


Please cite the Published Version

Bresnen, Michael , Lennie, Sarah-Jane and Marshall, Nick (2025) Partnering in construction revisited: gauging progress in industry practice and prospects for advances in academic research. *Construction Management and Economics*, 43 (1). pp. 59-77. ISSN 0144-6193

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2024.2416035>

Publisher: Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

Version: Published Version

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/636230/>

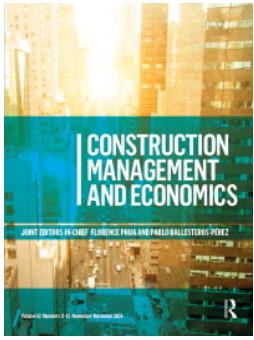
Usage rights:  [Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Additional Information: This is an open access article which was first published in *Construction Management and Economics*, published by Taylor and Francis

Data Access Statement: Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Enquiries:

If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)



Partnering in construction re-visited: gauging progress in industry practice and prospects for advances in academic research

Mike Bresnen, Sarah-Jane Lennie & Nick Marshall

To cite this article: Mike Bresnen, Sarah-Jane Lennie & Nick Marshall (24 Oct 2024): Partnering in construction re-visited: gauging progress in industry practice and prospects for advances in academic research, Construction Management and Economics, DOI: [10.1080/01446193.2024.2416035](https://doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2024.2416035)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2024.2416035>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 24 Oct 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Partnering in construction re-visited: gauging progress in industry practice and prospects for advances in academic research

Mike Bresnen^a, Sarah-Jane Lennie^b and Nick Marshall^c

^aFaculty of Business and Law, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK; ^bFaculty of Business and Law, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK; ^cUniversity of Brighton, Brighton and Hove, UK

ABSTRACT

Despite the ubiquity of partnering and alliancing in industry discourse and academic research, questions remain about the extent of transformational change within the sector towards more collaborative working. Revisiting earlier work that highlighted issues, problems and dilemmas of partnering related to definitional ambiguities, conflicting (commercial) orientations and cultural reach and readiness, this paper highlights continuing problems of definition, formalization, translation and performance. Attention is directed towards the lack of external validation and institutionalization, as well as the need for more comparative analysis, situated understanding, awareness of organizational pluralism and recognition of relational dynamics. From this critical review, a framework is presented that embraces the variety and indeterminacy in the many definitions, pathways to collaboration, realizations in practice and evaluative recipes used. Partnering is presented instead as being constituted through complex and interacting bundles of practices that cut across levels of interaction, and which reflect competing (and contested) institutional influences, situated practices, outcomes/effects and performance evaluations. This practice-based approach is more attuned to the diversity and fluidity of the institutional contexts, organizational processes, and project/programme settings wherein partnering is situated and through which it is instantiated, and thus affords new avenues of research into its nature and effects.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 December 2023
Accepted 8 October 2024

KEYWORDS

Partnering; alliancing;
collaboration; practice-
based theory;
institutionalization

Introduction

From as long ago as the mid-1990s, greater collaboration between clients and contractors through the medium of partnering and related forms of collaboration (such as alliancing and early contractor involvement) has been heralded as the way forward for responding to the fragmentation that has historically characterized the industry and which has bedevilled performance (Daniel *et al.* 2017). Rooted in industry and government reports that called for a new way of integrative working based on experiences in manufacturing (Bresnen and Marshall 2000a, 2010), partnering has since become a byword for enhanced collaboration and improved project performance, notwithstanding the many forms it can take in practice (Nyström 2005, Lahdenperä 2012, Kadefors *et al.* 2024) and continued critical reflection on its key underlying assumptions (e.g. Bresnen 2007).

Indeed, some have even suggested that collaboration within construction (qua partnering) has wider ramifications, both in promoting institutional change within certain domains of industry and government practice (e.g. Winch and Maytorena-Sanchez 2020, Glass *et al.* 2022) and in ensuring that the industry as a whole is better equipped to collaborate with others to meet the grand societal challenges of sustainability and place development as well as wider social policies (Thomson *et al.* 2024).

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, partnering has been extensively studied, both in the UK and internationally, with research consistently pointing to both the value of such forms of relational contracting and the many influences on their application and success (Chan *et al.* 2003, 2008, Beach *et al.* 2005, Yeung *et al.* 2007, 2009, Hartmann *et al.* 2014, Daniel *et al.* 2017, Sundquist *et al.* 2018, Bygballe and Swärd 2019, Eriksson *et al.* 2019, Ruijter *et al.* 2021, Walker *et al.* 2022, Kadefors *et al.* 2024).

CONTACT Mike Bresnen  M.Bresnen@mmu.ac.uk  Faculty of Business and Law, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Yet, despite the wealth of information and knowledge we now have about partnering – particularly in the private sector – several key issues remain that belie what appears to be a sedimentation of partnering in industry practice and its normalization within (certain) procurement regimes (Walker and Lloyd-Walker 2015). In an earlier work (Bresnen and Marshall 2000a), the authors identified and examined three main sets of issues, problems and dilemmas that at that time remained unresolved or under-explored in the literature. These were: the lack of an adequate and precise definition; the potential conflict between commercial pressures and forms of collaboration in practice; and the inherent difficulties in attempting to change organizational cultures to support collaboration (ibid: 230). In this paper, we re-visit many of these themes that were highlighted as underexplored conceptually and empirically in the literature, but for which there is now considerable empirical evidence. Our overarching aim is to crystallize that knowledge of partnering into an analytical framework that not only helps represent its many manifestations but which also captures its many and varied antecedents, correlates and consequences – providing a framework and agenda for continuing research into the phenomenon.

Partnering in construction has certainly become ubiquitous – whether expressed formally as such on projects (Cheung *et al.* 2003, Yeung *et al.* 2007); through its manifestations in project or programme alliances (e.g. Walker *et al.* 2002, Walker *et al.* 2022, Love *et al.* 2021, Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022); or through its sublimation into the many forms of explicit collaboration that characterize client-contractor interaction on major projects (e.g. Lahdenperä 2012, Hartmann *et al.* 2014, Davies *et al.* 2016, Oliveira and Lumineau 2017, Eriksson *et al.* 2019). Yet questions continue to be raised about the efficacy of such arrangements for improving both relational processes and performance outcomes. Hameed and Abbott (2017), for example, have suggested that 50% of strategic alliances around the world are failing and recent overviews have stressed the failure of partnering and alliancing to deliver on its promise (Challender *et al.* 2017, Love *et al.* 2021). This is despite mounting research that continues to highlight the appropriateness and suitability of partnering and alliancing as systems of governance under particular project conditions (e.g. Pitsis *et al.* 2003, Bygballe *et al.* 2010, Eriksson *et al.* 2019, Evans *et al.* 2020, Love *et al.* 2021, Walker *et al.* 2022).

Furthermore, it remains the case that a partnering approach does not necessarily guarantee improved project performance; and that improved performance can be achieved without an explicit commitment to partnering (Oliveira and Lumineau 2017). Indeed, research has taken an increasingly critical line in subjecting the concept of partnering to analysis based on a wider range of evaluative criteria than industry-determined project performance indicators. Of particular importance here has been the mobilization of insights from critical management studies in helping inform a more rounded, critical view of the context, nature and impact of partnering (e.g. Alderman and Ivory 2007) and from institutional theory in understanding its embedding in practice and wider proliferation (e.g. Winch and Maytorena-Sanchez 2020, Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022).

Research over the period has extensively examined the key features of, and crucial questions centred around, partnering, including continuing definitional issues about what constitutes partnering in theory and how it is manifested in practice (Nyström 2005, Eriksson 2010, Lahdenperä 2012, Daniel *et al.* 2017, Hameed and Abbott 2017, Eriksson *et al.* 2019). Questions have also been explored around the scope of application of partnering across sectors, particularly on public sector projects (Hartmann *et al.* 2014, Matinheikki *et al.* 2019, Bresnen and Lennie 2023, Rosander and Kadefors 2023), given the continued importance of competitive tendering (Reeves *et al.* 2017) and wider debates about public-private partnerships (Sherratt *et al.* 2020). Institutional and cross-national differences in the conditions enabling and inhibiting partnering have also been highlighted (Phua 2006, Bresnen and Marshall 2010, Winch and Maytorena-Sanchez 2020, Kadefors *et al.* 2024). The complex relationship between formal governance arrangements and the behavioural and attitudinal changes that lie at the heart of partnering prescriptions has also been explored at a project level (Bresnen and Marshall 2002, Bresnen 2009, Hällström and Bosch-Sijtsema 2024). So too have the mechanisms needed and used to promote, measure and monitor collaboration on projects (Chan *et al.* 2003, 2008, Cheung *et al.* 2003, Yeung *et al.* 2007, 2009).

The questions that still arise, however, are to what extent, in the light of developments in theory, research and practice, are those issues, problems and dilemmas now resolved or even fully understood; and to what extent have we witnessed a transformation of the culture of the industry in the ways that the proponents of partnering envisaged – regardless of the

inherent challenges of any industry transformation (Glass *et al.* 2022)? The argument that will be developed in this paper is that, despite the greater infusion of partnering within industry discourse and practice and the wealth of research on its nature and effects, those underlying issues, problems and dilemmas continue to dog collaborative efforts and, in turn, shape the nature and impact of those efforts, prompting the need for much more exploration and research into the phenomenon and understanding why and how its benefits may be realized and its limitations overcome. Drawing upon the same structure that was used in our original article, we will re-visit the case for partnering, its nature and definition, and prospects for cultural transformation in the light of work undertaken since. In doing so, we will particularly highlight continuing gaps in our understanding of the organizational and institutional correlates of partnering and attempt to capture these through the generation of our analytical framework that can help inform further research on modes of collaboration in construction.

The case for collaboration through partnering in the construction industry

The expected benefits of partnering are essentially what they were in the 1990s/2000s: a reduction in costs and disputes, reduced lead times and programme delays, more product and process innovation, and the greater sharing of risk, reward, resources and knowledge (Chan *et al.* 2003, 2008, Beach *et al.* 2005, Bygballe *et al.* 2010, Challender *et al.* 2017, Sparkling *et al.* 2016, Eriksson *et al.* 2019). Through more open communications and trusting relationships, it is expected that relations between clients and contractors (and their subcontractors) will become less contractual and adversarial and promote cultural benefits in terms of organizational flexibility and commitment and the ability to learn and solve problems (Wood *et al.* 2002, Beach *et al.* 2005, Crespín-Mazet and Ghauri 2007, Lahdenperä 2012, Eriksson *et al.* 2019).

Interestingly, while some research suggests that, for clients, meeting project objectives – especially faster construction time – is the main driver and benefit, consultants and contractors rate “improvement of relationship amongst project participants” as the most significant benefit (Chan *et al.* 2008, p.531), suggesting that clients may be a little less concerned with the means to the end than in the end itself. It also highlights how important are the potential reputational (and thus marketing) benefits that can accrue to contractors (and consultants) from them being seen to

embrace collaboration and associated values of honesty and open communications, promise-keeping, fairness/reasonableness and mutuality/reciprocity (Wood *et al.* 2002).

At the same time, it is obvious that partnering is not the panacea it was once presented as. Challender *et al.* (2017), for example, note the failure of partnering to yield expected benefits and significant industry scepticism about the approach, due to a gap between the rhetoric of trust and the reality of behaviour on the ground. They and many others (e.g. Nyström 2005, Anvuur and Kumaraswamy 2007, Hameed and Abbott 2017, Sundquist *et al.* 2018, Evans *et al.* 2020) stress the importance of individual and group behaviour in translating the choice of a partnering arrangement into effective partnering on projects (Challender *et al.* 2017, p.549). Sundquist *et al.* (2018, p.365) describe this as the “actor bond” and such “soft” human factors (motivation, team building, trust and respect) are still seen as critical influences on project performance (Ruijter *et al.* 2021). At the same time, the limitations of having to rely on what is effectively project specific, situated behavioural change is also recognized as “changing attitudes between actors will not be sufficient to reach the strategic partnering level” (Sundquist *et al.* (2018, p.369). Reducing partnering in this way to the level of individual and group behaviour still raises questions about the extent to which it is possible to generalize the learning from such behaviour and embed its key principles in wider organizational cultural values and norms (cf. Davies and Brady 2004, 2016).

Consequently, while there is a good deal of recognition and acceptance of the principles of partnering across the sector, there are still major questions about how it works and with what effects (Anvuur and Kumaraswamy 2007, Bygballe *et al.* 2010, Gottlieb & Haugbölle 2013, Hosseini *et al.* 2016). Many researchers have shifted attention to understanding its practical manifestations and consequences in particular project and organizational circumstances and contexts (Gottlieb and Haugbölle 2013, Sundquist *et al.* 2018, Bygballe and Swärd 2019, Matinheikki *et al.* 2019, Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022, Rosander and Kadefors 2023). While some researchers have tried to pin down the key performance indicators and project success measures that enable both researchers and practitioners to “measure, monitor, improve and benchmark the partnering performance of construction projects” (Yeung *et al.* 2009, p.1100; see also Cheung *et al.* 2003, Yeung *et al.* 2007), others have instead focused on partnering’s emergent relational

qualities and its impact as a lived experience (Nyström 2005, Bresnen 2009, Bygballe *et al.* 2010, Hartmann and Bresnen, 2011). Rather than being prescribed, partnering is now considered to be something that is actively developed and sensitively applied, with due cognisance of culture and context and of its social embeddedness in inter-organizational relationships (Gottlieb and Haugbölle 2013, Jacobsson and Roth, 2014, Sundquist *et al.* 2018, Bygballe and Swärd 2019).

Complexities and challenges of partnering: continuing issues, problems and dilemmas

Despite, however, the sophistication of much of that research, there remain real tensions and dilemmas in the way in which the subject is approached, and these still arguably revolve around definitional issues, cultural change expectations, and scope of application (international, sector). Each of these is now considered in turn.

In search of a definition of partnering

Partnering, alliancing and collaboration

The importance to partnering of long-term cooperation, at least in its original formulation, has always raised questions about its application to individual projects or programmes of work. While early work did try to distinguish between project-based alliances and longer term (programme-based) partnering (e.g. Loraine 1993), this only highlighted, rather than resolved, the tension between the (expected) longer term benefits of partnering and its mobilization as a project-based collaborative solution. Debates do continue about the feasibility of project-based partnering (Sundquist *et al.* 2018) and strategic alliancing and partnering are still seen as interchangeable terms within the industry (Hameed and Abbott 2017) – although alliancing is now extensively used to refer to one-off megaprojects or programmes of work in particular settings (e.g. Walker *et al.* 2002, Lahdenperä 2012, Eriksson *et al.* 2019, Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022, Walker *et al.* 2022). However, for the most part, partnering and related forms of collaboration are still largely applied in practice to single projects (Beach *et al.* 2005, Anvuur and Kumaraswamy 2007, Bygballe *et al.* 2010, Lahdenperä 2012, Hosseini *et al.* 2016, Challender *et al.* 2017, Sundquist *et al.* 2018, Eriksson *et al.* 2019).

At the same time, while such projects are ostensibly one-off, the scale and duration of work can provide sufficient longevity for the embedding of collaborative

relationships amongst what may become, on the largest and longest of projects, quasi-permanent organizational conditions (e.g. Davies *et al.* 2016). Moreover, across such projects, informal relational ties do provide some continuity between individual and organizational actors that allow the embedding of relational norms within associated wider project and programme ecologies (Grabher and Ibert 2010, Davies and Brady 2016, Hällström and Bosch-Sijtsema 2024).

While some continue to follow the lead of those who insist more generally on precise definitions of collaboration and related concepts (e.g. Castañer and Oliveira 2020), research has continued to highlight the ambiguities in terms, focusing upon the main differences *and* similarities between partnering and alliancing and related forms of collaboration (Eriksson *et al.* 2019, Lahdenperä 2012, Engebø *et al.* 2020). While such continuing etymological uncertainty may, on the face of it, appear to be less important in practice, lack of clarity and agreement of the definition of partnering between partners can nevertheless be a barrier to successful partnering, as Hosseini *et al.* (2016) found in their Norwegian study where contractor and host company struggled to agree terms (see also Rosander and Kadefors 2023, p.667). Moreover, it is perhaps not insignificant that the arguably less contentious and critically derided broader concepts of “collaboration” or “relational contracting” now often replace explicit reference to partnering in both industry discourse and academic research (e.g. Chakkol *et al.* 2018, Kadefors *et al.* 2024, p.39–40).

Partnering scope, practices and mechanisms

A continuing important source of variation in practice is with respect to partnering further down the supply chain (cf. Glass *et al.* 2022). Partnering with subcontractors has always been an ambiguous element of partnering discourse, which is surprising, given that subcontractors and suppliers typically account for over 80% of contract costs (Sundquist *et al.* 2018). Partnering between clients and contractors may not cascade any further down the supply chain (Bresnen and Marshall 2000b). Whereas some do engage fully with their suppliers, others remain only partially engaged, and yet others adopt different approaches with different suppliers within a project (Daniel *et al.* 2017). Indeed, the rewards that accrue to clients and contractors may only be achieved by pushing risk and cost further down the supply chain. Even where there is a desire to partner with suppliers, contractors may take a more transactional approach to obtaining particular (substitutable) supplies if products of equivalent

specification and quality are readily available on the market. Moreover, as Sundquist *et al.* (2018) found, even though there can be a desire to partner with subcontractors, it is often difficult to provide more than just a standalone contract due to the specific nature of the service required. Consequently, conditions may or may not favour the extension of collaboration across supply chains. More generally, in-depth study of contractor-subcontractor partnering remains comparatively rare (Beach *et al.* 2005, Bygballe *et al.* 2010, Sundquist *et al.* 2018).

In practice, the precise mechanisms used to support partnering can also vary considerably (Eriksson *et al.* 2019). These might include a risk/reward contractual element (or “gainshare/painshare” formula) and dispute resolution mechanisms. Team building exercises and/or charters and workshops – often externally facilitated – can be used and performance management and improvement programmes are common (Bresnen and Marshall 2000a, 2000b). In practice, however, the precise combination of practices, tools and techniques is likely to vary and depend fundamentally on client preferences, organizational needs and existing practices, processes and relationships (Beach *et al.* 2005, Adnan *et al.* 2012, Gottlieb and Haugbölle 2013). Hosseini *et al.* (2016), for example, identified a number of elements of partnering from the literature, and compared these to 26 partnering projects, finding that there was no single element that was considered essential (see also Lahdenperä 2012).

The net effect is that partnering inevitably takes many different forms in practice and is not reducible to a universally applicable set of tools and techniques. Instead, within an overall framework of values and principles that support collaboration, tools and techniques tend to be used pragmatically and adopted selectively in a piecemeal way to build that collaboration (Bresnen and Marshall 2000b). Not only does this mean that what one witnesses in practice is a variety of forms of partnering and related forms of collaboration (Nyström 2005), it also undermines the ability to develop a clear and uncontested definition or template against which partnering can be understood and assessed in both theory and practice.

Another consequence is the tendency towards an instrumentalist view of how to develop partnering (Bresnen and Marshall 2000b, 2002, 2010). The use of tools and techniques to actively build collaboration – including on short term, one-off projects – perhaps helps parties move swiftly through the learning curve to develop trust and collaboration (cf. Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022). However, it also has its limitations

in enabling relational norms to develop (Bresnen and Marshall 2002), particularly given the inherent lack of incentive associated with follow on work opportunities (Anvuur and Kumaraswamy 2007, Gottlieb and Haugbölle 2013, Sundquist *et al.* 2018).

Our early work suggested that this generated a tension between informal, *developmental* approaches to relational contracting and more formal, *instrumental* perspectives (Bresnen and Marshall 2000b, 2002). Over the last two decades, the spread of partnering has continued to chart this dualistic course. Consequently, while some have emphasised the soft power of collaborative discourse, based upon concepts of cooperation, trust, teamwork and mutual respect (Eriksson and Laan 2007, Evans *et al.* 2020, Challender *et al.* 2017), others have emphasised the importance of practical tools, techniques, systems and metrics to engineer change (Cheung *et al.* 2003, Yeung *et al.* 2007, 2009, Graca and Camarinha-Matos 2016, Habibi *et al.* 2019). Over the years, the balance of emphasis has perhaps shifted away from too heavy a focus on devising measures and metrics to drive collaboration as these tend to erode the underlying relational principles of partnering. Yet, more recent developments bring into focus again some key dilemmas in this respect: for example, while digitization may have to some extent flourished in the post-covid environment (Cheshmehzangi 2021, Elrefaey *et al.* 2022), the research base is relatively silent on the concomitant effects of covid on prospects for relationship building due to (continuing) remote working and social distancing (Ghansah and Lu 2023).

Nevertheless, these complexities do highlight the continuing challenges of defining and measuring precisely what success actually means and how it relates to project objectives, project processes and/or more strategic business goals – despite findings that do show generally positive performance effects (e.g. Eriksson *et al.* 2019). There still remain clear problems in identifying key performance indicators of both project performance and the performance of the relationship to effectively “measure, monitor, improve and benchmark the partnering performance of construction projects” (Yeung *et al.* 2009, p.1100). These problems are added to if we consider the wider purpose of those projects and those relationships and the contribution to strategic goals they represent for individual organizations (cf. Morris 2013) and the inter-organizational networks in which they are nested (Söderlund and Sydow 2019).

In summary, while definitional issues are less hotly contested than they once were, they still remain an

issue for some, as do the many manifestations of partnering found in practice, how deeply these penetrate through supply chains, whether they reflect an instrumental or developmental logic, and their precise effects on project performance and company goals.

Partnering, contracting and cultural (i.e. industry) transformation

Partnering and relational contracting more generally was meant to represent a “cultural shift” away from confrontation and “adversarialism” towards greater collaboration and cooperation (e.g. Jacobsson and Roth 2014). The rhetoric of partnering or collaboration is certainly now a key feature of industry discourse (Bygballe and Swärd 2019). There is also plenty of evidence of the “leap of faith” taken by clients in collaborating with contractors; and of contractors collaborating further down the supply chain (Sundquist *et al.* 2018). Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether this shift in behaviours marks a deeper change in attitudes and values, given that actors may be “trapped in beliefs and values they have activated over the years” (Sundquist *et al.* 2018, p.369).

Partnering institutionalized?

At one level, the question is to what extent collaborative, relational forms of contracting such as partnering have become institutionalized across the industry. There is certainly a good deal of research evidence of both the embedding of relational contracting in key parts of the industry worldwide (e.g. Walker and Lloyd-Walker 2015, Davies *et al.* 2016, Chakkol *et al.* 2018, Bygballe and Swärd 2019); as well as of the power of major projects and programmes to act as the *vehicle* of such institutionalization (e.g. Davies *et al.* 2016, Matinheikki *et al.* 2019, Love *et al.* 2021, Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022). In other words, institutional change can occur through the institutional work undertaken at both project and field level associated with prominent (mega) projects and programmes. At the same time, however, research continues to point to the complex relationship that exists between projects and the networks and institutional fields in which they are nested to suggest that such institutionalization is not straightforward (Söderlund and Sydow 2019). Research has also often highlighted the continuing challenges of reconciling the contradictory institutional logics of collaboration and competition on major projects and, thus, embedding change across the wider institutional fields they

represent (Winch and Maytorena-Sanchez 2020, Roehrich *et al.* 2024). Consequently, while some institutional changes may be observed, the bigger picture is one of variation, flux and inconsistency (Kadefors *et al.* 2024).

Moreover, an important unanswered question is how do we reconcile the many and diverse forms of partnering observed in practice with the processes of isomorphism and legitimation that should characterize the institutionalization of partnering? The question is particularly important if the aim is to establish standards that define expectations clearly (e.g. Chakkol *et al.* 2018, Kadefors *et al.* 2024, p.40–41). Indeed, in some situations, a more instrumental approach based on prescribed management methods and captured in guidelines and benchmarks appears to typify wider institutional transformation (Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022). However, in others, change appears more developmental and governance more distributed (Bygballe and Swärd 2019, Matinheikki *et al.* 2019, Ruijter *et al.* 2021, Rouyre *et al.* 2024). In yet others, the recursive interplay of institutional and (project) organizational factors and logics means the key to understanding partnering is as an ongoing accomplishment whereby co-existing or conflicting logics are somehow effectively reconciled (Rosander 2022, Bresnen and Lennie 2023, Rosander and Kadefors 2023, Hällström and Bosch-Sijtsema 2024, Radaelli *et al.* 2024).

Partnering embedded in practice?

At another level, the relationship between institutional level change and behavioural transformation “on the ground” presents a potentially much more complex picture of the translation of partnering principles into practice (Bresnen and Marshall 2010). Eriksson and Laan (2007), for example, found that Swedish contractors continued to display behaviours that valued price and authority over cooperation, reflecting continued low trust. In a similar vein, Ankrah *et al.* (2008) found that the structures underpinning relationships did not support collaboration when the project faced challenging circumstances, such as through cost pressures. Hexelen and Loosemore (2012) have highlighted how entrenched behaviours can undermine partnering efforts, as can the “culture shock” of moving from adversarial traditional contracts to relational contracting, where risk and reward are shared. Moreover, the issue is not just one of translating partnering principles into practice: it works both ways. Rosander and Kadefors (2023), for example, show how a strong drive for collaboration on the ground on a major Swedish

programme of work was undermined by residual marketing policies at an organizational level (see also Bresnen and Lennie 2023, Hällström and Bosch-Sijtsema 2024). As such, change may be skin deep and easily undermined by historical predilections – at a project or organizational level. A clear alternative interpretation, of course, is that commitment to partnering thus reflects as much the impact of market conditions and a more superficial alignment with the principles and practices of an approach that, for both clients and contractors, offers a way to meet institutional expectations while, at the same time securing more cost effective projects (for clients) and, for contractors, gaining more work (cf. Alderman and Ivory 2007, Bresnen 2007).

The continuing question here is whether the explicit commitment to partnering reflects and, in turn, shapes each party's own organizational cultural values and practices in ways that are internally consistent and which reinforce that commitment. Amongst the most conspicuous gaps in partnering research over the past 20 years is a focus on how partnering is shaped by, and reflected in, *internal* organizational structural and cultural capabilities (Rosander 2022, 2024, p.4). Work in this area continues, of course, to highlight the importance of internal championing of a partnering approach and the need for effective leadership to drive cultural adaptation (Nifa and Ahmed 2010). A lot of emphasis has been placed too on promoting behavioural change at both individual and group level (Evans *et al.* 2020). However, rather less attention has explicitly been directed at how these internal capabilities recursively relate to cultural transformation at the *interstices* between organizations (i.e. within project teams) and whether this signifies the sought-after more profound change of culture within the industry (Crespin-Mazet *et al.* 2015, Sundquist *et al.* 2018). For example, interviews conducted by Daniel *et al.* (2017) with 31 members of the UK construction industry (contractor, client, subcontractor and consultant) over a 12-month period showed that, while collaborative planning improved delivery time, collaboration was often only implemented at higher organizational levels due to the perception that onsite workers were simply too busy.

The interplay of collaborative and commercial logics

Broadening this out, the question still remains of how well partnering helps overcome some of the tensions and challenges associated with the reconciliation of fundamentally conflicting commercial aims and

objectives (Bresnen 2007). Perhaps the most obvious barrier to partnering is the residual appeal of competitive tendering. While it leads to a short-term, single project orientation and a focus on the price of tenders, for some clients this is often a preferred way of testing the market and seeking to reduce their initial capital cost (Eriksson and Laan 2007, Sundquist *et al.* 2018, Challender *et al.* 2017). The continued paradox here is that, for clients, the desire for greater collaboration based on a negotiated partnering agreement means foregoing the benefits of competition in procurement. For contractors, the prospect of securing more future work is offset by the cost of taking on greater risk and potentially reduced margins – particularly in buyer's markets. Initial scepticism can also be reinforced through previous experience (cf. Poppo *et al.* 2008). Collaborative approaches are often met with scepticism by construction professionals who believe that the benefits have been exaggerated and can point to negative experiences, such as lack of information sharing which has led to mistrust (Daniel *et al.* 2017).

In other words, partnering may be the accepted discourse, but cost saving and continuous improvement is still the aim and contractors who fail can easily be removed from lists of preferred suppliers. Moreover, any continuing emphasis on reducing cost rather than adding value can drive down quality and standards and create insecurity in the relationship, thus further undermining partnering (Wood and Ellis 2005, Alderman and Ivory 2007, p.388). Alderman and Ivory (2007, p.392) go so far as to suggest that partnering is, at best, an appeal to work together closely and to share the benefits of doing so. At worst, however, it becomes “a discursive smokescreen behind which to conceal business as usual, whilst at the same time motivating suppliers and contractors to go the extra mile” (ibid: 392). Adversarial thinking, the evidence suggests, is never far from the surface in any project, however obscured or suppressed it may be by an expressed commitment to partnering (Alderman and Ivory 2007, p.388). The complex interplay of collaborative and commercial motivations reflects a divergence and contestation of logics in the establishment of partnering relationships, their implementation in practice, and the extrapolation of learning across projects and the wider institutional field (cf. Roehrich *et al.* 2024).

In summary, while we have seen significant evidence of the institutionalization of relational forms of contracting, there are still significant gaps in our understanding about the diversity of forms this has led to, whether and how it translates into changed

behaviour “on the ground” and across participating organizations, and how collaborative and commercial logics are reconciled in practice.

Partnering and national, sectoral differences

There are also continuing questions about the scope of application of partnering internationally and across sectors of activity. Following early interest in the US, UK and Australia, partnering has since become much more internationally widespread with examples and cases emerging across a variety of international settings, including Hong Kong (Chan *et al.* 2003, 2008), Sweden (Eriksson and Laan 2007), Norway (Hosseini *et al.* 2016), the Netherlands (Venselaar *et al.* 2014), Qatar (Evans *et al.* 2020), Malaysia (Adnan *et al.* 2012), and China (Hong *et al.* 2012, Du *et al.* 2015). However, it is still quite concentrated in specific contexts (notably the Far East, Australia and Northern Europe) and still largely embraced by developed, rather than developing, economies.

International patterns and differences

While manifestations of partnering and related forms of collaboration have been shaped institutionally by international experiences – particularly in the UK, Australia and Scandinavia (Lahdenperä 2012, Kadefors *et al.* 2024) – there has still been very little comparative analysis of partnering *across* national contexts – even though the potential impact of international cultural and/or institutional differences has long been recognized (Phua 2006). Most research does provide clear evidence of international differences. In France, for example, there was seen to be a reluctance to embrace partnering due to the industry’s historic oligopolistic structure, reflected in the dominance of the four largest firms, which generated “a culture of distrust and adversarial relationships” (Crespin-Mazet and Ghauri 2007, p.237). In Australia, despite the growth in project alliances, there continues to be a gap between the rhetoric of collaborative working and the reality of a more traditional, adversarial approach, driven by financial imperatives (Davis and Love 2011, Love *et al.* 2021). Yet, such research continues to be nationally focused and thus institutionally bound, which inevitably restricts comparative analysis.

The notable exception here is recent work by Kadefors *et al.* (2024), which has compared relational contracting across Scandinavian countries and highlighted important similarities and differences – especially in the co-existence of relational and more traditional forms of procurement; in the role of public

sector institutions and others as drivers of change; and in the “pendulum movements” (ibid: 39) that have characterised waves of legitimation and de-legitimation of relational contracting as advocacy has given way to scepticism (and back again) in the light of the successes and failures experienced. While such analysis is important as it reveals the different forms that partnering takes and the importance of historical and institutional context in shaping those experiences, it is still bound by its regional focus and also leaves open further opportunities for systematically identifying at a more abstract level the enabling and inhibiting conditions associated with the embedding of partnering in different political institutions, legal frameworks, market conditions, societal contexts and technological environments (cf. Whitley 1999).

Public sector partnering

Regarding sectoral differences, the most notable omission is the comparative lack of research attention directed to partnering on public sector infrastructure projects. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the emphasis on compulsory competitive tendering became stronger – in the UK at least – just as partnering was being promoted as a serious alternative to more traditional forms of contracting (Pinch and Patterson 2000, Reeves *et al.* 2017). Over the past 20 years, at least in the UK, an easing of such restrictions combined with the extension of public-private partnering through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) has opened up the possibilities for collaborative contracting to be pursued by public sector clients (Corner 2005, Carrillo *et al.* 2008). Research on PFI and PPP has, however, highlighted how it remains more challenging to develop collaboration between clients and contractors, particularly given the importance of contract price in letting contracts and the challenges caused by delays in project delivery (Li *et al.* 2005, Nisar 2007, Carrillo *et al.* 2008, Henjeweile *et al.* 2011, Sweet 2018, Sherratt *et al.* 2020). A tendency to default to more adversarial, “contractual” ways of ensuring contract compliance has also inhibited attempts at developing stronger relational norms of cooperation and trust (Smyth and Edkins 2007) – despite repeated calls from government to move away from confrontation and towards relationalism (e.g. HM Treasury 2020, p.86).

While there is still an important gap to be filled in understanding how partnering works (or has worked) on such projects, other research on collaborative working on major public sector programmes has thrown important light on the factors and processes

enabling the development of collaboration between prominent public sector clients and their contractual partners (Davies and Brady 2004, 2016, Brady and Davies 2014, Hartmann *et al.* 2014, Winch and Leiringer 2016, Zerjav *et al.* 2018, Roehrich *et al.* 2019). Drawing upon the concept of dynamic capabilities (e.g. Eisenhardt and Martin 2000), emphasis has been put on exploring the development of *project capabilities* and their exploitation on projects or programmes at an operational level and, in turn, how these relate to organizations' dynamic capabilities at a more strategic business level (Davies and Brady 2016, Davies *et al.* 2016, Zerjav *et al.* 2018). While most of this work focuses on contractors' project capabilities, recent work has also highlighted the role of clients in developing such capabilities, acting as capable owners driving performance and aiming to ensure that the voice of the customer and its business needs are clearly articulated and met (Winch and Leiringer 2016, Maytorena-Sanchez and Winch 2022).

Research in this area has highlighted both the scale and significance of collaborative working on public sector projects/programmes (Hartmann *et al.* 2014, Davies *et al.* 2016, Zerjav *et al.* 2018, Roehrich *et al.* 2019). It has also shown how closely connected and mutually reinforcing the relationship is between building effective project collaborations to improve project performance – often through integrated project teams – and developing project capabilities (Davis and Walker 2009, Davis and Love 2011, Hartmann *et al.* 2014, Winch and Leiringer 2016, Roehrich *et al.* 2019, Love *et al.* 2021). Despite the focus on single projects or programmes, it has also shown how projects/programmes of sufficient size and impact can create the conditions for the development by firms of such project capabilities, as well as allow the wider diffusion of learning across projects or programmes of work (Davis and Walker 2009, Davies and Brady 2016).

The stages of transition from traditional to more collaborative ways of working have also been of interest. Hartmann *et al.* (2014), for example, link relational capabilities to shifts in contracting strategy leading to more collaborative interaction and value co-creation; while Zerjav *et al.* (2018) differentiate between the reconfiguration of project capabilities (at the project planning phase), their adaptation (during project execution) and maintenance (at final stages, through to handover). Others have highlighted the experiential phases that occur in relationship development (Davis and Walker 2009, Davis and Love 2011). Roehrich *et al.* (2019), for example, identify four phases of relationship development: motivation, motivation and early

search, continuous search and adaptation, implementation and validation. What connects these approaches are their emphasis on organizations' predispositions to collaborate, their motivations for adoption, and situational conditions shaping application and adaptation. Many researchers also highlight the factors enabling (or inhibiting) the embedding of these relational capabilities in project practice (e.g. Davis and Walker 2009, Davis and Love 2011, Zerjav *et al.* 2018).

The work leaves a number of unresolved issues, however. The first is the tendency to take the single project (or, most commonly, the mega-project or programme) as the appropriate unit of analysis (e.g. Davies *et al.* 2016, Zerjav *et al.* 2018), rather than simultaneously considering the project/programme within its wider (organizational and inter-organizational) context (Bresnen and Lennie 2023, Rosander and Kadefors 2023, Rosander 2024). While there is great value in taking a project focus, it can downplay the wider organizational influences that shape interaction, both directly and indirectly (cf. Engwall 2003). Second, is the tendency to privilege an "aggregated", organizational-level view of project relational capabilities, rather than drilling down to understand the dynamics of interaction at the level of key individual actors and groups. Given the reliance on the organizational level concept of capabilities this is perhaps not surprising. However, it does draw attention away from the situated interaction through which such relational capabilities are instantiated in practice (Hällström and Bosch-Sijtsema 2024). Third, the explicit inter-mingling of public and private sector practices and norms in such contexts and how they shape the development of contractual and relational capabilities tends to get overlooked (Rosander and Kadefors 2023). Arguably, such organizations face particular challenges and constraints in pursuing a collaborative approach due to their quasi-public sector status (Love *et al.* 2021, p.5).

There are therefore important gaps still to be filled in understanding how partnering works in this context, particularly regarding the impact of structural/cultural differences that reflect the public/private institutional divide and in understanding the corresponding *organizational* barriers and inhibitors to developing a partnering "culture" (Bresnen and Lennie 2023). More work in this area is of value, particularly given the importance of the public sector as a client in the construction industry (Sweet 2018), the role of public clients as drivers of change (Kadefors *et al.* 2024), and the proliferation of large public projects undertaken internationally which have various forms

of partnering and alliancing at their heart (e.g. Pitsis *et al.* 2003, Rosander 2022, Walker *et al.* 2022).

In summary, while we know a lot more now about manifestations of collaboration internationally and within the public sector, most of our understanding remains context-bound and sector-specific and we have only just begun to engage in the comparative analysis and longitudinal study necessary to generate analytical (rather than descriptive) insights into how partnering and related forms of collaboration relate to their context and evolve.

Towards an agenda and framework for future research?

The above review has attempted a critical overview of research on partnering, highlighting its continuing presumed benefits and advantages over traditional forms of contracting, while at the same time exploring key unanswered questions about its meaning in theory and practice; its impact upon the “culture” of the industry; and differences in its breadth and depth of application, across national contexts, sectors of activity, and within contracting organizations themselves.

Regarding definitional issues, the absence of a clear, unambiguous formal definition or set of common practices does not of itself constitute a major constraint upon understanding partnering, neither in theory nor in practice. However, it does throw the emphasis more upon trying to understand partnering as a pragmatic solution and lived experience, albeit one that is potentially different for the many parties involved due to their distinct perspectives and interests. It also questions the use of formulaic approaches to setting up partnership arrangements. Furthermore, it inevitably means that attempts to measure the effects of partnering (either by practitioners or researchers) need to acknowledge that the measures and metrics used can only really be situated in specific project contexts. In turn, this brings real challenges that need to be recognized of being able to comparatively evaluate the success (or failure) of partnering projects. In other words, the problem is one of *external validation*. Partnering judged in its own terms or by reference to its own implementation still risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy – that is, being seen to *do* partnering and commit to it *ergo* means it works. More generally, there is still a crying need to understand how partnering relates to broader performance goals and objectives – not only within wider programmes of work, but also in relation to each

participating organization’s strategic goals and calculations of value (cf. Morris 2013, Love *et al.* 2021).

Regarding industry culture, the jury is clearly still out on whether partnering has had (or can have) sufficient impact to overcome structural constraints (particularly due to traditional forms of tendering) and thus transform the “culture” of the industry. Promoting greater collaboration has certainly become subsumed within wider discourse within the industry. As such, there are certainly institutional isomorphic tendencies, both normative and mimetic (cf. DiMaggio and Powell 1983) affecting the spread of partnering discourse and which do shape how clients and contractors do, or seek to do, business (Biesenthal *et al.* 2018). However, continued powerful economic imperatives affecting both parties to the contract, as well as shifting market conditions that may, at any time, favour one side over the other, still raise questions as to how *institutionalized* partnering has (or could) become and how well it amounts to (or can encourage or generate) wider institutional change (Winch and Maytorena-Sanchez 2020). Moreover, if one takes into account any potential (or likely?) disconnect between cycles of policy discourse and the realm of industry practice (e.g. Rosander and Kadefors 2023), then the prospects for industry transformation become ever more abstract, elusive and contestable.

Regarding the breadth and depth of application, the wide range of research on different cross-national experiences does show important cross-cultural similarities as well as significant variations (e.g. Kadefors *et al.* 2024), which again brings into question the supposed universalism of partnering and which suggests a continued need for greater *comparative analysis* across national institutional settings (cf. Whitley 1999). There is also a clear gap when it comes to research on the micro-processes of interaction found on public sector partnering and alliancing projects, both in the UK and internationally (Rosander 2022, 2024). Given the localized cultural differences found when public agencies interact with private sector businesses (broadly speaking, the mixture of public service and commercial institutional logics), there is clearly value in pursuing a more *situated understanding* of partnering and the forms it takes (and the effects it has) on public sector projects (cf. Bresnen and Lennie 2023).

Developing this theme of situated analysis further, there is still a significant gap in understanding how the micro-processes of interaction on partnering projects relate to broader organizational structural and cultural conditions. The unit of analysis has naturally mainly been the project and collaboration on the

project which occurs at the interstices *between* organizations. However, there is further value to be gained by understanding the recursive interplay between relational conditions on the project and how these are, variously, enabled or inhibited by wider structural/cultural conditions *within* each participating organization (cf. Lindkvist *et al.* 1998). Importantly, such an analysis needs to go beyond existing research that aggregates relational qualities to the (organizational) level of project capabilities (e.g. Davies and Brady 2004, 2016). In other words, the problem is one of taking into account *organizational pluralism*, which also means exploring partnering not just from a project perspective, but also, simultaneously, from an organizational perspective (cf. Engwall 2003, Bresnen and Lennie 2023, Rosander and Kadefors 2023). This will allow a much more thorough understanding of the effects of organizational differentiation and subcultural influences on the propensity to partner that have so far been largely unaddressed.

Moreover, it is important that such an analysis takes account of the *relational dynamics* of interaction over time. At the level of interaction on projects (and

within the surrounding wider organizational network), the process of capitalizing on and institutionalizing collaboration can be regarded as an ongoing process, whereby cycles of positive and negative reinforcement are likely to further promote and/or inhibit the development of the relationship within the project (Fang *et al.* 2024, Rouyre *et al.* 2024), as well as, recursively, across the wider organizational divide within broader project/programme ecologies (Grabher and Ibert 2010). So, for example, partnering may be reinforced (and its institutionalization much more deeply affected) by the social capital generated through successful interaction (cf. Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), as much as through economic incentives and payback. Even more insight into these relational dynamics could be gained through relaxing our teleological assumptions about how to design or engineer partnering and, instead, by adopting an ontology that highlights the active building and becoming of a partnering relationship and which stresses its nature as a profound “social accomplishment” in the face of otherwise generally unsupportive economic and legal institutional conditions (cf. Tsoukas and Chia 2002). Whether or not

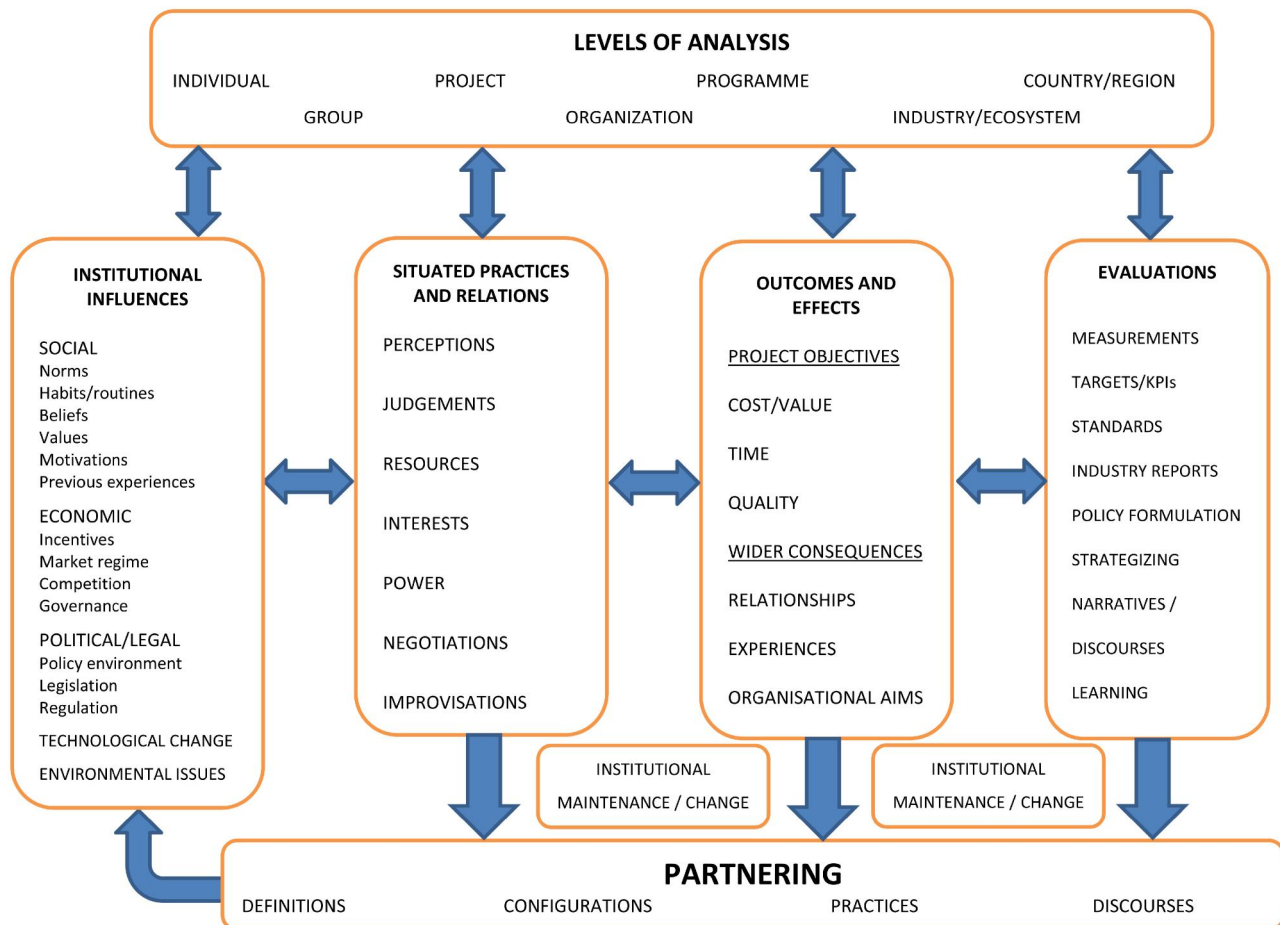


Figure 1. Partnering as constituted through bundles of practices

such a relationship becomes routinized or remains fragile becomes an empirical question and will reflect the relative balance of forces promoting stability or turbulence. Taking this theme and the previous point regarding organizational pluralism together, research that takes such an approach is likely also to afford greater insight into the challenges of change and of the ongoing internal organizational changes needed to support collaboration.

Researching these themes requires an approach that is sensitive to the recursive interplay between partnering in practice and the institutional influences that shape it. Drawing upon insights from practice-based and institutional theories, [Figure 1](#) offers a framework that addresses these key omissions in the evolving literature on partnering while providing some guidance for future research in the area.

The framework highlights and aims to synthesize the main elements shaping the nature and evolution of partnering in its various forms. Through it, we seek not only to understand and explain key sources of differentiation in practice and provide a schematic for their further analysis, but also to encourage a more holistic approach to analyzing partnering in its specific context. As explained below, this does not mean looking for a single, unified, prescriptive model of partnering, but instead a broad and flexible meta-framework that offers a platform for taking stock of findings to date as well as providing inspiration for future explorations. It acts more as a map than a recipe, highlighting the main features that shape partnering practices and the discourses surrounding them, but also suggesting a multiplicity of influences and dynamics that help explain varieties and supposed inconsistencies in partnering practice.

The framework draws together complementary aspects of institutional theory and practice-based theories highlighting the mutually constitutive interplay between the lived experiences and practices of those engaged in partnering (including a wider web of stakeholders and interested parties) and the influence of the institutional environment that they inhabit and which shapes wider partnering discourse. Its novelty is not so much in the conceptual elements and theoretical positions which, as this review has shown, have already been employed at times in the study of partnering and related forms of collaboration. Instead, its contribution is in explicitly bringing them together to focus on how the different elements relate to each other. We do not aim to offer a “grand theory” which explains everything, but rather to encourage a deeper understanding of reasons for the many varied

manifestations of partnering and their effects we encounter in practice. While the framework does have explanatory intent, it is on a more modest scale – acting more as a map that charts familiar locations, while inspiring exploration of less familiar aspects of the terrain that are worthy of further research.

The framework follows three sets of guiding principles. Firstly, it is overtly pluralistic, pragmatic, and cautious of dogma, acknowledging that there are multiple theoretical perspectives that can offer alternative insights. Rather than aiming for a single right “answer”, this diversity is welcomed as a source of creative understanding, offering alternative lenses through which to view partnering (cf. [Söderlund 2011](#)). Such a pragmatic embracing of multiple viewpoints has its limits, of course, if it brings together theoretical perspectives that may be inconsistent or even incommensurable. However, a second set of principles emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and careful scepticism in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical positions and how comfortably they fit together. It is also about unpacking and problematizing the various concepts in the framework, so they are opened up and their meanings not taken for granted. We thus follow the example set by [Alvesson et al. \(2019\)](#) in being more specific about how such concepts are used, while remaining open to seeing the world beyond an institutional or practice-based lens. This leads to the third set of principles, which are about indeterminacy, complexity, and open-endedness. The elements of the framework and the relations between them are, by necessity, abstractions and simplifications. However, we hope that they can be animated by providing a tool for sensemaking in the face of the complex realities and representations of partnering (cf. [Weick 1995](#)). Rather than being deterministic, we are purposefully open-ended about how the interplay of the different elements of the framework work themselves out in practice, with the potential for variation over time and between different settings.

These guiding principles are themselves broadly consistent with the theoretical traditions upon which the framework draws, reflecting similar debates and trajectories of development in both practice-based and institutional theories. Practice-based approaches are part of a wider, ongoing “practice turn” in social theory ([Schatzki et al. 2001](#)) which is informed by multiple traditions, drawing on writers as diverse as Bourdieu, Foucault, Garfinkel and Giddens – creating a rich variety of practice theories that many argue should be celebrated (e.g. [Gherardi 2001](#)). However, as

Nicolini (2012) cautions, combining theories with potentially incompatible assumptions does emphasize the need for critical reflexivity. Nevertheless, while being explicit about such differences is important, practice approaches do share some key similarities and overlapping characteristics which, according to Feldman and Orlikowski (2011, p.1241), are reflected in three “theorizing moves”: “(1) that situated actions are consequential in the production of social life, (2) that dualisms are rejected as ways of theorizing, and (3) that relations are mutually constitutive” (see Marshall 2014, for a discussion of these characteristics).

Institutional theories are equally heterogeneous and have prompted similar calls for more careful definition of terms and specification of theoretical assumptions (Alvesson *et al.* 2019). Although they share a focus on institutions, a major point of variation is between “old” and “new” institutionalism. The former, mainly associated with the work of Selznick, was concerned with processes of institutionalization, highlighting variation across organizations over time. Neo-institutional theory, in contrast, has been mostly preoccupied with the issue of isomorphism, which considers institutional pressures for conformity (Meyer and Rowan 1977, DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Scott 1995). Although institutional theory has the benefit of highlighting broader influences on organizational behaviour, varieties of it have been criticised for being too deterministic and treating individuals as “cultural dopes” (Colomy 1998). However, recent developments have offered a more agentic, contested, and open-ended view of institutional stability and change – highlighting the importance of institutional work (Lawrence *et al.* 2011), the interplay between different institutional logics (Seo and Creed 2002), and showing increasing interest in the micro-foundations of organizational institutionalism (Ocasio and Gai 2020).

The framework draws together elements of both practice theories and institutionalism to provide complementary insights. One criticism of practice theories is that they have been too focused on the micro-level. As Burgelman *et al.* (2018, p.540) argue, “practice scholars’ enthusiasm with a micro-level of activity have been accused by process scholars as having let fascination with the details of managerial conduct distract them from issues with substantive impact on organizational outcomes”. Conversely, institutional theories, while interested in the broader field level, have veered towards structural determinism. Bringing the two together in our multi-level framework offers the potential for bridging between micro and other analytical levels, emphasizing the mutually constitutive

interplay between partnering social practices and the institutional fields within which they are embedded (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1966, Giddens 1984). Practices and institutions are co-conditioning, with institutions shaping how practices play out in different settings and these situated practices, in turn, influencing the creation, reproduction, or transformation of institutions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Giddens 1984, Bourdieu 1990, Scott 1995). Through this model, we suggest that these processes of institutional formation, stabilization, maintenance, change and destruction are further guided by bundles of practices associated with making sense of the outcomes and effects of partnering, as well as with evaluating its benefits, opportunities, problems and challenges (cf. Raz *et al.* 2005). It is important to emphasize that the four central components of the framework – institutions, practices, outcomes and evaluations – are conceptual categories with no ontologically distinct status.

Just as the mutually conditioning relationship between institutions and practices makes them enmeshed and difficult to separate, so too is there a similar entanglement between outcomes and evaluations. These are, again, co-conditioning and socially constructed, emerging from practices of negotiation and contestation between different actors, thus establishing the criteria through which partnering projects and relationships are planned, measured, and judged. These will include some variation of the iron triangle of cost, time, and quality, but may also draw in other, wider or more nuanced criteria, such as alternative standards of evaluation (social, environmental, political); positive or negative experiences of partnering; and how far involvement in partnering is perceived as beneficial or otherwise for the organizations and individuals concerned.

A closely related set of institutionally shaped practices is involved in interpreting, prioritizing, and legitimizing the forms of valuation that are used, both formally and informally, to assess the outcomes and effects of partnering (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1966, Luckmann 1987). These include more localized practices, such as specific contractual conditions, KPIs and dashboards/metrics used to manage performance and regulate participants; and more distant or dispersed practices, such as wider commentaries on partnering in government reports, the media, industry and academic discourse as well as narratives that build and spread through relevant social networks. These practices help shape perceptions of partnering and influence organizational strategy processes and subsequent behaviours in collaborative engagements (cf. Winch and Sergeeva 2021).

The four key bundles of practices identified in [Figure 1](#) together help shape the institutional fields within which partnering is actively located. Crucially, there is scope for variation here. The power-laden relationships through which partnering is played out in practice allows for negotiations and improvisations that modify the definitions and routines of partnering and that may become institutionalized into new versions of the partnering “playbook” (Marshall 2006). Although this makes definition problematic, it usefully brings the process of classifying and defining partnering within the orbit of the framework as an integral set of practices that actively shapes the domain, rather than being simply a passive exogenous yardstick against which to measure it. This allows for an evolutionary perspective on the varying definitions, configurations, practices, and discourses of partnering that interact over time to constitute its “actuality” (cf. Cicmil *et al.* 2006).

Taking such a perspective on partnering allows us to tackle head on the challenges noted earlier surrounding issues of external validation, institutionalization, comparative analysis, situated understanding, organizational pluralism and relational dynamics by appreciating the complexities they bring to understanding that “actuality”. It also helps us to effectively circumvent four key problem areas that have bedevilled theory and research on partnering by suggesting that there is no one definitive answer. First, problems of definition: note the considerable effort expended on trying to define partnering, with particular emphasis on questions surrounding the temporality and duration of relationships, whether it is possible to have partnering on a single project, and how far partnering spreads through the value chain. Second, problems of formalization: whether or not partnering needs to be enshrined in formal agreements and the activities surrounding these (such as charters and workshops), as well as the wider question as to whether partnering can exist without being explicitly defined and acknowledged by participants (Marshall 2014). Third, problems of translation: that is, how the “theory” of partnering relates to and aligns with “practice”. The difficulty is that academic and practical fields operate according to their own logics and sets of practices that are constantly in motion, creating a potential disconnect between the realm of theories, narratives and discourses about partnering, and the complex combination of practices that constitute its realization in industry practice. Fourth, problems of performance: there is a strong instrumental logic in

the literature on partnering, driven by a concern with finding recipes that have proven to be successful. However, the concept of performance, and the evaluative practices that surround it, are clearly open to interpretation and (mis)representation, with the perceived success or otherwise of partnering relationships being driven by how it is framed (and whether that is contested).

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed and examined research on partnering over the last two decades and has sought to assess progress regarding definitional issues, prospects for industry change and the breadth and depth of analysis that has occurred at both an institutional and organizational level. In doing so, it has raised important continuing questions about partnering that relate to its external validation, institutionalization, degree of comparative analysis, situated understanding, recognition of organizational pluralism and lack of attention to relational dynamics. At present, the impact that partnering and related forms of collaboration have had could arguably be described as having significantly altered the basis of transactional relationships. Yet, the question still remains as to whether the greater collaboration that has been observed in practice amounts to a more profound transformation of the industry that proponents have long sought.

Our contribution to those continued debates about industry transformation (cf. Glass *et al.* 2022) is to present a new framework and agenda for further research on forms of collaboration such as partnering. This framework circumvents problems of definition, formalization, translation and performativity, by highlighting the indeterminacy in definitions of partnering, pathways to collaboration, its realization in practice and in the recipes used for evaluating outcomes. Instead, it presents partnering as being constituted through complex and interacting bundles of practices that cut across levels of interaction and which comprise institutional influences, situated practices, outcomes/effects and performance evaluations. As such, it offers a more practice-based approach to understanding partnering that is arguably more attuned to the diversity and fluidity of the institutional context, organizational processes, comparative settings and project/programme scenarios within which it is situated and through which it is instantiated in practice.

Methodologically, applying this approach does create challenges as it encourages deeper, more longitudinal, multi-level investigations that may be difficult to

reconcile with funding cycles and other practical constraints on research. However, a good deal of recent work – particularly in Scandinavia and the UK – does provide clear examples of how such in-depth, longitudinal studies can help generate research insights (e.g. Davies *et al.* 2016, Aaltonen and Turkulainen 2022, Bresnen and Lennie 2023, Rosander and Kadefors 2023, Rosander 2024). Moreover, such an approach has enormous potential benefits for policy and practice by avoiding simplistic solutions to what are often “wicked” collaboration problems; encouraging more engaged and relevant research through relationship building with project stakeholders; and enabling greater reflection on the role academia has played in the evolution of partnering. Regarding this last point, academics are not outside the setting being studied and are, to a greater or lesser extent, active participants in the construction and institutionalization of partnering – something that research also needs to fully recognize.

By embracing rather than rejecting such variety and indeterminacy in forms of collaboration and by accepting such methodological and reflexivity challenges, it is hoped that our framework offers new avenues for research that avoid some of the conceptual and methodological straitjackets that have previously hindered the search for unambiguous answers to questions about the nature and impact of partnering and related forms of collaboration. Indeed, if collaborative contracting qua partnering and alliancing is to make an even wider societal impact through associated industry change (Glass *et al.* 2022, Thomson *et al.* 2024), then we are beholden to understand more completely its complex and dynamic nature and effects.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

References

- Aaltonen, K., and Turkulainen, V., 2022. Institutionalization of a collaborative governance model to deliver large, inter-organizational projects. *International journal of operations and production management*, 42 (8), 1294–1328.
- Adnan, H., *et al.*, 2012. Conflict prevention in partnering projects. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences*, 35, 772–781.
- Alderman, N., and Ivory, C., 2007. Partnering in major contracts: paradox and metaphor. *International journal of project management*, 25, 386–393.
- Alvesson, M., Hallett, T., and Spicer, A., 2019. Uninhibited institutionalism. *Journal of management inquiry*, 40, 199–218.
- Ankrah, N. A., Proverbs, D. G. and Ahadzie, D. K. 2008. Exploring the behaviours of construction project participants through social cognitive theory. In Dainty, A (Ed.), *Proceedings 24th Annual ARCOM Conference*, 1–3 September 2008, Cardiff, UK. Association of Researchers in Construction Management, Vol. 1, 443–453.
- Anvuur, A., and Kumaraswamy, M., 2007. Conceptual model of partnering and alliancing. *Journal of construction management and engineering*, 133 (3), 225–234.
- Beach, R., Webster, M., and Campbell, K.M., 2005. An evaluation of partnership development in the construction industry. *International journal of project management*, 23 (8), 611–621.
- Berger, P., and Luckmann, T., 1966. *The social construction of reality: a treatise on the sociology of knowledge*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Biesenthal, C., *et al.*, 2018. Applying institutional theories to managing megaprojects. *International journal of project management*, 36 (1), 43–54.
- Bourdieu, P., 1990. *The logic of practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Brady, T., and Davies, A., 2014. Managing structural and dynamic complexity: a tale of two projects. *Project management journal*, 45 (4), 21–38.
- Bresnen, M., 2007. Deconstructing partnering in project-based organisation: seven pillars, seven paradoxes and seven deadly sins. *International journal of project management*, 25 (4), 365–374.
- Bresnen, M., 2009. Living the dream? Understanding partnering as emergent practice. *Construction management and economics*, 27 (10), 923–933.
- Bresnen, M., and Lennie, S.-J., 2023. Driving programme delivery forward? A case study of owner-supplier collaboration in infrastructure development. *IEEE transactions on engineering management*, 71, 11842–11854.
- Bresnen, M., and Marshall, N., 2000a. Partnering in construction: a critical review of issues, problems and dilemmas. *Construction management and economics*, 18 (2), 229–237.
- Bresnen, M., and Marshall, N., 2000b. Building partnerships: case studies of client-contractor collaboration in the UK construction industry. *Construction management and economics*, 18 (7), 819–832.
- Bresnen, M., and Marshall, N., 2002. The engineering or evolution of co-operation? A tale of two partnering projects. *International journal of project management*, 20 (7), 497–505.
- Bresnen, M., and Marshall, N., 2010. Projects and partnerships: institutional processes and emergent practices. In: P. Morris, J. Pinto and J. Söderlund, eds. *OUP handbook of project management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 154–174.
- Burgelman, R.A., *et al.*, 2018. Strategy processes and practices: dialogues and intersections. *Strategic management journal*, 39 (3), 531–558.
- Bygballe, L.E., and Swärd, A., 2019. Collaborative project delivery models and the role of routines in

- institutionalizing partnering. *Project management journal*, 50 (2), 161–176.
- Bygballe, L.E., Jahre, M., and Swärd, A., 2010. Partnering relationships in construction: a literature review. *Journal of purchasing and supply management*, 16, 239–253.
- Carrillo, P., et al., 2008. Participation, barriers, and opportunities in PFI: the United Kingdom experience. *Journal of management in engineering*, 24 (3), 138–145.
- Castañer, X., and Oliveira, N., 2020. Collaboration, coordination, and cooperation among organizations: establishing the distinctive meanings of these terms through a systematic literature review. *Journal of management*, 46 (6), 965–1001.
- Chakkol, M., Selviaridis, K., and Finne, M., 2018. The governance of collaboration in complex projects. *International journal of operations and production management*, 38 (4), 997–1019.
- Challender, J., France, C. and Baban, H. (2017). So why is UK construction partnering not working the way it was intended?. Proceedings, international research conference 2017: shaping tomorrow's built environment, 11–12 September 2017, University of Salford, 544–551.
- Chan, A.P., et al., 2008. Achieving partnering success through an incentive agreement: lessons learned from an underground railway extension project in Hong Kong. *Journal of management in engineering*, 24 (3), 128–137.
- Chan, A.P.C., Chan, D.W.M., and Ho, K.S.K., 2003. An empirical study of the benefits of construction partnering in Hong Kong. *Construction management and economics*, 21 (5), 523–533.
- Cheshmehzangi, A., 2021. From transitions to transformation: a brief review of the potential impacts of COVID-19 on boosting digitization, digitalization, and systems thinking in the built environment. *Journal of building construction and planning research*, 9 (1), 26–39.
- Cheung, S.O., et al., 2003. Behavioural aspects in construction partnering. *International journal of project management*, 21, 333–343.
- Cheung, S.O., Suen, H.C., and Cheung, K.K., 2003. An automated partnering monitoring system—Partnering Temperature Index. *Automation in construction*, 12 (3), 331–345.
- Cicmil, S., et al., 2006. Rethinking project management: researching the actuality of projects. *International journal of project management*, 24 (8), 675–686.
- Colomy, P., 1998. Neofunctionalism and neoinstitutionalism: human agency and interest in institutional change. *Sociological forum*, 13, 265–300.
- Corner, D., 2005. The United Kingdom private finance initiative: the challenge of allocating risk. In: Graeme Hodge and Carsten Greve, eds. *The challenge of public-private partnerships: learning from international experience*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 44–61.
- Crespin-Mazet, F., and Ghauri, P., 2007. Co-development as a marketing strategy in the construction industry. *Industrial marketing management*, 36 (2), 158–172.
- Crespin-Mazet, F., Havensvid, M.I., and Linné, Å., 2015. Antecedents of project partnering in the construction industry—the impact of relationship history. *Industrial marketing management*, 50, 4–15.
- Daniel, E.I., et al., 2017. The relationship between the last planner® system and collaborative planning practice in UK construction. *Engineering, construction and architectural management*, 24 (3), 407–425.
- Davies, A., and Brady, T., 2004. Building project capabilities: from exploratory to exploitative learning. *Organization studies*, 25 (9), 1601–1621.
- Davies, A., and Brady, T., 2016. Explicating the dynamics of project capabilities. *International journal of project management*, 34 (2), 314–327.
- Davies, A., Dodgson, M., and Gann, D., 2016. Dynamic capabilities in complex projects: the case of London Heathrow Terminal 5. *Project management journal*, 47 (2), 26–46.
- Davis, P.R., and Love, P.E.D., 2011. Alliance contracting: adding value through relationship development. *Engineering, construction and architectural management*, 18 (5), 444–461.
- Davis, P.R., and Walker, D.H.T., 2009. Building capability in construction projects: a relationship-based approach. *Engineering, construction and architectural management*, 16 (5), 475–489.
- DiMaggio, P., and Powell, W.W., 1983. The iron cage revisited: collective rationality and institutional isomorphism in organizational fields. *American sociological review*, 48 (2), 147–160.
- Du, L., et al., 2015. Enhancing engineer – procure – construct project performance by partnering in international markets: perspective from Chinese construction companies. *International journal of project management*, 34 (1), 30–43.
- Eisenhardt, K.M., and Martin, J.A., 2000. Dynamic capabilities: what are they? *Strategic management journal*, 21, 1105–1121.
- Elrefaey, O., et al., 2022. Impacts of COVID-19 on the use of digital technology in construction projects in the UAE. *Buildings*, 12 (4), 489.
- Engbø, A., et al., 2020. Collaborative project delivery methods: a scoping review. *Journal of civil engineering and management*, 26, 278–303.
- Engwall, M., 2003. No project is an island: linking projects to history and context. *Research policy*, 32 (5), 789–808.
- Eriksson, P.-E., 2010. Partnering: what is it, when should it be used, and how should it be implemented? *Construction management and economics*, 28, 905–917.
- Eriksson, P.-E., and Laan, A., 2007. Procurement effects on trust and control in client-contractor relationships. *Engineering, construction and architectural management*, 14 (4), 387–389.
- Eriksson, P.-E., et al., 2019. Collaborative procurement strategies for infrastructure projects: a multiple-case study. *Proceedings of the institution of civil engineers – management, procurement and law*, 172 (5), 197–205.
- Evans, M., et al., 2020. Influence of partnering agreements associated with BIM adoption on stakeholder's behaviour in construction mega-projects. *International journal of BIM and engineering science*, 3 (1), 1–17.
- Fang, F., van der Valk, W., Vos, B. and Akkermans, H. A. 2024. Down the drain: the dynamic interplay of governance adjustments addressing setbacks in large public private projects. *Journal of Operations Management*, 70(1), 80–106.
- Feldman, M.S., and Orlikowski, W.J., 2011. Theorizing practice and practicing theory. *Organization science*, 22, 1240–1253.
- Ghansah, F.A., and Lu, W., 2023. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the construction industry: a literature review

- of academic research. *Construction management and economics*, 41 (9), 781–803.
- Gherardi, S., 2001. From organizational learning to practice-based knowing. *Human relations*, 54 (1), 131–139.
- Giddens, A., 1984. *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glass, J., Bygballe, L.E., and Hall, D., 2022. Transforming construction: the multi-scale challenges of changing and innovating in construction. *Construction management and economics*, 40 (11–12), 855–864.
- Gottlieb, S., and Haugbölle, K., 2013. Contradictions and collaboration: partnering in-between systems of production, values and interests. *Construction management and economics*, 31 (2), 119–134.
- Grabher, G., and Ibert, O., 2010. Project ecologies: a contextual view on temporary organizations. In: P. Morris, J. Pinto and J. Söderlund, eds. *OUP handbook of project management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 175–98.
- Graca, P., and Camarinha-Matos, L.M., 2016. Performance indicators for collaborative business ecosystems – literature review and trends. *Technological forecasting and social change*, 116, 237–255.
- Habibi, M., Kermanshachi, S., and Rouhanizadeh, B., 2019. Identifying and measuring engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) key performance indicators and management strategies. *Infrastructures*, 4 (14), 1–19.
- Hällström, A., and Bosch-Sijtsema, P., 2024. “I can say things I wouldn’t normally say”: Changing project delivery implementation and social networks as drivers of institutional change in Nordic infrastructure projects. *Project leadership and society*, 5, 100117.
- Hameed, W., and Abbott, C., 2017. Critical review of the success factors of strategic alliances in the UK. *Construction innovation*, 4, 53–65.
- Hartmann, A., and Bresnen, M., 2011. The emergence of partnering in construction practice: an activity theory perspective. *Engineering Project Organization Journal*, 1(1), 41–52.
- Hartmann, A., et al., 2014. Procuring complex performance: the transition process in public infrastructure. *International journal of operations & production management*, 34 (2), 174–194.
- Henjewe, C., Sun, M., and Fewings, P., 2011. Critical parameters influencing value for money variations in PFI projects in the healthcare and transport sectors. *Construction management and economics*, 29 (8), 825–839.
- Hexelen, R. and Loosemore, M. (2012). Culture shock of alliance projects. *Proceedings, 28th annual conference, September 3-5*, p. 543.
- HM Treasury 2020. *National infrastructure strategy: fairer, faster, greener*. London: HM Treasury.
- Hong, Y., Chan, D.W., and Chan, A.P., 2012. Exploring the applicability of construction partnering in mainland China: a qualitative study. *Facilities*, 30 (13–14), 667–694.
- Hosseini, A., et al., 2016. Project partnering in Norwegian construction industry. *Energy procedia*, 96, 241–252.
- Jacobsson, M., and Roth, P., 2014. Towards a shift in mindset: Partnering projects as engagement platforms. *Construction management and economics*, 32 (5), 419–432.
- Kadefors, A., et al., 2024. Relational contracting in Nordic construction – a comparative longitudinal account of institutional field developments. *International journal of managing projects in business*, 17 (8), 22–46.
- Lahdenperä, P., 2012. Making sense of the multi-party contractual arrangements of project partnering, project alliancing and integrated project delivery. *Construction management and economics*, 30 (1), 57–79.
- Lawrence, T., Suddaby, R., and Leca, B., 2011. Institutional work: refocusing institutional studies of organisation. *Journal of management inquiry*, 20 (1), 52–58.
- Li, B., et al., 2005. Critical success factors for PPP/PFI projects in the UK construction industry. *Construction management and economics*, 23 (5), 459–471.
- Lindkvist, L., Soderlund, J., and Tell, F., 1998. Managing product development projects: on the significance of fountains and deadlines. *Organization studies*, 19 (6), 931–951.
- Loraine, R. K., 1993. *Partnering in the public sector*. London: Business Round Table.
- Love, P., et al., 2021. Shared leadership, value and risks in large scale transport projects: re-calibrating procurement policy for post COVID-19. *Research in transportation economics*, 90, 100999.
- Luckmann, T., 1987. Comments on legitimation. *Current sociology*, 35 (2), 109–117.
- Marshall, N., 2006. Understanding power in project settings. In: Hodgson, D. and Cicmil, S., eds. *Making projects critical*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 207–31.
- Marshall, N., 2014. Thinking, saying, and doing across boundaries of practice in collaborative projects. *Engineering project organization journal*, 4 (2/3), 107–122.
- Matinheikki, J., Aaltonen, K., and Walker, D., 2019. Politics, public servants, and profits: institutional complexity and temporary hybridization in a public infrastructure alliance project. *International journal of project management*, 37 (2), 298–317.
- Maytorena-Sanchez, E., and Winch, G.M., 2022. Engaged scholarship in project organizing research: the case of UK infrastructure. *Project leadership and society*, 3, 100049.
- Meyer, J.W., and Rowan, B., 1977. Institutionalised organisations: formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American journal of sociology*, 83, 440–463.
- Morris, P. W. G., 2013. *Reconstructing project management*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Nahapiet, J., and Ghoshal, S., 1998. Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. *Academy of management review*, 23 (2), 242–266.
- Nicolini, D., 2012. *Practice theory, work and organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nifa, F.A.A. and Ahmed, V. (2010). The role of organizational culture in construction partnering to produce innovation. *Proceedings of 26th annual ARCOM conference, 6-8 September*, 725–34.
- Nisar, T.M., 2007. Value for money drivers in public private partnership schemes. *International journal of public sector management*, 20 (2), 147–156.
- Nyström, J., 2005. The definition of partnering as a Wittgenstein family resemblance concept. *Construction management and economics*, 23, 473–481.
- Ocasio, W., and Gai, S.L., 2020. Institutions: everywhere but not everything. *Journal of management inquiry*, 29 (3), 262–271.
- Oliveira, N., and Lumineau, F., 2017. How coordination trajectories influence the performance of interorganizational project networks. *Organization science*, 28 (6), 1029–1060.

- Phua, F.T.T., 2006. When is construction partnering likely to happen? An empirical examination of the role of institutional norms. *Construction management and economics*, 24 (6), 615–624.
- Pinch, P.L., and Patterson, A., 2000. Public sector restructuring and regional development: the impact of compulsory competitive tendering in the UK. *Regional studies*, 34 (3), 265–275.
- Pitsis, T.S., et al., 2003. Constructing the Olympic dream: a future perfect strategy of project management. *Organization science*, 14 (5), 574–590.
- Poppo, L., Zheng Zhou, K., and Ryu, S., 2008. Alternative origins to interorganizational trust: an interdependence perspective on the shadow of the past and the shadow of the future. *Organization science*, 19 (1), 39–55.
- Radaelli, G., Spyridonidis, D., and Currie, G., 2024. Platform evolution in large inter-organizational collaborative research programmes. *Journal of operations management*, 70 (1), 22–49.
- Raz, J., et al., 2005. *The practice of value*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Reeves, E., et al., 2017. The determinants of tendering periods for PPP procurement in the UK: an empirical analysis. *Applied economics*, 49 (11), 1071–1082.
- Roehrich, J.K., et al., 2019. Management innovation in complex products and systems: the case of integrated project teams. *Industrial marketing management*, 79, 84–93.
- Roehrich, J.K., et al., 2024. Large interorganizational projects (LIPs): toward an integrative perspective and research agenda on interorganizational governance. *Journal of operations management*, 70, 4–21.
- Rosander, L. (2024). *Adhocracy in the bureaucracy: practices of implementing collaborative contracting in infrastructure client organizations*. Thesis (PhD). KTH Royal Institute of Technology.
- Rosander, L., 2022. Same same but different: dynamics of a preprocurement routine and its influence on relational contracting models. *Construction management and economics*, 40 (11–12), 955–972.
- Rosander, L., and Kadefors, A., 2023. Implementing relational contracting in a public client organization: the influence of policy clashes, resources and project autonomy. *Construction management and economics*, 41 (8), 651–669.
- Rouyre, A., Fernandez, A.-S., and Estrada, I., 2024. Co-evolution of governance mechanisms and coopetition in public-private projects. *Journal of operations management*, 70 (1), 50–79.
- Ruijter, H., et al., 2021. ‘Filling the mattress’: trust development in the governance of infrastructure megaprojects. *International journal of project management*, 39 (4), 351–364.
- Schatzki, T. R., Knorr Cetina, K., and von Savigny, E., 2001. *The practice turn in contemporary theory*. London: Routledge.
- Scott, W. R., 1995. *Institutions and organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Seo, M.G., and Creed, W.E.D., 2002. Institutional contradictions, praxis and institutional change: a dialectical perspective. *Academy of management review*, 27, 222–247.
- Sherratt, F., Sherratt, S., and Ivory, C., 2020. Challenging complacency in construction management research: the case of PPPs. *Construction management and economics*, 38 (12), 1086–1100.
- Smyth, H., and Edkins, A., 2007. Relationship management in the management of PFI/PP projects in the UK. *International journal of project management*, 25, 232–240.
- Söderlund, J., 2011. Pluralism in project management: navigating the crossroads of specialization and fragmentation. *International journal of management reviews*, 13 (2), 153–176.
- Söderlund, J., and Sydow, J., 2019. Projects and institutions: towards understanding their mutual constitution and dynamics. *International journal of project management*, 37 (2), 259–268.
- Sparkling, A.E., Mollaoglu, S., and Kirca, A., 2016. Research synthesis connecting trends in architecture, engineering, and construction project partnering. *American society of civil engineers*, 33 (1), 04016033.
- Sundquist, V., Hulthen, K., and Gadde, L.E., 2018. From project partnering towards strategic supplier partnering. *Engineering, construction and architectural management*, 25 (3), 358–373.
- Sweet, R., 2018. Canary in the coal mine: what Carillion’s collapse reveals about construction’s productivity conundrum. *Construction research and innovation*, 9 (1), 3–8.
- Thomson, C.S., Karrbom Gustavsson, T., and Karvonen, A., 2024. Expanding the field: combining construction management and urban studies to address grand societal challenges. *Construction management and economics*, 42 (2), 109–115.
- Tsoukas, H., and Chia, R., 2002. On organizational becoming: rethinking organizational change. *Organization science*, 13 (5), 567–582.
- Venselaar, M., Gruis, V., and Verhoeven, F., 2014. Implementing supply chain partnering in the construction industry: work floor experiences within a Dutch housing association. *Journal of purchasing & supply management*, 21, 1–8.
- Walker, D. H. T., and Lloyd-Walker, B. M., 2015. *Collaborative project procurement arrangements*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Walker, D., Hampson, K., and Peters, R., 2002. Project alliancing vs project partnering: a case study of the Australian National Museum Project. *Supply chain management*, 7 (2), 83–91.
- Walker, D.H.T., Vaz Serra, P., and Love, P.E.D., 2022. Improved reliability in planning large-scale infrastructure project delivery through Alliancing. *International journal of managing projects in business*, 15 (5), 721–741.
- Weick, K., 1995. *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Whitley, R., 1999. *Divergent capitalisms: the social structuring and change of business systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Winch, G., and Maytorena-Sanchez, E., 2020. Institutional projects and contradictory logics: responding to complexity in institutional field change. *International journal of project management*, 38 (6), 368–378.

- Winch, G.M., and Leiringer, R., 2016. Owner project capabilities for infrastructure development: a review and development of the “strong owner” concept. *International journal of project management*, 34 (2), 271–281.
- Winch, G.M., and Sergeeva, N., 2021. Project narratives that potentially change the future. *Project management journal*, 52 (3), 264–277.
- Wood, G., McDermott, P., and Swan, W., 2002. The ethical benefits of trust-based partnering: the example of the construction industry. *Business ethics: a European review*, 11 (1), 4–13.
- Wood, G.D., and Ellis, R.C.T., 2005. Main contractor experiences of partnering relationships on UK construction projects. *Construction management and economics*, 23 (3), 317–325.
- Yeung, J.F., Chan, A.P., and Chan, D.W., 2009. A computerized model for measuring and benchmarking the partnering performance of construction projects. *Automation in construction*, 18 (8), 1099–1113.
- Yeung, J.F., et al., 2007. Development of a partnering performance index (PPI) for construction projects in Hong Kong: a Delphi study. *Construction management and economics*, 25 (12), 1219–1237.
- Zerjav, V., Edkins, A., and Davies, A., 2018. Project capabilities for operational outcomes in inter-organisational settings: the case of London Heathrow Terminal 2. *International journal of project management*, 36 (3), 444–459.