceived as being the most important factors that contributed to achieving 'successful' business collaborating. My understanding of their views has then been compared and contrasted both between the participants themselves and with the various world-views as described in the literature.

I refer the reader to Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 and the appendices.
Demonstrate command and confidence in the application of practice based and discipline-related research methods and in the discussion of methodological issues

I have taken a pluralist approach in my research, which has allowed me to explore a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods. I have demonstrated my practical experience in the use of questionnaires and structured and semi-structured interviews. However, the research methods that inspired me and contributed the most to my research were based on my direct observation, unstructured interviews, accounts and life experiences of the over fifty individuals that I engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process, backed up too by my reflective diary and real time thought process from the participants in both the public and private sector involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting. Thematic discourse analysis was also used to interpret the life experiences of these public sector business collaborators. Twenty-four of the collaborators work for public sector organisations, twenty-nine work in the private sector. Material from their experiences was used to support the development of a new conceptual model and framework, proposed for use by TCA and other public sector organisations in their future business collaborating with both public and private sector partners. In summary, the approach and methodology used in the study was social constructionist, narrative, and interpretive. Narrative was used to explore the business collaborating process as constructed by each collaborator.

For evidence of my command and confidence in the application of practice based and discipline-related research methods and in the discussion of methodological issues I
refer the reader to Chapters 3 and 4. The conceptual model and framework is introduced and discussed in Chapter 6.

**Demonstrate a deep understanding of ethical and professional considerations in the context of the discipline or field of enquiry**

I would refer the reader to my discussion on ethics in the dissertation, which describes the lengths that I went to and the protocols that I put in place in order to ensure that the academic ethics of my work were not compromised, to ensure that my professional integrity was always maintained, and to protect the privacy and best interests of the various participants and their organisations. The names of all participants and their organisations are fictitious (except for TCA as an organisation) to protect and respect the privacy and confidentiality of the actual participants and their organisations.

I have operated at all times within the University of Derby ethical guidelines and those of my own professional bodies (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and Chartered Management Institute). I have fully outlined the limitations to the research and its scope. The ethical considerations covered all aspects of the research, from the research design and methodology stage, through to data collection and analysis, presentation and interpretation of the data, through to reporting the final conclusions and critical reflection. I have outlined the many ethical dilemmas that I was faced with and fully described and justified the solutions and outcomes to them.
For evidence of my deep understanding of ethical and professional considerations in the context of the discipline of business collaborating I refer the reader to Chapter 4 in particular, and also to Chapters 3 and 7, and to the appendices.

**Demonstrate highly developed personal and presentational skills in presenting and discussing data, ideas and the application of professional practice**

A number of different methods of data presentation have been used in this dissertation, in both the pilot study and in the main research study. The method used reflected the nature of the research data, how it had been collected, how it had been analysed, interpreted and reported, and how it might best make sense to readers of it. I have created tables, graphs, figures, matrices, grids and charts, as well as models and frameworks, so as to best convey the research data, and both mine and the participants' ideas and views. I have developed a conceptual model and framework, based on my four perspectives of public sector business collaborating, as a means of sense-making and putting the theory to use as best professional practice.

I have discussed and utilised structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and developed a ‘business collaborating / cake analogy’ that helps me better understand and make sense of the public sector business collaborating process, but more importantly to help others understand too, i.e. it helps in my research study’s transferability to the reader to their personal situation.

For evidence of my highly developed personal and presentational skills in presenting and discussing data, ideas and the application of professional practice I refer the reader to Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6 and the appendices.
Demonstrate accomplishment in the organisation and management of independent studies in the form of a project or generating creative works

I have completed and successfully submitted every module assignment ahead of the required deadline and to the required standard. This demonstrates a disciplined approach to the organisation and management of my independent studies. The Research Practice and Consulting Module, Negotiated Pilot Study Module, the Practice Based Project and this final dissertation are all examples of the management of projects and the generation of creative works.

For comprehensive evidence of my accomplishment in the organisation and management of independent studies in the form of a project or generating creative works I refer the reader to Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Demonstrate an ability to reflect critically on the experience of professional practice and in producing insights relating to the research approach

Critical reflection formed a major part of my doctoral journey and my research was supplemented by reflective diary. I have included critical reflection on the type and nature of the research questions, the choice of methodology, the data management processes and the writing processes used in the research project.

I have recognised a need to reflect on my research process and on the knowledge I have achieved and presented these in a systematic manner which provides clarity with respect to the rigor and integrity of the research. I believe this final Chapter of the dissertation achieves this, though my personal reflection is included throughout the
dissertation. I have written this final Chapter in the first person, consistent with the personal nature of the reflection, and it starts from the time I decided to undertake the doctorate study through to submission of this final dissertation. Because personal reflection is something that I have not been previously used to and was uncomfortable with, I have utilised the Kirkpatrick (1967) model for the evaluation of learning and development outcomes, since this has provided me with a useful theoretical framework for my personal reflection on the doctoral programme.

For evidence of my ability to reflect critically on my experience of professional practice, and in producing insights relating to the social constructionist approach, I refer the reader to Chapters 2, 3 and 6, and in particular to this final Chapter 7.

7.4 Conclusions

This final Chapter has summarised the research conclusions and outlined the early impact of the conceptual model and framework of public sector business collaborating, on myself and on my colleagues at TCA. I have demonstrated and described how my research approach has generated credible, useful knowledge that is now being practically applied to address the dilemmas, problems and predicament of the individuals involved in business collaborating at TCA. I have outlined and described the things we are doing differently in light of the research and my conclusions, the benefits that have resulted, and the various changes to our behaviour and practices with regard to the way we interact and collaborate with people from other organisations. These were comprehensively set out in table 6.1 under each of the four perspective headings, i.e. the context, business and strategy, delivery, and people aspects and perspectives.
I have demonstrated how the study offers an original contribution to professional knowledge and practice, with reference to existing knowledge, through a deeper exploration of the social construction processes of public sector collaborating. I believe I have also demonstrated how the social constructionist framework provides a way of looking at business collaborating that has been largely ignored in the ‘world view’ research to date. I also believe that analysis based on deeper, more probing conversation, as part of the researcher immersing themselves within the research environment, including unstructured depth interview as a secondary data gathering method, supplementing one’s own reflective diary as the primary instrument, and the capture of real-time thought from the participants, through observation at their business meetings, as they engaged in their activities, and through talk and other interaction with business partners, has potentially useful practical implications and resulting application for all those involved in any business related research process.

I have critically reflected on my research process and on the knowledge I have achieved and presented these in a systematic manner based on the Kirkpatrick (1967) four level model for the evaluation of learning and development outcomes. I believe my adoption of the Kirkpatrick model has provided a useful theoretical framework for my personal reflection on the doctoral programme and provided clarity with respect to the rigor and integrity of the research.

Finally, I have demonstrated my achievement of the six learning outcomes of this doctoral programme and discussed each one in detail. More importantly, I have demonstrated to the reader in table 7.1 and the subsequent narrative, how and where to locate evidence from the body of the dissertation of the achievement described.
References / Bibliography


Rogers, A. (2003). What is the difference?: a new critique of adult learning and teaching. Leicester: NIACE.


Appendix 1

Functions of the Coal Authority

The Coal Authority (TCA) was established by Parliament in 1994 to undertake specific statutory responsibilities associated with:

- licensing coal mining operations in Britain
- handling subsidence damage claims which are not the responsibility of licensed coalmine operators
- dealing with property and historic liability issues, such as treatment of minewater discharges
- providing public access to information on past and present coal mining operations

The main functions of TCA are set out in Section 1 of the Coal Industry Act 1994 as:-

1. Holding, managing and disposing of interests and rights in or in relation to the unworked coal and other property which is transferred to, or otherwise acquired by it, under this Act;

2. Carrying out functions with respect to the licensing of coal-mining operations;

3. Carrying out functions with respect to coal-mining subsidence, and in connection with other matters incidental to the carrying on of any opencast or other coal mining operations;

4. Facilitating the establishment and maintenance of arrangements for the information to which persons are to be entitled under this Act, to be made available to them, and

5. Carrying out the other functions conferred on it by virtue of this Act.

Mission Statement of the Coal Authority (TCA)

*We aim to facilitate the proper exploitation of the Nation's coal resources, whilst providing information and addressing liabilities for which the Authority is responsible, in a professional, efficient and open manner*

Source: TCA website www.coal.gov.uk, 2006
Duties of the Coal Authority

Licensing and Leasing of Coal
The 1994 Act stipulates that TCA will secure, as far as practicable, the development by those licensed to carry on coal mining operations, of an economically viable coal mining industry. In doing so, TCA must ensure that licensees are able to finance their operations and discharge liabilities arising from coal mining operations. Licensees must also be able to make reasonable financial arrangements to meet subsidence liabilities. Finally, TCA must seek to ensure that licensees have the appropriate experience and expertise necessary to operate coal-mining activities.

Subsidence
TCA aims to discharge its liability for coal mining subsidence damage in a prompt, fair and efficient manner. Its duties in respect of mining subsidence damage are contained within the Act and supporting regulations, but the primary legislation is the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991. There are a few outstanding claims, however, which were made under other legislation or rights, for example, under Working Facilities Orders or Title Deeds.

Mining Reports
Under section 57 of the 1994 Act, the Coal Authority is obliged to make arrangements with regard to the supply of, and access to, certain information in its possession, in particular, mining and subsidence related information.

TCA satisfies its duty to make information available by giving public access to data in its raw state, in the form of approximately 100,000 historic mine plans and other records. It also provides a Mining Reports Service. TCA's Mining Reports Service provides information on past, present and future underground and surface coal mining for any individual property or site in Great Britain. It is a highly computerised service drawing on a unique database of coal mining information. During 2006, some 550,000 mining reports were produced.

As a Non-Departmental Government Body, the Coal Authority is required to run the Mining Reports Service on a cost recovery basis.
**Property**

The primary duties of TCA in respect of the management and disposal of property are contained within the 1994 Act. They require TCA to make surplus land available for acquisition and to secure best terms reasonably available on disposal.

Where TCA retains land, either for operational purposes or whilst in the process of being sold, it has the duty to manage the property professionally, ensuring that all relevant legal, environmental, planning and other landowner obligations are met.

In formulating proposals for works on its property, TCA must have regard to the environmental effects of these proposed works.

TCA has certain powers in respect of its property, including the ability to acquire, hold and dispose of land or to carry out works. In respect of surplus land it has the power to develop or improve the land with a view to its disposal. Treasury Guidelines for the disposal of property are also relevant and apply to TCA's activities.

**Historic Liabilities**

The term 'historic liabilities' is used to refer to problems arising from past coal mining activities, such as collapses of mine shafts and adits, emissions of mine gas and water, and spontaneous combustion. It does not include mining subsidence damage, which is dealt with separately. The main issue in relation to this work is public safety, although nuisance (the interference with someone's enjoyment of their land) can be an issue.

The principal obligation on TCA is set out in Section 3 (5) of the 1994 Act, where TCA must have regard to the safety of the public in managing and disposing of its property interests.

In addition, Section 151 of the Mines & Quarries Act 1954 places an obligation on the owner of a mine entry to provide effective means to prevent accidental entry. This can include barriers or fencing, but modern day practice requires that in areas where people are or are likely to be present, such entries should be filled and provided with a reinforced concrete cap of appropriate technical specification. Common law and other obligations may also impact on TCA's position.
TCA\'s Emergency Call Out Service deals with coal mining related ground collapses, shaft collapses, water and gas emissions and similar surface hazard incidence on a 24-hour basis, every day of the year. Upon receiving a report of a coal-mining hazard, TCA will arrange for the situation to be made safe, without consideration of responsibility. TCA\'s policy is to respond to incidents within two hours and arrange to make them safe, without consideration of responsibility, within six hours of being notified. Only when the incident has been made safe do TCA investigate to determine whether or not they are related to former coal mining activities.

Mining Records
TCA has a duty under the 1994 Act to compile and maintain registers of information, and make information available, which does not breach the requirements of confidentiality. This information must be made available to stakeholders within a reasonable timescale, as set out in the various Government codes of best practice in making information available to the public. TCA ensures that mining record information is made available within these timescales.

Minewater Pollution
The Government has given TCA the responsibility for dealing with minewater pollution issues in areas of former coal mining, and an extensive programme is being implemented, in accordance with priorities agreed with the Environment Agency and Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Source: TCA website www.coal.gov.uk, 2006
Questionnaire - Business Collaborating & Alliance Management

This questionnaire forms part of my DBA research study into the behavioural and structural factors that contribute to successful business collaborating and alliance management.

Name (Optional) .................................................................

Organisation .................................................................

Is your role predominantly  Managerial/Strategic  (circle 1 line, delete the others)  
Technical/Specialist  
Administration/Supervisory

There are a number of factors perceived to contribute to successful interorganisational business collaborating and alliance management. The purpose of this survey is to establish which of these factors are perceived to be the most important from the point of view and perspective of those people directly involved in business collaborating and alliance management on a day-to-day basis. On the attached pages are statements relating to these various factors. Please review and consider each statement and indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement made. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. What is important is whether the statement made reflects what you believe and perceive to be important in successful business collaborating. If you are unsure about any of the statements, leave them blank.

Please return your completed questionnaire to:  Joe Dearden 
The Coal Authority  
200 Lichfield Lane  
Mansfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG18 4RG

All completed forms and feedback will be used solely for this DBA research project and for no other purpose. Participants' privacy and feedback will be respected and held in confidence at all times.

Thank you for helping make this survey a success.

Joe Dearden  
January 2005
DBA Research Study Interview  
Business Collaborating & Alliance Management  
- Questionnaire Respondents Interviews

Follow up interview looking to validate the literature and make sense of it.

Name (Optional) ........................................................................................................

Date ...........................................................................................................................

Time ...........................................................................................................................

Organisation .............................................................................................................

Predominant Role  
Managerial/Strategic  
Technical/Specialist  
Administration/Supervisory

Question 1  How did you find the questionnaire?  
- for feedback to establish if it is practically feasible

Ask respondent to identify:

2 instances of successful business collaborating (as simply A & B), and

2 instances of business collaborating they consider "not so successful" (as C & D)

The respondents/interviewees may wish to note the names of the collaborative partners for their own benefit and reference when considering the subsequent 'compare and contrast' questions.

Ask the respondent/interviewee to pair the A & B collaborating against C and answer the following 4 key questions (answer sheet page 2 of 4overleaf).

Ask the respondent/interviewee to then pair the A & B collaborating against D and answer the same 4 key questions (answer sheet page 3 of 4 overleaf).
Pair A and B against C and identify:

Question 2  What was similar about the A & B collaborating that was different in the C collaboration?

Question 3  How did people in the A & B collaborating spend their time differently than in the C collaboration?

Question 4  What did people consider to be important in the A & B collaborating that the people in the C collaboration didn’t?

Question 5  How did people react differently in challenging circumstances in the A & B collaborating as compared with the people in the C collaboration?
Pair A and B against D and identify:

Question 6  What was similar about the A & B collaborating that was different in the D collaboration?

Question 7  How did people in the A & B collaborating spend their time differently than in the D collaboration?

Question 8  What did people consider to be important in the A & B collaborating that the people in the D collaboration didn’t?

Question 9  How did people react differently in challenging circumstances in the A & B collaborating as compared with the people in the D collaboration?
Question 10  What do you think an ideal collaboration might be?

Question 11  How was the interview for you?

Interview Closing Time
Appendix 4

Results of pilot research study questionnaire scores
ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

Attitude Management, Participative Decision Making

Communication

Organizational Interpersonal Trust

Self-Knowledge

Soft Factors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>485</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>465</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>9.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>438</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>9.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360</td>
<td>Legal Contracts &amp; Agreements</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>349</td>
<td>Partner Selection</td>
<td>7.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>349</td>
<td>Alliance Management &amp; Relationships</td>
<td>7.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>305</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>295</td>
<td>Goal &amp; Objective Setting</td>
<td>6.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>280</td>
<td>Risk Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>261</td>
<td>Formal Governance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>4.54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>213</td>
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<td>186</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
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<td>168</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>485</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>465</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>19.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Commitment</td>
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<td>295</td>
<td>Goal &amp; Objective Setting</td>
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</tr>
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<td>218</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
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<td>217</td>
<td>Organisational Culture</td>
<td>83.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213</td>
<td>Performance Measurement &amp; Monitoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>211</td>
<td>Organisational Self-Knowledge</td>
<td>92.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>Organisational Interdependence</td>
<td>96.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>99.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coal Authority
282 Communication 9.79% S
249 Legal Contracts & Agreements 8.65% H
240 Trust 8.33% S
224 Formal Governance 7.78% H
218 Commitment 7.57% S
202 Partner Selection 7.01% H
201 Project Management 6.98% H
184 Alliance Management & Relationships 6.39% S
177 Risk Management 6.15% H
170 Goal & Objective Setting 5.9% H
152 Control 5.28% H
150 Organisational Culture 5.2% S
134 Performance Measurement & Monitoring 4.65% H
111 Organisational Self-Knowledge 3.85% S
108 Organisational Interdependence 3.75% S
078 Conflict Resolution 2.71% S

282 Communication 9.79%
249 Legal Contracts & Agreements 18.44%
240 Trust 26.77%
224 Formal Governance 34.55%
218 Commitment 42.12%
202 Partner Selection 49.13%
201 Project Management 56.11%
184 Alliance Management & Relationships 62.5%
177 Risk Management 68.65%
170 Goal & Objective Setting 74.55%
152 Control 79.83%
150 Organisational Culture 85.03%
134 Performance Measurement & Monitoring 89.68%
111 Organisational Self-Knowledge 93.53%
108 Organisational Interdependence 97.28%
078 Conflict Resolution 99.99%
ESA
225 Trust 11.72% S
220 Commitment 11.46% S
203 Communication 10.57% S
165 Alliance Management & Relationships 8.59% S
147 Partner Selection 7.66% H
140 Conflict Resolution 7.29% S
125 Goal & Objective Setting 6.51% H
111 Legal Contracts & Agreements 5.78% H
104 Project Management 5.42% H
103 Risk Management 5.36% H
100 Organisational Self-Knowledge 5.21% S
079 Performance Measurement & Monitoring 4.11% H
078 Organisational Interdependence 4.06% S
067 Organisational Culture 3.49% S
037 Formal Governance 1.93% H
016 Control 0.83% H

225 Trust 11.72%
220 Commitment 23.18%
203 Communication 33.75%
165 Alliance Management & Relationships 42.34%
147 Partner Selection 50%
140 Conflict Resolution 57.29%
125 Goal & Objective Setting 63.8%
111 Legal Contracts & Agreements 69.58%
104 Project Management 75%
103 Risk Management 80.36%
100 Organisational Self-Knowledge 85.57%
079 Performance Measurement & Monitoring 89.68%
078 Organisational Interdependence 93.74%
067 Organisational Culture 97.23%
037 Formal Governance 99.16%
016 Control 99.99%
Feedback to the open question at the start of each interview as to "How did you find the questionnaire?"

- COMPLEX & UNNECESSARILY LONG-WINED BUT APPRECIATE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS FOR
- FOUND MIND COULDN'T BE CONSISTENT SINCE (QUESTIONNAIRE) TOO LONG
- LONG - SO DIDN'T DO ANY CONSISTENCY CHECK, SO SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE - ATTEMPTED NO ANALYSIS
- THOROUGH
- THOUGHT (AS PROGRESSED THROUGH QUESTIONNAIRE) ANSWERED SIMILAR QUESTIONS ALREADY
- ANSWERED BASED ON "INITIAL REACTION" RATHER THAN SPEND TOO LONG ON IT
- ENJOYED IT
- VERY DIFFICULT BECAUSE LOTS OF THE SAME QUESTIONS WERE ASKED IN DIFFERENT WAYS SO SOME WERE EASY TO ANSWER BUT WITH OTHERS SKIPPED SOME THEN CAME BACK TO FILL IN
- LEFT SOME PAGES EMPTY, SOME NOT
- "DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO PUT"
- VERY INTERESTING
- REALISED SAME QUESTION THOUGH INVERTED SO THINK VERY QUICKLY, ANSWER VERY QUICKLY - "HOPEFULLY GAVE SAME ANSWER!"
- QUITE INTERESTING
- DIFFICULT IN TERMS OF WHAT CLASSED AS BEING MORE IMPORTANT
- COULD HAVE APPROACHED IN DIFFERENT WAYS
- GETTING ON AND INTERACTING WAS, IN MY VIEW, KEY ELEMENT + OTHER ROUTES (TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATING)
- NEEDED THINKING ABOUT
- "INITIAL IMPACT QUITE DEVASTATING" - SPENT FIRST HOUR FILLING IN FIRST FEW PAGES, THEN REALISED SOME COMMONALITY - SO USED POST-IT NOTES TO ANSWER GENERIC QUESTIONS - PROVED VALUABLE - SHARED IDEA WITH NGW & MA (NOTE: NGW RETURNED QUESTIONNAIRE / MA DIDN'T)
- MAY HAVE GIVEN CONTRADICTORY RESPONSES
- PARTS QUITE DIFFICULT TO COMPLETE / ANSWER - SOME SEEMED SAME QUESTION PUT DIFFERENTLY
- REPETITIVE AFTER A WHILE
- LOST AT TIMES
- "THOUGHT PROVOKING"
- BECAUSE OF NUMBER OF QUESTIONS, GO ON "GUT INSTINCT" - INSTINCT MAY BE DIFFERENT IF THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR LONGER
- FELT GUT INSTINCT INCLUDED PERSONAL PREJUDICES
Feedback to the open question at the end of each interview as to “How was the interview for you?”

- "FINE"
- "SHOULD (RIGHT TO) SIT DOWN MORE OFTEN & SPEND TIME CONSIDERING WHY THINGS WORK"
- EXPERIENCE HELPS; GOOD TO KNOW WHAT FACTORS HELP IN PRACTICE
- "QUITE LIBERATING TO TALK ABOUT THESE THINGS OCCASIONALLY" SINCE LITTLE “INTELLECTUAL CONSIDERATION” OR ANALYSIS GIVEN TO WHAT WORKS AND DON’T ALWAYS KNOW ‘WHY?’, LESSON TO BE LEANT RE WHAT WORKS & DOESN’T – USING BENEFIT OF EXPERIENCE SO TENDENCY TO REPEAT MISTAKES OF THE PAST
- COMPANY / ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE – NOT SURE HOW IMPORTANT THIS IS – A LOT COMES DOWN TO INDIVIDUALS – SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS
- "FINE"
- "HOPE (IT’S) WHAT YOU REQUIRE"
- (RESPONSES) "HOW I SEE IT"
- "OK"
- "INTERESTING"
- MADE ME THINK ABOUT SOME OF THE THINGS THAT WERE GOOD & BAD IN RECENT COLLABORATIONS
- "FINE"
- "THOUGHT PROVOKING"
- MAKES YOU THINK BACK AS TO WHAT’S GONE WELL, NOT SO WELL LIKE A PROJECT CLOSURE
- GOOD IF MORE TIME SPENT ON THIS - NOT GOOD AT IT – TO SEE WHERE WE CAN IMPROVE ON THEM (COLLABORATIONS)
- "FINE"
- "COULD HAVE GONE A LOT DEEPER"
- (INTERVIEW) "A BIT QUICK" - "COULD HAVE HIGHLIGHTED PARTS IN MORE SPECIFIC DETAIL
- "WELL, THE EARTH DIDN’T MOVE!"
- "NOT AN EASY THING TO DO, DEALING WITH SOMETHING INTANGIBLE"
- (INTERVIEW) "BETTER THAN FILLING IN THAT FORM" (QUESTIONNAIRE)
- "FINE – GET ON WELL WITH YOU SO NO ISSUES"
- "HAVING PREVIOUSLY INTERACTED WITH YOU HELPED – IF COLD, WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT
- (INTERVIEW) NOT AS LONG AS THOUGHT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BEEN INTERESTING
- DIFFICULT TO THINK OF THE 4 EXAMPLES QUICKLY
- MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE ADVANCE WARNING - "BUT NOT A BIG DEAL"
- EXAMPLE ‘D’ DIFFERENT COLLABORATION THEREFORE MADE SOME OF THE COMPARISONS "RATHER DIFFICULT"
Profiles of the one-to-one, in-depth, unstructured interview participants

Harry Stevenson, Development Manager, TCA

*Job role:* Responsible for the development and implementation of major and medium scale IT projects. Ensuring that project management and risk management standards and procedures are maintained. Further responsibilities with respect to information management of the MRSDS system. Ensuring the integrity and fitness for purpose of the Authority’s coal mining database and associated administrative information. Responsible for those Authority data models associated with the mining reports service.

*Professional background:* Qualified mining surveyor. Subsequently retrained to work within ICT sector.

*Work experience across sectors:* Worked exclusively in the public sector for over 25 years. Initial 10 years in mining industry. Last 18 years within public sector organisations working with other public and with private sector organisations in the mining and information delivery sectors.

*Company information:* The duties, functions and responsibilities of TCA are set out in Appendix 1.

Heather Moore, Account Manager, Mapping Agency

*Job role:* Manages public sector customer accounts for Mapping Agency.

*Professional background:* Qualified cartographer and land surveyor. Retrained as commercial account manager.

*Work experience across sectors:* Worked exclusively in public sector for 20 years. Held various positions and roles. Initially as field surveyor and cartographer maintaining the national map database. Now works as account manager primarily for Mapping Agency’s public sector clients.

*Company information:* Mapping Agency has been providing accurate, reliable and detailed geographic information for more than 200 years. Today they are a dynamic, modern organisation employing over 1400 people. They are justifiably proud of their rich heritage, yet committed to leading the way in technological innovation. As the recognised market leader in their field, their name is synonymous with mapping expertise. They offer a wide range of internationally renowned products for both business and leisure – from complex digital information to traditional walking maps for Great Britain. At the heart of their organisation is a vision that, together with their partners, they will be the content provider of choice for location-based information in the new information economy.
Mapping Agency's data underpins a vast range of private and public-sector services. Their reputation is founded on the quality of its geographic data. Partnerships underpin everything they do. Mapping Agency provides definitive and intelligent digital geographic information that benefits tens of millions of people every day.

Extract from mapping Agency website home page 23 May 2006 re “Working in partnership”

“Partnership underpins everything we do and we work with a wide range of organisations and individuals to develop products and services based on our geographic information. Our partners provide geographic data-enabling tools, software and services for public and private sector customers, bringing new solutions and products to market. We also work closely with retailers, who supply our portfolio of paper maps and customised data to meet individual customer requirements. Our partner community is an integral part of our business and we support it in a number of ways, including hosting an annual conference.”

Bethany Carlton, Commercial Manager, National Hub Services Limited.

Job role: Manages a portfolio of public and private sector clients on behalf of National Hub Services Limited (NHS Ltd).

Professional background: Qualified business and commercial manager.

Work experience across sectors: Has held a number of business development, project management and marketing roles primarily in the private sector financial services and information service sectors.

Company information: NHS Ltd provides advanced information solutions that capture and process vast amounts of data, produce essential information, and improve the decision-making and operational performance of business and government organizations worldwide.

NHS is focused primarily on land and property related information solutions for two major market sectors, each offering strong repeat business potential, the Financial Services sector and the Surveillance and Intelligence sector. To these markets, NHS delivers a broad spectrum of information solutions including complex operational systems, tailored information services and electronic information products.

The Company operates through two reporting units: Information Products and Information Systems. NHS employs over 2,700 people through offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The Company's common shares trade on the Toronto Stock Exchange under the symbol "NHS".
NHS provides Property Information Products and Geospatial Services. Their Property Information Products provide professionals such as lawyers, lenders and appraisers with essential information on millions of properties in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada for the conveyancing, mortgage financing and insurance of properties through their wholly owned subsidiaries.

NHS is also a leading provider of Geospatial Information Products and Services from the majority of commercially available radar and optical satellites. Their Geospatial Services are used globally for resource management, mapping, environmental monitoring, surveillance and intelligence.

NHS provides civilian, defence, and commercial customers with end-to-end Information Solutions to monitor and manage changes and activities anywhere on earth. Their Information Systems solutions include Earth Observation Systems, Radarsat-2, small satellites, defence, security and surveillance systems, airborne systems and advanced robotics.

They provide Information Systems solutions to customers worldwide through their offices in the United States and Canada.

**Jack Jameson, Director of Information, Earth Sciences Agency (ESA)**

*Job role:* Leads the ESA Information Department, which comprises some sixty staff, the majority of whom have a scientific background.

*Professional background:* Jack is a graduate of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. He has been the Director of Information at the ESA since April 2000. Between 1997 and 1999 he was the Project Manager of a major EU funded project to create a European geoscience metadata service - GEIXS. Jack has worked for ESA for over 30 years; initially on mineral assessment programmes in the UK and overseas and subsequently as a field geologist, undertaking applied geological mapping in the North-East England coalfield. Use of relational database and CAD systems to handle the large borehole and mineplan datasets associated with these projects, led to his appointment as the manager of the ESA Digital Map Implementation project in 1990. This was followed by responsibility for ESA Information Systems. During this period he also undertook geoscience information systems consultancy in South America and Europe.

*Work experience across sectors:* see professional background note above.

*Company information:* Founded in 1835, the ESA is the world's longest established national geological survey and the United Kingdom's premier centre for earth science information and expertise.
As a public sector organisation they are responsible for advising the UK government on all aspects of geoscience as well as providing impartial geological advice to industry, academia and the public. The ESA is a component organisation of the Natural Research Economic Council (NREC), which is the UK's leading body for basic, strategic and applied research and monitoring in the environmental sciences. The NREC was founded by Royal Charter in 1965 and reports to the UK government's Office of Science and Technology under the Department of Trade and Industry.

ESA undertake an extensive programme of overseas research, surveying and monitoring, including major institutional strengthening programmes in the developing world. Much of this work is now won through competitive tendering. Their annual budget is in the region of £37 million, about half of which comes from the UK government's Science Budget, with the remainder coming from commissioned research from the public and private sectors. The BGS has its headquarters at Lockworth, just outside Northampton, and they have a large regional office in Glasgow, as well as offices at Watford, Southampton, London and Swansea. Their parent body, the NREC, has its offices at Reading.

The ESA provides expert services and impartial advice in all areas of geoscience. Their client base is drawn from the public and private sectors both in the UK and internationally. ESA can provide a variety of geological information and advice relevant to housing. For example they can provide advice on radon, on ground conditions and many other relevant issues.

Richard Coast, Account Manager, CapitalG Group

Job role: Manages public and private sector customer accounts for CapitalG Group.

Professional background: Qualified business and commercial manager.

Work experience across sectors: Has worked exclusively in the private sector for over 30 years. Has worked primarily in the financial services, manufacturing and ICT sectors. This has included collaborative initiatives with both public and private sector organisations.

Company information: CapitalG is one of the world’s largest providers of Consulting, Technology and Outsourcing services. The company helps businesses implement growth strategies and leverage technology. CapitalG has a unique way of working with its clients called the Collaborative Business Experience. The Collaborative Business Experience is designed to help their clients achieve better, faster, more sustainable results through seamless access to their network of world-leading technology partners and collaboration-focused methods and tools. Through commitment to mutual success and the achievement of tangible value, they help businesses implement growth strategies, leverage technology, and thrive.
through the power of collaborating. CapitalG employs approximately 59,000 people worldwide in more than 30 countries and reported 2004 global revenue of 6.2 billion euros. CapitalG shares are quoted on the First Market of the Paris Bourse and their headquarters are in Paris.

Extract from the CapitalG website re collaborating with CapitalG:

"Imagine being a part of this family of bold thinkers with a passion for challenge and achievement. Imagine connecting talents and technology to transform or create organisations and deliver measurable value. Imagine having the freedom to seize opportunities, deliver results, and create value around you. Imagine dramatically increasing your knowledge by learning across all borders. Now, imagine a company where what you can imagine, is what you can do and accomplish."

Tom Saracen, Client Services Director, Burdocks UK Limited

Job role: Tom jointly manages the Commercial Client Services Department at Burdocks UK Ltd., which provides financial service support to a number of public and private sector client organisations.

Professional background: Qualified accountant and business manager. He joined Burdocks in 1989. Tom is an Associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute and has over 20 years experience in the insurance industry, the last 17 with Burdocks.

Work experience across sectors: Tom's specialisation is major and large account servicing to a wide spectrum of commercial clients including Property Owners, Engineers, Contractors and Distribution Companies. Tom is also intrinsically involved in insurance programme design, technical support and the development of innovative insurance products to meet the ever-changing requirements of the industry and Burdock's clients.

Company information: Burdocks are an independent insurance intermediary who specialise in providing insurance and risk management solutions to a wide range of corporate and commercial UK based companies and their overseas subsidiaries.

Burdocks UK Division is part of the Burdocks Group and is wholly owned by Burdocks & Co Limited - a company established in 1820 and one of the oldest and most respected firms of Lloyd's Brokers.

Their client base includes a cross section of different businesses ranging from large PLC companies to smaller privately owned companies. These are spread throughout the UK and for the majority of their clients they have been their advisers for many years, due mainly to the consistent quality of service, which is the cornerstone of our their business.
University of Derby Standard Ethics Approval Form

**Ethics Approval**

**Student name and signature:** Joe Dearden

Does the proposed study entail ethical considerations? Yes

If 'yes', please indicate how you intend to address each of the points, as appropriate. If no, you may proceed to the next section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consent</td>
<td>Observation research N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an ethical protocol, I’ll speak with each of the participants about the research project and its purpose, seek their consent, thank them for their participation, point out it is entirely voluntary and that they are free to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from any interview at any time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deception</td>
<td>Giving advice N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisory team has audited my protocol content as a fair and trustworthy record of my study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing</td>
<td>Research undertaken in public places N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>No written briefing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal from the investigation</td>
<td>Academic integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of the written protocol.</td>
<td>I am using Marshall and Rossman (2000, p. 22) to ensure the ongoing quality of my work, linked to a reflective/reflexive diary, since it is important that I have a process that forces an ongoing check on my actions as a researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality and data protection</td>
<td>Animal rights N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll affirm that any research information and interview feedback will be kept strictly confidential and available only to my DBA supervisory team and me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of participants</td>
<td>Contractual responsibilities N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will respect and protect the names and organisations of my participants, together with any references they make to other third party individuals and organisations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you intend to request clearance from any other body/organisation (e.g. local education authority)?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does any other Code/s of Practice of Professional Bodies apply?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and Chartered Management Institute)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is NHS Ethical Approval required? (see <a href="http://www.corec.org.uk">http://www.corec.org.uk</a>)</td>
<td>No</td>
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STANDARD ETHICS PROTOCOL (read by the interviewer before each interview. One copy of this form left with each participant)

My name is Joe Dearden and I am a doctoral research student with the University of Derby on a project sponsored by The Coal Authority. The project is entitled The Social Construction of Public Sector Business Collaborating. If you wish to discuss this project at any time you may ring me at work on 01623 683169, on my mobile on 07702 908374 or at home on 01332 513520.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the project. Just before we start, I would like to assure you of certain rights you have as a participant:

Firstly, your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the interview at any time.

This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the supervisory team/examiner.

Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in the report.

You will be given the opportunity to check the researcher’s understanding of your answers and to review/add to this as you think appropriate. This would be much appreciated to ensure that the findings are valid.

If you would like a copy of the report on the findings of this project, please contact me at the number above.

Thank you.

Name of Participant

Ref/date
Quality of research work audit (from Marshall and Rossman, 2000)

One of the things that is important to me is that my research project is underpinned by quality of work guidance. I have audited the quality of my research work against Marshall and Rossman's (2000, p.22) twenty questions to judge the goodness of qualitative research. My summary findings are set out below:

1. My research methods are sound and robust and explained in detail so that readers are able to judge for themselves whether they were adequate and make sense. I have justified, clarified and explained my reasons for the use of qualitative research from a social constructionist perspective in a way that is open yet robustly defendable from constructive criticism and critical review. My research environment, and the methods for gaining access to people and places within TCA and the various other public and private sector organisations with which we collaborate and whom formed the scope and basis for the research setting have been discussed. I have described and justified how the research participants were selected. I have also explained in detail my research stance, role and perspective, and my data collection, recording and analysis methods. I have described and maintained my ethical standards and issues, and my DBA supervisory team at the University of Derby have approved my adopted ethical protocols. I have maintained a full and complete auditability trail, including my reflective diary and discussion / interview notes. I have taken steps to ensure that my pilot research study data and accounts are preserved and are available for re-analysis. Similarly all my final practice based project research material, including audio recordings on my unstructured interviews, have been securely retained and maintained.

2. I have stated clearly any and all assumptions that I have made and expressed any potential biases, particularly in my interpretation of the research participants views, opinions and perspectives as I presented these back within my analysis, presentation and conclusions. I have presented my ontological, and epistemological assumptions. I have reflected before, during and after the research and all parts of it, to ensure that any potential biases have been identified and/or made clear and/or addressed. The dilemma as to how best minimise the Hawthorne effect in itself led to a further ethical dilemma arising from the opportunity to carry out a more covert operation in my action-research role within my own department and our alliance partners as against the (more practical) overt operation involving other TCA departments and their alliance partners’ teams. In needing to play two or more roles I needed the ability to step in and step out of each as required and the wisdom to recognise when there was the need to do so. On reflection, and taking into account the responsibility and accountability for my research work, I felt justified in carrying out a more covert research operation where this did not risk any negative impact on the other participants. However, given the prior assessment of such risk is purely subjective and only clear in hindsight after the research had concluded, I briefed my own department colleagues and those of our alliance partners beforehand of the research I was undertaking, its aims and methodology and ensured they were comfortable with it. In the event they
were not, I intended to reconsider the research methodology and amend the approach accordingly. Early feedback from key participants suggested, however, that this would not be necessary.

3. I have avoided making any value judgements in data collection and in my analysis, particularly with regard to direct feedback from the numerous participants that I engaged with on a one-to-one basis as I immersed myself fully within the research setting. There was a need for me to be ruthless with the amount of 'voice' that I presented in the final written dissertation of the research project. Otherwise it made the dissertation far too long and I recognised the need for me to be more succinct, to be more to the point, to get across the problematic issue that I'm trying to get across to the reader. However, I couldn't do that without giving full voice to the research participants first. In being ruthless with the voice, I hope to have explained the process more pragmatically and more effectively.

4. I have demonstrated an appropriate progression from raw, research data through my subsequent analysis and interpretation, and through to my presentation and conclusions of my research findings. I have linked these to the real world of business collaborating, in particular in addressing the dilemmas and predicaments of TCA as outlined in Chapter 1. I have presented data in a clear, readable, useful and accessible form by creating and using tables, graphs, figures, matrices, grids and charts, as well as models and frameworks, so as to best convey the research data, and both mine and the participants' ideas and views. I have developed a conceptual model and framework, based on my four perspectives of public sector business collaborating, as a means of sense making and putting the theory to use as best professional practice. I have developed a 'business collaborating / cake analogy' to help readers better understand and make sense of the public sector business collaborating process, i.e. it helps in my research study's transferability to the reader to their personal situation.

5. I have stated my research questions and provided the background to their relevance and appropriateness as the subject of the subsequent research. I have also included critical reflection on the type and nature of the research questions. The research study answers the research questions, and has contributed new insights and unique knowledge to extend the boundaries of both the existing academic and the management policy literature on business collaborating and alliance management.

6. I have demonstrated tangible relationships between this study and the world literature, the public sector collaborating context within UK, and the links between my research design and methodology, analysis, interpretation and presentation of the data with that of previous studies on inter-organisational business collaborating and alliance management. I have defined as best as I am able the definition of 'successful' collaborating, given the intangible nature of it, based on the feedback, opinions and perspectives of those that I engaged with during the research process. The broader research question was to determine and make sense of what people involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis perceived the phenomena of 'successful' business
collaborating to be and what they perceived as being the most important factors that contributed to achieving 'successful' business collaborating. My understanding of their views has then been compared and contrasted both between the participants themselves and with the various world-views as described in the literature. My study goes beyond previously established frameworks and challenges old ways of thinking. It does this by offering two major contributions to professional practice. The first is that the social and behavioural activities associated with the business collaborating process are of as much concern as the economic and structural aspects. The second is a conceptual model and framework, which makes sense of the public sector business collaborating process, and highlights and recommends perceived best practice in collaborator behaviours and practices, so as to beneficially minimise the risk of inter-organisational collaborating failure. The research study also addresses a literature gap since a holistic, social, economic and political multidimensional conceptualisation of public sector business collaborating doesn't exist. This study has aimed to address this gap from a relational, social constructionist perspective by focussing on the nature, substance and perceptions of the relationships between individuals involved in public sector business collaborating on a day-to-day basis; the interactions, the reconstructing of knowledge and making sense of what is going on.

7. The study is reported and presented in a way that is accessible to others. I have presented my findings in a way that enables others to use them in a timely and effective way. I have done this by developing a conceptual model and framework, based on my four perspectives of public sector business collaborating, as a means of sense making and putting the theory to use as best professional practice. I have developed a 'business collaborating / cake analogy' to help readers better understand and make sense of the public sector business collaborating process, i.e. it helps in my research study's transferability to the reader to their personal situation.

8. In adopting a social constructionist research stance and perspective I had no need to crosscheck my data through alternative sources or explanations, i.e. I had no justification for triangulation. However, I believe that I was tolerant of ambiguity, though probed my research participants for clarification and explanation of their views, opinions and perspectives throughout my engagement with them where this was necessary and encouraged them to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences, seeking clarification from them as necessary. I recognised that I needn't engage with people from a particularly large number of diverse organisations for some sort of validity, indeed, the interview study was limited to six participants to enable depth rather than breadth of coverage, though overall I engaged with over 50 people from 19 different organisations (24 from 6 public sector and 29 from 13 private sector organisations).

9. My final dissertation acknowledges the limitations of generalisability whilst assisting the reader in seeing transferability of findings. The limitations of the research were bound up in the focus and scope of the research study and these have been summarised. In seeking to understand the 'day to day' I acknowledge that this is context and time specific. The research study was
limited to those engaged in by TCA during a relatively short time period of
some 30 months from June 2004 to December 2006. Each setting and each
individual was unique and I had to consider the impact of reduction in the
analysis process. There was also insufficient time to carry out any extensive
hypothesis testing of the conclusions derived from this research study. There
were further ethical and legal issues I needed to take into account and address
and, whilst I recognise that the research has its limitations, the degree with
which I have understated these is a further limitation in itself, since this affects
my ability to demonstrate that, on balance, I have made the best available
choices relative to my research question(s). My efforts to improve the
transferability of my findings have been discussed at 4 and 7 above.

10. It is clear from my background information and detail set out in Chapter 1,
that there was a real and tangible problem, dilemma and predicament faced by
the Executive and Board of TCA with their strategy of increased collaborating
with other public and private sector organisations, and the risks they perceived
that brought them, that justified my research. This is practice based research
not merely theoretical research just for the sake of it.

11. My observations have been made and data collected from people involved in a
full range of interorganisational collaborating projects, tasks and activities,
over a full cycle of thirty months of such interorganisational collaborating
between the people within TCA and those within a number of other public and
private sector organisations.

12. All my data have been preserved and are available for re-analysis.

13. My research settings had the appropriate mix of processes, people, interactions
and structures. To ensure the quality of my research data I engaged with those
various players and interview participants who had credible and practical
expertise and experience of business collaborating, because I had ready access
to them and their organisations, and because their experiences were likely to
help me better understand the business risk, including the public/private
dimension. I recognised that I needn’t engage with people from a particularly
large number of diverse organisations for some sort of validity, indeed, the
interview study was limited to six participants to enable depth rather than
breadth of coverage, though overall I engaged with over 50 people from 19
different organisations (24 from 6 public sector and 29 from 13 private sector
organisations). The decision to go for people from TCA and its alliance
partners was because I considered this represented a credible cross-section of
collaborating teams and the research needed to be open to the impact of the
diversity in their backgrounds and learning experiences (Devins and Gold,
2002). It is suggested that only those persons immediately affected by
organisational events (e.g. business collaborating) have sufficient knowledge
of the precise circumstances to be able to suggest influences on relationships
(Jennings and Beaver, 1997).

14. All my in-field work analysis is documented, securely maintained and
available for review and re-analysis.
15. I have elicited meaning from cross-cultural perspectives having engaged with over fifty people from nineteen different public and private sector organisations. This was discussed in detail in 13 above.

16. I have continued to be careful about the sensitivity of my research participants and maintained ethical standards. All the participant and organisation names (except for TCA as an organisation) in the dissertation are fictitious to protect and respect the privacy and confidentiality of the actual participants and their organisations. I have extensively detailed my ethical standards and protocols within the dissertation narrative. As an example of an ethical protocol, I spoke with each of the interview participants about the research project and its purpose, thanked them for their participation, pointed out it was entirely voluntary and that they were free to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from any interview at any time. I affirmed that any research information and interview feedback would be kept strictly confidential and available only to my DBA supervisory team and me.

17. The people taking part in the research benefited in a variety of ways depending on the circumstances. In some instances this was a free meal or coffee. In other circumstances it was an opportunity to be listened to, to get things off their chests and/or to take the time to indulge in some valuable personal self-reflection.

18. I believe that my data collection strategies were the most adequate and efficient available. I have taken a pluralist approach in my research, which has allowed me to explore a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods. I have demonstrated my practical experience in the use of questionnaires and structured and semi-structured interviews. However, the research methods that inspired me and contributed the most to my research were based on my direct observation, unstructured interviews, accounts and life experiences of the over fifty individuals that I engaged with during my thirty months involvement within the research process, backed up too by my reflective diary and real time thought process from the participants in both the public and private sector involved in business collaborating on a day-to-day basis, as I immersed myself in a purposeful way in the research setting. I have been careful to be self-analytical and recognised when I was getting subjective or moving away from my social constructionist researcher stance. I believe I balanced my work-role and researcher-role. This was important to do and had relevance to my research, significant aspects of which were to be carried out within my own organisation (TCA) in both an action-research (where I am both an observer and participant) and interviewing role. It also had relevance as I carried out my business collaborating 'day job' with people from, and within, other organisations. We see their influence in my analysis and presentation of my research data. A particular challenge was my desire to hold the accounts within the context (space and time) that the accounts were given to me. A problem that I perceive for social constructionists relates to how do you do that and produce a conceptual model of what you've understood in terms of how it relates to the structure / behaviour debate?
19. The study is tied to the bigger picture of inter-organisation business collaborating and alliance management in general, and in addressing the dilemmas, problems and predicament of the individuals involved in business collaborating at TCA in particular. The study also offers a significant and original contribution to professional knowledge and practice, with reference to existing knowledge, through a deeper exploration of the public sector collaborating processes. I have looked holistically at the research setting and attempted to make sense and understand the relationships and linkages among the people and the collaborating processes and procedures. The research study also goes some way to address a literature gap since a holistic, social, economic and political multidimensional conceptualisation of public sector business collaborating doesn’t exist. This study aims to address this gap from a relational, social constructionist perspective by focussing on the nature, substance and perceptions of the relationships between individuals involved in public sector business collaborating on a day-to-day basis; the interactions, the reconstructing of knowledge and making sense of what is going on. The world of business collaborating is ambiguous and complex and this study helps make better sense of the literature in general and the problems and predicament that individuals working for public sector organisations are finding with business collaborating in particular.

20. I have traced the historical context of the research problem and predicament through analysis of the current political and business environment of TCA. I have also traced the historical context of various business collaborating and alliance management issues in the literature and discussed how the subject and its related issues have evolved. There have been various attempts to classify critical business collaborating success factors with different writers identifying different factors as important. These key alliance factors are listed in table 2.6 and discussed later in the literature review chapter. I have also provided a brief overview of the perspectives of major contributors in the literature as to the definition and types of business collaborating and why people collaborate. Then illustrated various examples of business collaborating analysis irrespective of whether the authors identified themselves as postmodernist, critical theorists, social constructionist or of any other perspective. I have then considered the decision as to whether to collaborate or not, with particular emphasis on the public and private sector context. The main part of this chapter examines the literature accounts as to the factors perceived as important to ‘successful’ business collaborating, examined from a social constructionist perspective. Finally, I propose a social constructionist approach to understanding public sector business collaborating.