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Partnerships for impact in the domain of work integration of disabled people: an empirical investigation

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Author: **Luisa Campane**

Student ID: 941586

Advisor: Veronica Chiodo

Co-advisor: Gabriele Guzzetti

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Abstract

Purpose – Combining resources maximises their value and allows to achieve positive effects for the actors involved and the environment in which they operate. Cross-sectoral partnerships are an essential tool for realising this interconnection and addressing complex social problems, including the work integration of people with disabilities. The aim of this study is therefore to investigate partnerships between companies and not-for-profit organisations aimed at the work inclusion of people with disabilities. **Methodology** – The literature review has been used to explore existing knowledge about cross-sectoral partnerships between companies and not-for-profit organisations. Subsequently, through a *multiple-case study* approach, 9 cases of partnerships between companies and not-for-profit organisations aimed at the work inclusion of people with disabilities have been selected. The work has involved the use of different techniques of data collection and analysis, in particular 17 semi-structured interviews were carried out, analysed through *Thematic coding*. **Main results** – The study highlights the drivers, barriers, critical success factors and outcomes of partnerships in the domain of work inclusion of disabled people, the process of partner selection and the main practices of partnership management and evaluation. The configuration of the project is then analysed, with reference to the planned activities, location and tasks chosen. In light of the results, a framework has been developed to provide an overall representation of the phenomenon, highlighting the temporal dimension and key actors involved. Finally, the comparison with the literature on partnerships between companies and not-for-profit organisations allows to highlight the distinctive elements of partnerships aimed at work inclusion of disabled people. The analysis illustrates how the presence of strong and “*inclusion-specific*” drivers – including the need to comply with legal obligation for companies and to have access to a high employment potential for not-for-profit organisations – leads to the absence of several barriers, and reveals how specific critical success factors and crucial activities as training impact on the cultural emerging barriers.

Key-words: partnership; firm; NPO; case study; labor market inclusion; disability.

Abstract in italiano

Scopo – La combinazione delle risorse consente di massimizzarne il valore e di ottenere effetti positivi per gli attori coinvolti e per l’ambiente in cui si muovono. Le partnership cross-settoriali sono uno strumento essenziale per concretizzare questa interconnessione e affrontare problemi sociali complessi, tra cui l’inclusione lavorativa di persone con disabilità. Scopo di questo studio è dunque quello di indagare le partnership tra aziende ed enti not-for-profit finalizzate all’inclusione lavorativa di persone con disabilità. **Metodologia** – L’analisi della letteratura è stata utilizzata per esplorare la conoscenza esistente in merito alle partnership cross-settoriali tra aziende ed enti not-for-profit. In seguito, attraverso un’impostazione della ricerca di tipo *Multiple-case study* sono stati selezionati 9 casi di partnership tra aziende ed enti not-for-profit finalizzate all’inclusione lavorativa di persone con disabilità. Il lavoro ha previsto il ricorso a diverse tecniche di raccolta e analisi dei dati, in particolare sono state svolte 17 interviste semi-strutturate, analizzate attraverso il *Thematic coding*. **Risultati principali** – Lo studio mette in luce i driver, le barriere, i fattori critici di successo e gli outcome delle partnership atte all’inclusione lavorativa di persone con disabilità, il processo di selezione del partner e le principali pratiche di gestione e valutazione della partnership. Viene poi analizzata la configurazione del progetto, con riferimento alle attività previste, alla location e alle mansioni scelte. Alla luce dei risultati, è stato sviluppato un framework che fornisce una rappresentazione complessiva del fenomeno, evidenziando la dimensione temporale e gli attori chiave coinvolti. Infine, la comparazione con la letteratura in merito alle partnership tra aziende ed enti not-for-profit permette di mettere in luce gli elementi distintivi delle partnership finalizzate all’inclusione lavorativa. L’analisi mostra come la presenza di driver forti e “*inclusion-specific*” – tra cui la necessità di rispettare l’obbligo di legge per le aziende e di avere accesso ad un elevato potenziale occupazionale per gli enti not-for profit – porti all’assenza di numerose barriere, e rivela come specifici fattori critici di successo e attività cruciali quali il training impattano le barriere emergenti di natura culturale.

Parole chiave: partnership; azienda; no-profit; casi di studio; inclusione lavorativa; disabilità.

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Introduction

Research background and relevance of the topic

In an environment which typically encourages competition rather than collaboration, available resources are perceived as scarce and the goal of several organisations is trying to secure the largest number of resources without taking other players into account (Stibb and Prescott 2020). However, this way of thinking is reductive and it is possible to start from a different premise, which does not see the challenge in the scarcity of resources but rather in the lack of connection between them.

This paradigm change shifts the focus to finding ways to engage and combine resources in new ways, which means “connecting the dots” to maximise their value and achieve better results with greater impact. In this perspective, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise the links between a healthy environment, a thriving society and a prosperous economy. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs not only highlight the key role of each sector in achieving the goals, but more importantly they are built on the idea that the interconnections, linkages and collaboration between business, government, NGOs, civil society and all other players determine the achievement of the goals. In short, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are *“The result of – and a call for – a new collaborative way of working”* (Stibb and Prescott, 2020 p.10).

Goal 17 is precisely *“Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development”* and is transversal to the other goals, as visually represented in Figure 0.1. Although Goal 17 refers specifically to global partnerships, the transversal nature of collaborations as a means of combining resources to address the other goals can be applied at all levels, including local.

Indeed, once it is recognised that all sectors are interconnected, and that addressing complex problems and moving towards concrete and long-term sustainable changes requires the involvement and collaboration of all actors, it becomes natural to interpret partnerships as an essential tool at all levels to address complex problems, to make the best use of resources and maximise their value and impact.

In this context, all actors can and should play their role thanks to their unique resources. In particular, since companies have a large footprint in economic, environmental and social terms, they can act on many levels to actively promote environmental, economic and social wellbeing by doing business responsibly, inclusively and sustainably and achieving positive impacts both for the organisation itself and for the environment in which it is placed (Stibb and Prescott 2020).

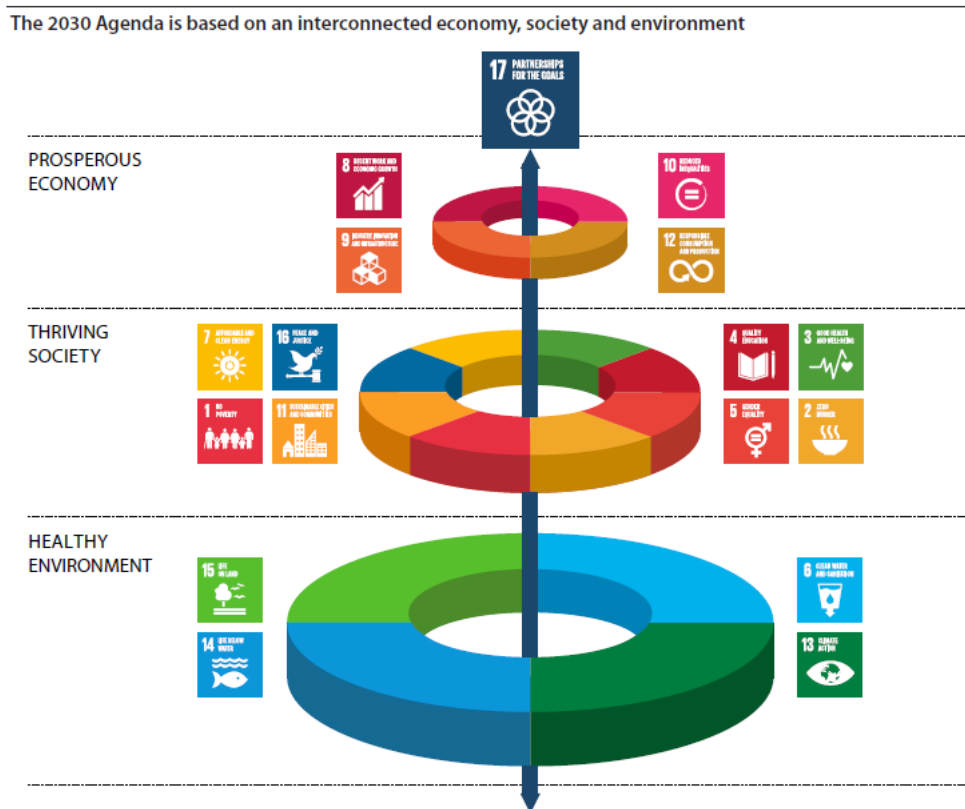


Figure 0.1: Partnering as an essential approach to SDG impact

Source: Stibbe D., Prescott D. (2020). *The SDG partnership guidebook: A practical guide to building high-impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals*, p.10

This study adopts the perspective that collaborating and combining resources leads to the maximisation of value and to positive effects on players and the environment, and analyses the issue of partnerships focusing in particular on collaborations between companies and NPOs for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Work inclusion of people with disabilities is a relevant issue in the national and international panorama, addressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights

of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP, 2007), European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, European Disability Strategy 2021-2030 and other treaties and strategies, and which is connected to two other goals among the SDGs. Goal 8 refers to "*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*" and in particular target 8.5 aims to achieve "*Full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value*". Furthermore, Goal 10 is to "*Reduce inequality within and among countries*" and target 10.2 is to "*Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status*".

Once again, in order to highlight the relevance of the theme it is important to underline its interdependence and links with other aspects. In this context, the satisfaction of each right contributes to the realisation of human dignity, and the fulfilment of one right partially depends on the satisfaction of the others: this means, for example, that not having access to the labour market may make it impossible to achieve an adequate standard of living, and vice versa the violation of other human rights, such as the right to education, may in turn undermine the right to work.

Despite the inalienability of the right to work and the policies undertaken to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, first the establishment of a reserved quota of jobs for persons with disabilities, provided for in Italy by Law 68/1999, data currently show that inequities are still widespread. The barriers encountered by people with disabilities, both of a personal and systemic nature, are numerous and severely affect concrete opportunities to enter the labour market, resulting in 29% of reserved quotas still unfulfilled.

In this context, partnerships between companies and NPOs are a tool to effectively address this issue and bring value at the micro, meso and macro level. In other words, they are a concrete example of how collaboration can combine resources in a synergistic way to increase the value created.

It is evident, then, that addressing the issue of partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities provides to the study a twofold relevance, translated into the analysis of partnerships as a valuable tool for addressing complex problems by exploiting synergies among different actors, and to the choice of a relevant field of application.

Research objective

The primary aim of this dissertation is to investigate partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, in light of

the key role that partnerships can play in addressing complex problems and of the relevance of work inclusion of people with disabilities.

The general purpose is to identify and investigate the key aspects and to understand the dynamics in order to arrive at a general understanding and comprehensive representation of the phenomenon. In order to achieve this goal, it is essential to start with a literature review to understand and systematise the existing knowledge on the subject. Subsequently, performing an empirical research allows to obtain new evidence-based knowledge directly from the field. To this end, several interviews are conducted with non-profit organisations and companies that implemented this type of collaboration. Therefore, the study adopts the perspective of both companies and NPOs and focuses on the most relevant areas of investigation, leveraging on the experience and expertise of key actors.

As the aim is to build a comprehensive overview of these types of collaborations, the areas of investigation are wide and comprehend drivers leading to the development of partnerships, barriers encountered, outcomes obtained and management practices implemented; subsequently, the research focuses on the project activities, the key actors and other relevant characteristics of the project developed.

Structure of the contents

The general structure of the contents is described hereafter, with the aim of briefly presenting each Chapter and highlighting the logical relationships between the various sections, in order to support the reading and fruition of the present study.

Introduction

The introduction is aimed at presenting the context of the study and highlighting the relevance of the topic addressed, which are partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities. Furthermore, it introduces the general objective of the research and illustrates its structure.

Chapter 1: State of the art

The aim is to systematically present the existing knowledge about the topic. The Chapter is divided into three sections, ranging from the general to the particular. The first section is dedicated to cross-sector partnerships and serves to build a common and shared knowledge base on the topic. The second section focuses on the case of cross-sector partnerships between companies and NPOs. Finally, the third section aims to provide the salient elements regarding the context of application, crucial both to explain the rationale behind the choice and to provide

the necessary elements to understand the characteristics of the partnerships under analysis.

Chapter 2: Research objectives and research questions

The first part of Chapter 2 is dedicated to the introduction and description of the knowledge gap emerged from the literature analysis discussed in Chapter 1. In particular, it emerges the presence of a considerable amount of literature about partnerships between firm and NPO, but at the same time it is highlighted the lack of structured knowledge referred to the field of inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. The lack of knowledge in this field motivates the research and leads to the definition of the objective and the research questions, explained in the second part of Chapter 2.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and methods

The aim of Chapter 3 is to describe the methodological choices and stages taken in the course of the research. The first section delves into the literature search, the outcomes of which are presented in Chapter 1. Subsequently, Section 3.2 is dedicated to the empirical investigation: the decisions regarding the type of research and the research strategy are investigated, the case studies are described, and finally, the methods of data collection and analysis are illustrated.

Chapter 4: Findings of the empirical investigation

Chapter 4 presents the results of the empirical data analysis. The aim is to show in a comprehensive, systematic and precise way the key elements regarding partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, in order to provide an answer to the research questions. The last paragraph of this Chapter is dedicated to the presentation and description of a comprehensive framework, which allows to highlight the key concepts and lead to a general understanding of the phenomenon.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter 5 uses the elements emerged from the literature review (Chapter 1) to interpret the findings (Chapter 4). Thus, the first part of the Chapter is devoted to interpreting the findings in the light of the literature. After identifying the similarities, differences and elements specifically related to the field of work inclusion, Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 are oriented towards grasping the links between the different aspects and understanding their impact on collaboration, thus providing a valuable interpretation and meaning to the answer to the research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and future developments

Chapter 6 presents the theoretical contribution and practical implications of the research. Finally, it illustrates the limitations of the study and suggests possible future developments to address the limitations and to orient towards improving and expanding the research.

1 State of the art

The present Chapter offers a description of the state of the art on the topic of partnerships between firms and not-for-profit organisations aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. The purpose is to synthetise the main theoretical and empirical evidence and to identify aspects not sufficiently explored in literature. In order to reach this purpose, the approach moves from the general to the particular: an overview of cross-sector partnerships is presented, followed by the illustration of the most relevant elements about the specific case of partnerships between firms and NPOs, finally the context of the empirical research is defined.

1.1. Cross-sector partnerships

Society is facing increasing turbulence and societal interactions have become more complex (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Gray and Stites 2013, MacDonald et al. 2018); in this context cross-sector social partnerships have flourished and have become a central theme in research about the social role and responsibilities of business (Clarke and Crane 2018, quoting Seitanidi and Crane 2014), the emergence and effectiveness of new forms of private governance (Clarke and Crane 2018, quoting Auld et al. 2015, Cashore et al. 2004, Crane 2011, Hahn and Pinkse 2014, Pattberg 2005), and the shifting practices, performance, and legitimacy of civil society (Clarke and Crane 2018, quoting Baur and Palazzo 2011, Baur and Schmitz 2012, Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014, Herlin 2015).

Literature offers a wide range of definitions of *cross-sector partnerships*; though the focus is on different aspects, they unanimously suggest the following distinctive characteristics:

- *Collaboration between organizations from more than one sector* (Clarke and MacDonald 2016, quoting Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos 2011), involving government, business, non-profits and philanthropies, communities, and/or the public as a whole (Bryson et al. 2006);
- *Voluntary nature of the collaboration* (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Glasbergen 2007, Pinkse and Kolk 2012; Clarke and MacDonald 2016);
- *Collaboration aimed to addressing complex and mutually prioritized social or environmental issues* (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Glasbergen 2007, Pinkse and Kolk 2012), such as unemployment, economic development, education (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Selsky and Parker 2005, Waddock 1991), health, poverty, climate change (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Clarke and Ordonez-Ponce 2017), corruption, organized crime (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Crane and Seitanidi 2014) or waste, energy, land use, transportation, and housing (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting MacDonald et al. 2018).

Bryson et al. (2006, p. 44) assert that collaboration occurs “*In the midrange of how organizations work on public problems*”; according to the authors, at one end of the continuum there are the organizations which do not rely on each other even when it comes to face complex issues beyond their own possibilities, while at the other end there are organizations that have merged into a new entity to join capabilities and resources in order to deal with complex challenges. Finally, in the midrange it

is possible to identify all the organizations which decide to face these issues sharing information, resources and capabilities, cooperating and developing collaborations.

Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert (2020) quote Barney et al. (2011) stating that assessing drivers and outcomes is not only one of the most commonly used theories to understand organizations, but it is also particularly powerful in order to comprehend their competitive advantage; therefore, the following paragraphs will be dedicated to the analysis of these two aspects for what concerns cross-sectoral collaborations.

1.1.1. Drivers of cross-sector partnerships

Factors found to be influencing in the choice of partnering have been explored in several studies; in particular, a synthetic literature review is offered by Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert (2020).

Organizations partner when they need resources (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Ansell & Gash 2008, Lotia & Hardy 2008), and to improve their strategic positions (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven 1996, Gray & Stites 2013). They partner due to uncertainty (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Gray 1989, Gray & Wood 1991) pursuing knowledge and prospects for sharing ideas (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Butler 2001), to acquire competencies they cannot develop (Selsky and Parker, 2005), to respond to socio-environmental pressures (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Lin & Darnall 2015, Wassmer et al. 2014), or to solve problems (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Glasbergen 2007, Huxham 1993) in search for competitive advantage (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Lavie 2006, Lotia & Hardy 2008). Organizations also partner to create real change for society and the environment (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Koontz 2006), to address collective social and environmental problems (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Clarke & Fuller 2010; Waddock 1988), and to improve the sustainability of society (Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert 2020, quoting Gray and Stites 2013, Kolk et al. 2010).

Among the theories developed to explain the rationale behind the creation of cross-sector partnerships, there is the transaction cost theory. According to this theory, firms' objective is to minimize the sum of transaction and production costs, where transaction costs come from the activities needed for an exchange (for instance writing a contract), while productions costs are the expenses related to in-house activities (as organizing and managing production). Therefore, internal development of certain activities will be preferred when transaction costs of an

exchange are high, while market exchange will be the choice in case of low transaction costs and high production costs.

Strategic collaborations combine the characteristics of internalization and market exchanges, since they “*Partially internalize an exchange*” (Das and Teng, 2000 p. 36), thereby they will be preferred “*When the transaction costs associated with an exchange are intermediate and not high enough to justify vertical integration [...]*” (Das and Teng 2000, quoting Gulati 1995 p. 87) or when internalization would be more cost efficient, but prevented by a variety of constraints. Theories like transaction cost view are useful to understand the phenomenon of strategic alliances, but they do not take into consideration the role of resources. Indeed, even though traditional strategy research suggests that firms need to seek a strategic fit between their internal characteristics (strengths and weaknesses) and the external environment (opportunities and threats), much more attention is usually given to the competitive environment to the detriment of the internal resources.

In contrast to the external emphasis described so far, the Resource-based view (RBV) stresses the internal aspects of a firm, giving relevance to the value maximization of an organization through its resources rather than through cost minimization. According to the Resource-based view, the rationale for the partnerships is the value creation potential of resources that are combined. Basically, Das and Teng (2000) suggest that the development of cross-sector partnerships is a mean for organizations to acquire critical resources otherwise unavailable, and therefore to gain a competitive advantage. Since resources are not mobile among organizations and are usually scarce, imperfectly imitable, and lacking in direct substitutes (Barney 1991), the trading and accumulation of resources is a strategic necessity for firms and represents a way to gain competitive advantage.

According to the Resource-based view, resources are classified into tangible and intangible and furtherly clustered in four types of capitals: physical (e.g., technology, machines, and facilities), human (e.g., experience, knowledge, training and wisdom), organizational (e.g., relationships, trust and culture), and financial capitals (e.g., debt, equity, and earnings) (Barney 1991).

Ordonez-Ponce and Colbert (2020) suggest that this classification corresponds to the four groups of reasons for organizations to partner identified by Gray and Stites (2013) and proposed hereafter:

- *Legitimacy-oriented reasons to partner*: they refer to those for gaining social acceptance, building reputation, image and social licence and correspond to organizational capitals.

- *Competency-oriented reasons to partner:* they include gaining knowledge, skills and capabilities and correspond to human capitals.
- *Resource-oriented reasons to partner:* they are about having access to networks, sharing risks, and gaining financial and social capital; they correspond to financial and physical capitals.
- *Society-oriented reasons to partner:* they are the interest of organizations in making changes in society, including addressing sustainability challenges and are the only cluster not clearly identified by the Resource-based view.

This correspondence furtherly suggests that the Resource-based theory is suitable to explain the rationale behind the creation of cross-sector partnerships, which are indeed driven by the necessity and desire to access these four classes of resources.

1.1.2. Outcomes of cross-sector partnerships

The purpose of this paragraph is to briefly present the outcomes of cross-sector partnerships. In this regard, it is possible to assess the interpretation and systematization of the outcomes using again the lens of the Resource-based view, classifying the effects according to the same typologies of capital previously used to present the drivers, that are physical, organizational and human. In particular, Clarke and MacDonald (2016) offer an overview of the cross-sector partnerships' outcomes based on a survey performed in the context of the research described in the paper and on the findings coming from the Cross-sector social partnerships and Resource-based view literatures, as well as a comparison between them; the result of their work is synthetized hereafter.

- *Physical/financial capital:* even though cross-sector partnerships can lead to physical and financial capital, the empirical findings of the research indicated that physical or financial resources gained are limited to cost savings and improved efficiency, which can be reached for instance through the implementation of initiatives aimed to reduce energy, waste, and/or water as part of the commitment to the partnership;
- *Organizational capital:* becoming part of the common effort, partners gain social capital and are more networked with new and stronger local relationships; furthermore, the involvement in the partnership lead to improved reputation, with increased respect, recognition, legitimacy, and image. It is also important to mention the access to new marketing opportunities (for instance due to increased visibility and publicity) and business opportunities. In addition, partnerships allow to engage with the community stakeholders, but also lead the organizations to focus on

building new programs and processes, enabling increased organizational capital in sustainability. Finally, two aspects which are not present in the RBV literature are the increased influence of the organization and its impact on sustainability goals of their community; they are both specifically relevant in the context of cross-sector partnerships because are related to the creation of social change, a unique aspect of cross-sectorial partnerships and a critical outcome expected by partners (Clarke and MacDonald 2016, quoting Seitanidi et al. 2010);

- *Human capital*: partnerships often result in training opportunities and in the cross exchange of knowledge between organizations; therefore, partner representatives gain knowledge sharing information, obtain new ideas, change perspectives, build awareness and shift their culture. This aspect has had considerable attention in both the cross-sectorial partnerships and RBV partnerships literatures (Clarke and MacDonald 2016, quoting Arya and Lin 2007; Huxham and Hibbert 2004).

Bryson et al. (2006) offer a different interpretation and classification of the outcomes identifying three categories: public value, first-, second- and third-order effects and resilience and reassessment. Among the three categories proposed by the researchers, it is especially relevant to emphasize the creation of public good, identified as the purpose and therefore the desired outcome of cross-sector collaborations. Public good is the value which cannot be created by single actors, but rather requires the joint utilization of each sector's characteristic strengths while minimizing, overcoming or compensating each partner's peculiar weaknesses. Furthermore, it is argued that public value creation is more likely to happen when partnerships "*Effectively link individuals' and organizations' self-interests and sector capabilities with the common good*" (Bryson et al., 2006 p. 51).

1.1.3. Typologies of cross-sector partnerships

Cross-sector collaborations can have different characteristics and assume multiple forms, varying from the actors involved to the configuration adopted, and thereby several categorizations can be suggested. Specifically, Clarke and MacDonald (2016) proposed a basic distinction between two typologies: large and small. Large cross-sector partnerships are called "multi-stakeholder", since they have multiple partners from all three sectors, which are business, public and civil society; conversely, small partnerships can be either a dyad (composed by two partners) or a triad (in this case, the partners are three) from two or three of the different sectors.

The focus of this research is a specific typology of dyad, namely the partnerships developed and implemented between a firm and a non-profit organization, which are the subject of the next section (1.2).

1.2. Partnerships between firms and NPOs

Partnerships between firms and NPOs are a specific typology of cross-sector partnerships: on one hand the inherent differences between the two organizations, taking also into consideration the historical conflictual nature of the relationship between them, can lead to several barriers and misalignments; however, the level of resource complementarity is remarkably high, as well as the potential value creation.

In the last years, the number of partnerships between NPOs and firms has increased and it represents a growing field in research. The purpose of this section is therefore to explore the literature regarding the most significant aspects of the alliances between firms and NPOs, from the evolution of their relation to elements as the drivers and the barriers of this kind of partnership, along with some insights regarding the management.

1.2.1. Evolution of the relation between NPOs and firms

In the past, the relation between NPOs and firms was conflictual. Indeed, NPOs focused their attention on companies which engaged in unethical behaviours and used negative pressure as a mean to affect their conduct, with the aim to lead companies to extend and improve their corporate responsibilities. As a reaction, companies promoted initiatives primarily for the purpose of improving or recovering their public image and reputation (Hartman and Dhanda 2018, quoting Doh 2008).

The idea that profit and CSR activities constitute an “either-or” decision for companies, and that NPOs’ strategy should rely on hostile and intimidating attitude towards corporations to obtain effective results have changed and are changing (Hartman and Dhanda 2018). Nowadays, society is led to face increasingly complex and severe socioeconomic problems, which cannot be addressed individually by organizations because they exceed the capabilities of a single entity. Austin and Seitanidi (2012) report a statement by Visser (2011) which effectively summarizes this concept, defining responsibility as a form of sharing, a way of recognizing that we’re all in this together. In this context, collaborative cross-sector partnerships between firms and NPOs, which overcome the traditional contrast between them as well as the donor-recipient model, seem to be a useful instrument to face this

complexity, a powerful source of value creation for all stakeholders and a vehicle to achieve social and economic missions, according to both academics and practitioners (Austin and Seitanidi 2012).

Austin proposes that both non-profits and firms searched for greater value creation, and that their two distinct evolutions finally converged, resulting in cross-sector partnerships. He defines this evolution as the “*Converging search for collaborative value*” (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012 p.731).

For what concerns firms, Friedman stated that “*there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game*” (Friedman 1970). Basically, Friedman considered social actions and their drivers as in contrast with the main function of companies, that is profits and returns’ generation. The extension of the concept of relevant stakeholders to consumers, communities, government and non-profits (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, quoting Freeman 1984, Jensen 2002 and others) led to the recognition of linked interests among them. Therefore, the incompatibility between social and business value was argued, in favour of the approach which considers producing benefits to other stakeholders as a source to produce business value. It is in line with the concept of shared value, developed by Porter and Kramer (2011), which means implementing policies and practices that enhance at the same time the competitiveness of a company and the economic and social conditions of the communities where it operates; Porter and Kramer (2011) underline that these policies should be part of the corporate strategy, as well as integral to competition and profit maximization.

With respect to NPOs, the overgrowth of the non-profit organizations’ number in the last years has led to an increase in competition for resources. If some NPOs still engage in confrontational relationships with companies, many have progressively discovered linked interests and considered the benefits arising from alliances with businesses, due for instance to the access to complementary resources and distinctive assets (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, quoting Ählström and Sjöström 2005, Stafford et al. 2000, Yaziji and Doh 2009). In summary, NPOs have recognized collaboration with firms as a source of value generation.

In this way, Austin (2000) ultimately describes the collaborative convergence. The main idea is that both firms and NPOs can separately create value, but cross-sector collaborations can represent a choice and a mean to create and deliver more value.

1.2.2. Introduction to different types of partnerships

Partnerships between NPOs and firms can take many forms; Austin (2000) conceptualizes the collaboration continuum. This concept is remarkably relevant because it emphasizes the dynamic and multifaceted nature of collaborations: some characteristics of a partnership might be closer to one stage and others to a different one; the shift of a partnership through the different stages is not automatic, but it depends on the decisions, actions and inactions of the participants, as well as a collaboration does not necessarily pass through all the stages, nor it must begin at the first (Austin and Seitanidi 2012).

The stages identified by Austin are summarized hereafter.

- *Philanthropic stage*: in this case, usually the corporation provides funds, while the non-profit provides the social service, the relation is limited both in terms of resources involved and interactions between the two entities;
- *Transactional stage*: examples are employee volunteer programs, events and other sponsorships or name and logo licensing agreements. Essentially, they are specific projects characterized by clear objectives, assigned responsibilities, programmed activities and predetermined timetables;
- *Integrative stage*: the collaboration here is considered as integral to the strategic success of both partners; furthermore, priority is given to producing societal improvement;
- *Transformational stage*: it is the fourth and last stage, as well as the most advanced, whose aim is to create disruptive social innovations.

Partnerships are characterized by a number of elements, including level of engagement of the two parties, type and magnitude of resources involved in the collaboration and scope of activities; the intensity and the characteristics of these elements vary according to the nature of the relation, that is the stage in which the collaboration is. Figure 1.1 is the Collaboration continuum provided by Austin, which illustrates the distinctive elements of collaborations and their nature according to the different stages. Much research on partnership between NPOs and firms has been performed; the main objective of this Chapter is therefore to report the most significant elements, covering all the relevant aspects to give a complete and fair overview of the literature about this topic.

	<u>Stage I</u>	<u>Stage II</u>	<u>Stage III</u>	<u>Stage IV</u>
NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP	Philanthropic →	Transactional →	Integrative →	Transformational
▪ Level of engagement	Low	←—————→		High
▪ Importance to mission	Peripheral	←—————→		Central
▪ Magnitude of resources	Small	←—————→		Big
▪ Type of resources	Money	←—————→		Core competencies
▪ Scope of activities	Narrow	←—————→		Broad
▪ Interaction level	Infrequent	←—————→		Intensive
▪ Trust	Modest	←—————→		Deep
▪ Internal change	Minimal	←—————→		Great
▪ Managerial complexity	Simple	←—————→		Complex
▪ Strategic value	Minor	←—————→		Major
▪ Co-creation of value	Sole	←—————→		Conjoined
▪ Synergistic value	Occasional	←—————→		Predominant
▪ Innovation	Seldom	←—————→		Frequent
▪ External system change	Rare	←—————→		Common

Figure 1.1: Collaboration continuum

Source: derived from Austin J., Seitanidi M. (2012). *Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering Between Nonprofits and Businesses: Part I*, p.73

1.2.3. Drivers of firms-NPOs partnerships

In Paragraph 1.1.1, the Resource-based view has been introduced as the approach used to understand the rationale behind the creation of alliances between organizations belonging to different sectors. Indeed, the RBV suggests that the rationale for collaborations is the value creation potential of resources pooled together, and it is especially appropriate for cross-sector collaborations, since alliances are essentially used to gain access to other valuable resources (Das and Teng 2000).

The necessity to access to otherwise unavailable resources as driver of the collaborations can be applied also to the specific case of partnerships between firms and NPOs, as argued by several publications appeared in recent years. Furthermore, the access to complementary resources is not only a driver for the partnership's formation, but also a key antecedent of value creation, as suggested by Austin and Seitanidi (2012 p. 730): *"The more partners mobilize distinctive competencies, the greater the potential for value creation"*.

The drivers, and thereby the resources sought and gained by the two organizations, will be presented hereafter, not according to the typologies defined in the context of RBV, that are organizational, human and physical, but distinguishing between NPOs' and firms' perspectives.

NPOs perspective

Previous research has focused on the need to acquire physical and monetary resources as primary driver for NPOs (Simpson et al. 2011, quoting Hoffman 2009, Hartman and Dhanda 2018). As suggested by Herlin (2013), NPOs are traditionally funded by governments, and the decrease of this source of financial gain together with the increase of competition from both other NPOs and companies led non-profit organizations to face an increasingly challenging situation.

In accordance with this perspective, it has been observed an increase mostly in the forms of collaboration undertaken sporadically or “from time to time” (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019), which are predominantly characterized by the transfer of monetary and physical assets and seem to be preferred by NPOs with respect to alternative types of partnerships (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Adamiak et al. 2016, Karwacka 2013).

However, it is also broadly recognized that NPOs do not only seek physical and economic resources. Indeed, non-profit organizations need to improve their operations, innovation, managerial skills, accountability and efficiency, and partnerships with firms represent a vehicle to reach these objectives (Sanzo et al. 2015).

The reasons of this “*commercialization*” have been suggested among the others by Young and Salamon (2002), who mentioned six crucially important factors: diminishing government support, increased demand for services provided by NPOs (e.g., due to aging populations), increased competition from companies, increased competition from other NPOs, broader availability of partners that are interested in working with NPOs, and increased accountability requirements forcing NPOs to focus on efficiency and effectiveness (Herlin 2013, quoting Young and Salamon 2002). Therefore, the literature proposes that this critical situation led the NPOs to the necessity of monetary and physical resources – as aforementioned – but also to the need to acquire new business-related knowledge, competences and skills.

Furthermore, other drivers include the improvement of public awareness regarding a specific issue, the increase of their influence and the opportunity to enlarge their network (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Runte’ et al. 2009), as well as name recognition and credibility with other stakeholders (Hartman and Dhanda 2018).

Firms perspective

Reputation has been identified by several studies as a major driver for firms; indeed, reputation enhancement, client base enlargement, brand reputation improvement

and protection from bad publicity are often mentioned in literature (Schiller and Almog-Bar 2013; Simpson et al. 2011; Hartman and Dhanda 2018), as well as the willingness to obtain social legitimacy in contexts where companies are usually considered with suspicion and scepticism (Hartman and Dhanda 2018, quoting Dahan et al. 2010, Oetzel and Doh 2009).

Considerable attention has been also paid to CSR as a driver for partnerships with non-profit organizations. Indeed, Eid and Sabella (2014) suggest that partnerships are perceived as a mechanism to fulfil corporate social responsibility agenda, while supporting NPOs in meeting their objectives; this concept is reflected in the companies' preference for advanced forms of collaboration, for instance joint long-term projects, as proposed by Mirońska and Zaborek (2019).

The interest of firms in partnerships for meeting their social responsibilities has been encouraged by institutions through the promotion of patronage and sponsorship laws; indeed, governments are facing the need to undertake austerity policies and to outsource many social services, therefore they want to promote mechanisms, as cross-sector partnerships, which enhance the provision of these services to an increasingly number of beneficiaries (Sanzo et al. 2015). It is also crucial to recognize the role of society's expectations: the stakeholders strongly demand to companies ethical and responsible behaviours, and therefore the fulfilment of social agenda gained a central role in firms.

The reputational benefits given by CSR activities to companies are confirmed by Seitanidi, according to whom firms want to "*Capitalize on the positive reputational benefits of taking on some of the responsibility for social problems*" (Seitanidi, 2008 p. 51). Therefore, paying attention to social issues increasingly becomes a factor that contributes to long-term survival and gives a competitive advantage. It must be said that examples of private firms which looked at broader issues than profit exist for quite some time already, but the intensity and the strategic nature of the efforts is new (Nijhof and de Bruijn 2008). Carroll (1991), quoted by Nijhof and de Bruijn (2008), stresses that, given the critical role of CSR, companies need to develop new competencies in order to integrate these responsibilities in their management processes, in their daily activities, policies and operations. In this context, partnerships are considered by many scholars as an effective mean to reach these goals.

Furthermore, while firms offer business-related knowledge, expertise and greater financial and operational resources (Hartman and Dhanda 2018), several studies have revealed that companies seek market expertise (needs identification, knowledge of certain market segments), customer relationships and legitimacy with

civil society players and governments (Dahan et al. 2010), and greater knowledge of the social issue addressed by the partnership typical of NPOs.

Co-creation of additional value

The two parties do not only want to compensate for the lack of resources, but also co-create additional value and deliver benefits arising from the combination of their assets. The assumption is that certain outcomes are best achieved collectively in a way characterised by complementarity and compatibility (Eid and Sabella 2014); even according to Porter and Kramer (2001), engaging in partnerships is a mean with great potential to generate and deliver shared value, which means leveraging the unique resources and expertise for the development of new business models and relationships for creating economic value by creating social value, solving social and environmental problems.

1.2.4. Barriers, challenges, and risks of firms-NPOs partnerships

Together with the drivers which lead to the formation of partnerships between firms and NPOs, it is crucial to recognize and to take into consideration the multitude of different barriers, challenges and risks associated with them, which are broadly acknowledged in the literature.

Misalignment

A key barrier is constituted by the substantial differences between NPOs and firms, also indicated as misalignment, which emerges at different levels and involves, among other aspects, values, objectives and management practices.

Rondinelli and London (2003), notice that corporations and NGOs have fundamentally different structures and values, and that alliances between them are characterized by lack of common experience, which is usually a requirement of successful collaborations and in this context represents an additional challenge even when there is commitment from both sides. Accordingly, it is noticed that the potential for conflict is greater than in within-sector partnerships, since the two parties come from different sectors, which sometimes have adversarial origins, and face several contradictions in terms of missions, values and motives (Sanzo et al. 2015).

Furthermore, the difference in the objectives is widely recognized in literature. Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury (2021) underline that businesses seek mainly, although not necessarily exclusively, financial gains; their dominant objective is wealth maximization for shareholders and the measures through which the performances are evaluated are profit, market share, and share price (Ahmadsimab

and Chowdhury 2021, quoting Jensen 2001, McLaughlin 2006). On the other hand, NPOs are primarily concerned with non-economic objectives and social value creation (Hartman and Dhanda 2018, quoting La Porta et al. 1999, Drumwright et al. 2004).

While private firms' values are mostly rooted in their "*Commercial knowledge, financial capital and market legitimacy*" NPOs' values are mostly rooted in their "*Local knowledge, social capital and social legitimacy*" (Di Domenico et al., 2009 p.888, quoted by Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021).

Murthy et al. (2021) provide a wide range of barriers, mentioning internal and external consistency, cultural conflict, organizational compatibility, adversarial position between corporations and non-profits, hostility, mistrust, and postures of conflicts, different organisational norms, cultures and policies and misalignment to the strategic development of the partners.

Finally, differences in communication and management practices are revealed as additional elements which obstacle the collaboration (Schiller and Almog-Bar 2013, quoting Ashman 2001, Liu and Ko 2011).

Therefore, the existence of these differences can lead to "*Misunderstandings, misallocations of costs and benefits, mismatches of power [...] and mistrust*" (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012 p. 932).

Prejudices and bias

In addition to the factual differences between them, the prejudices and bias of an organization about the other and vice versa, defined "*Mutual misrepresentations*" (Arenas et al., 2009 p. 179, quoted by Hartman and Dhanda 2018) are addressed as a barrier. For instance, even though many NPOs form complex organizations involving significant administrative and financial responsibilities, some business leaders maintain the mental model which considers NPOs utopian, excessively ideological, and inexperienced in business matters (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021). This prejudice has been proven to be widespread also among many NPOs, which underestimate their own capacities to contribute to the value creation, even when their partners recognize their efficiency and role in the accomplishment of business aims (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021, quoting Arenas et al. 2009, Lucea 2009).

In the same way, some NPOs believe that companies inherently exploit and instrumentalize in order to earn more profit to the detriment of social welfare (Hartman and Dhanda 2018). Furthermore, some members of NPOs view partnerships with businesses as a defeat which can compromise their values and

integrity. Another concern is driven by the occurrence that the business partner exploits the partnership for personal interests, such as marketing goals, rather than for the social cause (Sanzo et al. 2015).

Reputational risk

Reputational risk has been identified as one of the major dangers for non-profit organizations; indeed, the visibility of a wealthy partner might bring to decrease in donations, internal and external scepticism and legitimization of the “greenwashing” mechanism. In addition, people might perceive a change in NPO’s goals and a loss of its independence as a consequence of the business partner, which might result again a in a loss of reputation (Sanzo et al. 2015).

Above all, potential scandals, frauds or inappropriate behaviours of the business partner would cause a substantial damage to the NPO’s image, and losing reputation for a non-profit organization means losing capacity to attract donors, volunteers and employees, which is a threat to NPO’ survival (Sanzo et al. 2015, quoting Seitanidi et al. 2010).

Legitimacy

It is then important to introduce the concept of legitimacy, defined as public approval of an organization and its activities, granting its right to exist and authority to operate (Herlin 2013) and expecially relevant for NPOs, because directly related to the resource acquisition.

The issue of the relation between partnerships and legitimacy is controversial. It has been suggested that collaborations can increase NPOs’ legitimacy, because cross-sector partnerships are considered as a sign of credibility (Herlin 2013, quoting Eikenberry and Kluver 2004, Wymer and Samu 2009), guarantee greater financial sustainability and allow to expand the number of beneficiaries, as well as can be perceived as a positive strategy to interact with companies through collaboration rather than confrontation.

However, other researchers argue that partnerships might jeopardize the NPOs’ legitimacy due to power asymmetry in favour of the firms. The risk addressed by Herlin (2009) is that companies might take advantage of the situation, engage in “corporate greenwashing”, and exploit the reputation of the non-profit organization. Furthermore, the legitimate status of the NPO might be put at risk by scandals related to the business partner (Herlin 2013, quoting Wymer and Samu 2003).

Power imbalance

Power imbalance or power asymmetry is identified as one of the most significant elements which undermine the NPOs, causing to the non-profit organization loss of autonomy, among the other side effects.

Herlin (2013) stresses the risk in particular with respect to integrative partnerships, in favour of philanthropic or transactional relations, and short-term rather than long-term alliances. These findings seem paradoxical, since transformative partnerships and long-term relations are considered the most interesting for companies (*"at least rhetorically"* states Herlin) and the ones with the greatest transformative potential (Herlin 2013, quoting Kourula and Halme 2008) as well as the prerequisite for joint innovations (Herlin 2013, quoting Holmes and Smart 2009). The author proposes that integrative partnerships are riskier because power imbalance is more prominent in that typology rather than in sponsorships, which conversely are considered by Baur and Schmitz as the case where co-optation is most likely to happen due to financial resource dependence (Herlin 2013, quoting Baur and Schmitz 2012). Therefore, a critical interpretation of partnerships with respect to the effects on NPOs is offered, indicating the lack of evidence in favour of the theory which considers partnerships with companies as a mean to increase credibility and legitimacy of non-profit organizations and arguing the *"Win-win rhetoric that permeates most of mainstream partnership literature"* (Herlin, 2013 p. 848).

Nevertheless, it is important to underline that power asymmetry is frequently identified as a risk factor even when a comprehensively more positive vision of the partnership is proposed.

For instance, it is outlined as a key predisposing factor to end business non-profit partnerships (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021). In addition, power asymmetry is proposed as a driver of eventual misconduct, encouraging the partner with the most resources (such as competence, credibility and group support) to misuse them for illegitimate purposes (Eid and Sabella 2014).

Furthermore, power asymmetry can lead the disadvantaged side to a loss of control over the decision-making process. Usually in this context the business partner tends to have more power and therefore more weight in decision-making, even though this result is not necessarily intentional (Schiller and Almog-Bar 2013, quoting Ashman 2001).

Moreover, some authors stress the possible lack of autonomy of NPOs, explaining that the root of power imbalance should be sought in the ideological bias which attributes greater relevance to monetary resources with respect to the others in

cross-sector collaborations; if it is the case, a partnership of parity is impossible under any circumstance (Hartman and Dhanda 2018).

However, Hartman and Dhanda (2018) offer an alternative interpretation, claiming that the issue is in the perception of resources, that is in the value attributed to the different resources and not in the partnership per se. Indeed, Dhanda et al. (2010) contend that NPOs offer many resources to their business partners, such as market expertise, customer relationships, legitimacy with society and so on. Hence, their study suggests that power imbalances is not a danger to NPOs, as long as the resources brought by one side of the collaboration are perceived equally valuable by the other, which means that companies must value the contribution of the NPOs as much as NPOs value the financial contributions and the other resources that they receive (Hartman and Dhanda 2018, quoting Dhanda et al. 2010).

Partner selection: strategy and process

Given the differences between NPOs and firms and the risks embedded with the cross-sector partnerships presented so far, partner selection is proved to be a crucial aspect and a challenge.

In particular, Feilhauer and Hahn (2021) focus on the strategic level, and namely the authors suggest strengthening or broadening the network as the possible strategies for the partner selection from the firm's perspective.

The four possible pathways identified for partnership formation are described in Figure 1.2.

Hereafter, the advantages, disadvantages and drivers of reinforcing and broadening will be briefly reported.

For what concerns the reinforcing strategy, three classes of drivers have been depicted.

- *Constraint driven*: setting up a partnership requires many resources in terms of money, time and energy, which is exacerbated by the lack of familiarity between NPOs and firms and their different objectives, and at the same time firms have limited financial and human resources available; using a network-reinforcing strategy allows to lower the search costs and the coordination costs, leaving the possibility to build a partnership agreement despite the limited resources;
- *Recognition driven*: few long-term partnerships are more effective in terms of communication, reputational effects and credibility for firms;

- *Risk driven*: partnering with tested and known NPO partners guarantees the minimization of reputational risks.

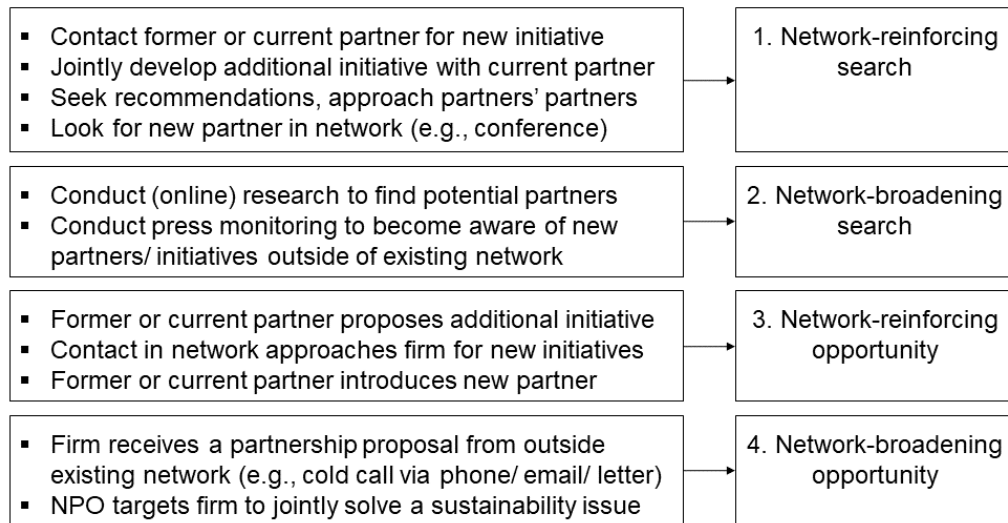


Figure 1.2: Dynamics of cross-sector partnership formation

Source: derived from Feilhauer S., Hahn R. (2021). *Formalization of Firms' Evaluation Processes in Cross-Sector Partnerships for Sustainability*, p.8

On the other hand, there is the network broadening strategy: especially referring to the "Network-broadening search", managers can actively search the partners in order to create alliances and partnerships, which allow to strategically select the organizations which best fit the specific needs of the firm. Other advantages which refer in general to the broadening strategies are the opportunity to ensure a diverse access to resources and a lower dependency on existing partners (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021, quoting Baum et al. 2000, Holmberg and Cummings 2009).

In summary, firms need to consider whether it is more important to lower the risk for opportunistic behaviour of partners (network-reinforcing strategy) or to lower the dependency on individual partners (network-broadening strategy).

In addition to the possible strategies adopted to select the partner, Austin and Seitanidi (2012) underline the criticality of selection, which can determine the failure or the value creation potential of the partnership, and at the same time the tendency of organizations to underestimate the relevance of partner selection process, which is described by the researchers.

They assert the importance of developing partnership-specific criteria, which can facilitate the assessment of potential partners. Previous research has suggested

industry of interest, scope of operations, cost-effectiveness (investment required vs. generation of potential value), time scales of operation, personal affiliations, availability and type of resources among the possible selection criteria (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, quoting Holmberg and Cummings 2009, Seitanidi 2010, Seitanidi and Crane 2009). The authors contend that the organizations should specify criteria able to disclose the potential capability of the partnership to obtain and generate value from the four sources of value, that are resource complementarity, resource nature, resource directionality and use and linked interests; furthermore, these criteria should be able to reveal which combination of the four types of value (associational, transferred, interaction and synergistic) the partnership would be able to produce (Austin and Seitanidi 2012).

In addition, Austin and Seitanidi (2012) stress the imperative of performing the risk assessment, constituted by a formal and an informal part. The objective of the formal internal risk assessment process is to collect interaction intelligence across the potential partner organizations (e.g., internal process and output reports, external assessment of previous collaborative projects), while the formal external process is focused on previous partners, in order to develop knowledge and awareness regarding eventual incidents or concerns that may be mentioned by previous partner organizations. For what concerns the informal risk assessment process, open dialogue among the constituents of each partner organization is suggested, as well as informal meetings especially involving the potential members of the partnership team.

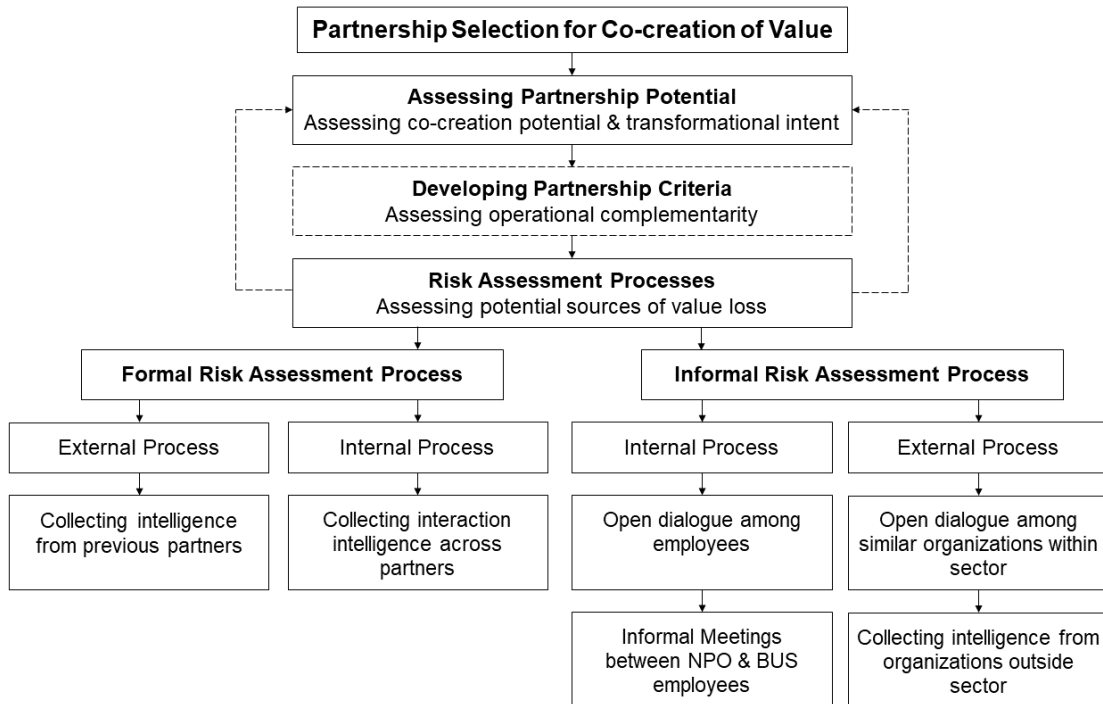


Figure 1.3: Partnership selection

Source: derived from Austin J., Seitanidi M. (2012). *Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering Between Nonprofits and Businesses: Part II*, p.9

1.2.5. Critical success factors of firms-NPOs partnerships

Critical success factors are those elements required to ensure the success of a partnership, the necessary conditions for value co-creation; they have been explored in several studies, the most recurring and significant elements and interpretations will be proposed hereafter. In particular, many scholars believe that success in inter-organizational relations is rooted in relational factors (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Lefroy and Tsarenko 2013, Morgan and Hunt 1994, Parker and Selsky 2004).

Alignment

Misalignment between NPOs and firms in terms of values, mission, vision, culture, organizational structure, as well as objectives, is broadly recognized as a risk element for cross-partnerships and a barrier to their success, leading to misunderstandings, conflicts and in the end to the failure of the collaboration, as described in Paragraph 1.2.4, dedicated to risks, challenges and barriers. Conversely, in other cases this same concept is interpreted using a different perspective: therefore, alignment is proposed as a determinant factor for the partnership success. Austin (2000) defines strategy, mission and values alignment

as one of the four “*Forces that provide primary power for strategic cross-sector collaboration*” (Austin, 2000 p. 71).

In literature, the concept of alignment has taken slightly different names and meanings. For instance, the term organizational fit is used to encompass compatibility of missions, motivations, and objectives, and the fact of operating in the same geographical areas and for similar customers and stakeholder groups (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Sanzo et al. 2015; Austin and Seitanidi 2012), while the definition “*The closeness of fit between partners’ missions, values, and/or strategies*” is proposed by Murphy et al. (2015 p. 146) in order to describe alignment (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Murphy et al. 2015). In general, it refers to the similarity of value, objectives and strategy, but also to the willingness to respect the partner’s value if they are different.

Trust

The second factor is trust, defined as the confidence in a partner’s reliability and integrity, where integrity is associated with honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness and benevolence (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Morgan and Hunt 1994). Parker and Selsky (2004) identify two components of trust: competence trust and goodwill trust, which are called by Barroso-Mendez et al. (2016) credibility and benevolence. Credibility is the conviction that the partner is competent, reliable and acts in accordance with expectations and promises; benevolence, on the other hand, is related to the belief that the organization is willing and ready to provide support to its partner if needed (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Parker and Selsky 2004, Barroso- Mendez et al. 2016).

Mayer et al. (1995) offer a definition of trust which encompasses all the three elements described so far: capability, or credibility, related to the competence and skills required to perform the job adequately; integrity, the belief that the partner will keep its promises; and benevolence, the willingness to provide support and interest in the partner’s welfare (Sanzo et al. 2015, quoting Mayer et al. 1995).

Conversely, Austin does not directly identify trust as critical success factor, but rather he discusses about the personal relationships: “*Institutional partnerships are created, nurtured, and extended by people. Social purpose partnerships appear to be motivationally fueled by the emotional connection that individuals make both with the social mission and with their counterparts in the other organization*” (Austin, 2000 p. 82) and underlines that they are crucial for the creation of interorganizational trust.

Commitment

Moreover, commitment is widely recognized as a critical success factors for cross-sector partnerships. Morgan and Hunt (1994) define it as the belief that the relation with the other organization is so important to deserve the maximum effort to maintain it (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Morgan and Hunt 1994).

It is then noticed that other scholars give emphasis to the affective component of commitment, describing it as a feeling of attachment, pride and loyalty toward the partner organization (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Lefroy and Tsarenko 2013). Indeed, there are two types of commitment: calculative and affective. While the former is based on a rational evaluation of benefits and costs associated with the partnership, the latter is rooted in the affective predisposition resulting from the identification of an organization in the partner's values (Sanzo et al. 2015).

In the paper *“NGO—Business Collaboration: A Comparison of Organizational, Social, and Reputation Value from the NGO Perspective in Poland”* (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019), a comprehensive approach is adopted, which describes commitment as composed by the feeling of loyalty and satisfaction, the effort exerted to maintain the collaboration and the perceived importance of the relationship, and therefore encompassing all the three components of an attitude according to the ABC model (Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive; Bagozzi and Burnkrant 1980).

Alliance drivers and enablers

Besides alignment of strategy, mission and values, personal connection and relationships, value generation and shared visioning, Austin underlines the role of “continual learning” (Austin 2000). According to the researcher, indeed, the strongest collaborations are characterized by the *“Hunger to find new ways to engage more effectively”* (Austin, 2000 p. 85); he defines this attitude as discovery ethic, which foster the formation of deeper, more effective and richer partnerships (Austin 2000).

Furthermore, together with the elements previously described Austin points out *“A constellation of factors that enable the effective management of the partnering relationship and process”* (Austin, 2000 p. 85). They are focused attention, which means that the partnership is perceived as a priority, with high internal visibility and focused engagement by the decision makers; effective, efficient and frequent communication, which should happen through multiple channels, both formal and informal and should be characterized by openness and accept constructive criticism; organizational system, that allows clear definition of the management's responsibility of both partners in their contributions to the partnership, and finally

mutual expectations and accountability, which means to clarify the expectations from each partner and to be able to demonstrate the proper execution (Austin 2000).

1.2.5.1. The relations between the factors: two frameworks

In addition to the precise descriptions of the critical success factors, two frameworks will be proposed; indeed, they provide the opportunity to go beyond the recognition and definition of the critical success factors presented so far, with the aim to explain the links both *within* these factors and *between* them and the value created.

The first framework is developed and described by Mirońska and Zaborek (2019). Alignment, trust and commitment are the three critical success factors taken into consideration, and the value generated is described following the model proposed by Selsky and Parker (2005), who identify three levels of partnerships' outcomes: organizational, social and reputational.

The framework is shown in Figure 1.4, which indicates the links between the factors and with the value generated, while the main findings and considerations regarding the model are reported hereafter. The best predictor of the model is alignment: its total effect on each type of value is greater than either trust or commitment. Beyond the direct relation between alignment and the generation of values, this framework argues that alignment between the organizations has a positive impact on both trust and commitment; indeed, on one hand it decreases the atmosphere of conflict between partners, facilitate communication and promote trust (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Austin and Seitanidi 2012). On the other hand, it has been proved that organizations sharing common values are more positive about each other and are ready and motivated to commit more intensely.

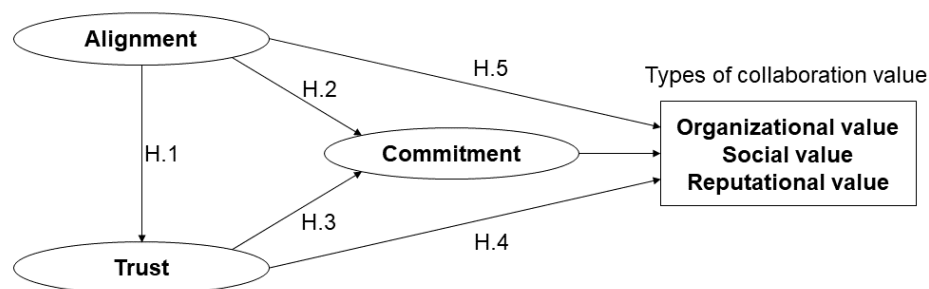


Figure 1.4: Conceptual model

Source: derived from Mirońska D., Zaborek P. (2019). *NGO-Business Collaboration: A Comparison of Organizational, Social, and Reputation Value From the NGO Perspective in Poland*, p.935

Furthermore, this study offers some important insights regarding the relation between commitment and the value generation: if trust and alignment have exclusively positive effects on the value creation, this framework interestingly and unexpectedly reveals a negative correlation between commitment and social and reputational values. This finding can be explained by the fact that high commitment leads to high visibility, and NPOs stakeholders as beneficiaries, employees and volunteers might perceive the partnership as against the principles of the non-profit organization, jeopardizing and undermining the NPO's legitimacy and reputation (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019).

The second framework, described by Sanzo et al. (2015), proposes a model which again encompasses alignment, trust and commitment, but the relationships partially differ. Moreover, the analysis is expanded both "before" with the description of additional determinants, and "after" with the evaluation of knowledge transfer and NPO's results.

The relevance of this framework is evident at theoretical level, as well as at field level; indeed, it points out some significant performances, and going backwards it brings to light the elements which lead to achieve positive results, up to the description of the upstream critical success factors, underlining the relations between the different aspects, as is shown in Figure 1.5.

For what concerns the performances, the ultimate indicator for NPOs is the extent to which the organization accomplishes its social mission (Sanzo et al. 2015, quoting McDonald 2007), but this final goal depends on other intermediate performances. The three indicators included in this framework are funding, since it is a critical challenge for NPOs, scale of operations, given the need of non-profit organizations to increase their size, and visibility, because it is a widespread objective of NPOs. In order to achieve these performances, the importance of internal marketing and ICTC is suggested. Internal marketing means that managers should provide financial support for carrying out regular evaluations of personnel satisfaction, but support also means encouragement and help to overcome problems, promotion of cross-functional cooperation and fostering of communication, both formal and informal. Other activities involve the design of jobs, which should consider the skills and professional development of personnel, as well as the promotion of training programs (Sanzo et al. 2015). Conversely, ICTC is the extent to which an organization is knowledgeable about and effectively uses ICTC to manage internal information (Sanzo et al. 2015, quoting Tippins and Sohi 2003). It seems that despite the availability and the usefulness of these technologies, which might be adopted to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and to support the campaigning, provision of

user services, and quality assurance (Sanzo et al. 2015, quoting Burt and Taylor 2003), most NPOs fail to take advantage of them.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this framework is that the development of innovations resulting from collaboration between NPOs and firms is positively associated with the implementation of an internal marketing approach and ICTC.

In turn, innovation development is considered to be positively associated with commitment, because the hypothesis is that close relationships can give rise to a bilateral process of knowledge transfer and capacity building (Sanzo et al. 2015, quoting Bennett et al. 2008).

Moving to the implications of this framework, the first relevant consideration suggested by the authors is that although cash support is usually the predominant company contribution, it should be noticed that in order to reach strategic goals and develop innovations and changes, the partnership cannot be based only on the provision of monetary resources, but should involve other more specialized resources and capabilities that help the partners to improve knowledge sharing (Sanzo et al. 2015).

The second finding is in line with the literature previously described, highlighting that trust and commitment, as well as their determinants, are crucial for the success of a partnership: therefore, managers should establish a team in which members from both organizations work together to implement the partnership, encourage the physical proximity of team members, ensure team member stability, use training and seminar sessions to develop understanding, and encourage temporal personnel mobility among groups (Sanzo et al. 2015).

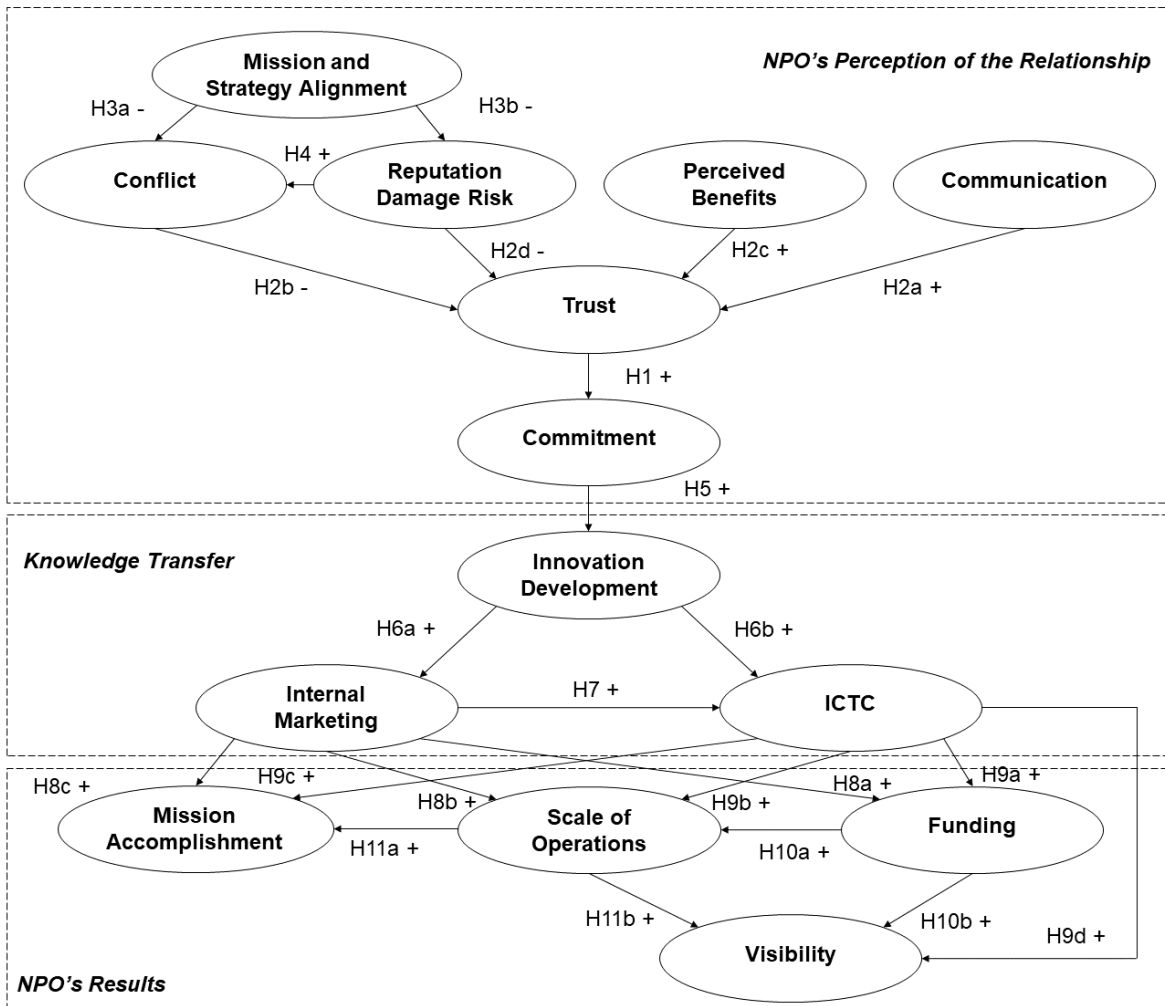


Figure 1.5: Conceptual model

Source: derived from Sanzo M.J., Álvarez L.I., Rey M., García N. (2015). *Business-Nonprofit Partnerships: Do Their Effects Extend Beyond the Charitable Donor-Recipient Model?* P. 383

1.2.6. Outcomes of firms-NPOs partnerships

A crucial aspect to be addressed for what concerns partnerships between firms and NPOs naturally consists in the final effects of the collaboration, the outcomes; in this respect, two perspectives present in literature will be illustrated hereafter.

Classification proposed by Selsky and Parker (2005)

Selsky and Parker (2005) identify three levels of partnerships' outcomes.

The first class is called social benefits and encompasses the direct effects on the primary cause of the non-profit organization, which have then also a positive

impact on satisfaction and motivation of employees and volunteers (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019).

The second level is named organizational benefits and involves the impacts on the capacity of the organizations involved, for instance as a result of the acquisition of resources, funds, skills and knowledge due to the collaboration (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019).

Ultimately, Selsky and Parker (2005) outline the reputational benefits, which can be recognized both in the visibility of the organization itself and in the raised public awareness about the social problem addressed (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019).

Classification proposed by Austin and Seitanidi (2012)

In addition, Austin and Seitanidi (2012) provide an exhaustive overview of the outcomes. The authors illustrate that collaborations simultaneously generate value at multiple levels (meso, micro and macro) and focus on who benefits from the partnership, distinguishing two "*loci of value creation*" (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012 p. 741): within the collaboration and external to it. Internally, the authors examine value generated at meso level for the organizations and at micro level for the individuals within those organizations. Externally, the focus is on societal welfare and its improvement as a result of the collaboration, in terms of benefits at micro (to individual recipients), meso (other organizations), and macro (systemic changes) levels (Austin and Seitanidi 2012).

The most common focus in literature is the internal value creation at meso level. Austin and Seitanidi (2012) provide examples of outcomes at this level for both profit and non-profit organizations, distinguishing the four typologies of value: associational value (e.g., higher visibility and increased public awareness of the social issue for non-profits; brand reputation, and image for business), transferred value (e.g., financial support, complementary and organization-specific assets for non-profits; market intelligence and development for business), interaction value (e.g., access to networks and improved relations with profit sector for non-profits; community and government relations for business) and synergistic value (e.g., positive organizational change and process-based improvements for non-profits; product and process innovation and learning and better risk management skills for business) (Austin and Seitanidi 2012).

Together with the benefits, also the costs are taken into consideration in this framework. For what concerns the non-profit organizations, costs include decrease in donations and internal and external scepticism, while businesses might incur in increased need in resource allocation and skills, increased credibility costs in case

of unforeseen exit of a partner from partnership or reputational damage (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, quoting Steckel et al. 1999).

Meso level internal to the partnership		
	<i>Non-profit organization</i>	<i>Business</i>
Association value	Credibility and visibility, increased public awareness, increase in support for organizational mission	Credibility, brand reputation, increased sales, legitimacy, increased usage of products/services, improved media exposure, public support, increased stakeholder loyalty
Transferred value	Financial support in cash or in kind; land, materials; increase of cash donations, of money, land, material from partner or others due to higher visibility; additional financial support; volunteer capital	Acquire market intelligence, competitiveness, second-generation customers, strengthened CFP
Interactional value	Opportunities for learning, development of unique capabilities, access to networks, technical expertise, increased ability to change behaviour, improved relations with profit sector, exposure to different organizational culture, market intelligence	Access to networks, technical expertise, improved community, and government relations, decreased long- and short-term costs, speeding up approval for license to operate, exposure to different organizational culture, increased potential meeting government's and society's priorities, exert more political power within non-profit sector, improved accountability
Synergistic value	Opportunities for innovation, opportunities for improvement of processes, development of new partnerships, increase in performance, sharing leadership, increased long-term value potential, increased ability to change behaviour, exert more political power within sector and society	Product and process innovation and learning, increased risk management skills, opportunities for innovation and for improvement of processes, development of unique capabilities, adaptation of new management practices due to the interaction with non-profit organizations (higher long-term value potential)

Figure 1.6: Partnership's outcomes at meso level

Source: adapted from Austin J., Seitanidi M. (2012). *Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering Between Nonprofits and Businesses: Part II*, p. 949-950

If the internal meso level is the most addressed in literature, micro-level benefits are underexplored and often overflow, even though it is broadly recognized that the implementation of CSR programs and activities should benefit a wide range of stakeholders beyond the partner organizations (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, quoting Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Green and Peloza 2011; Vock et al. 2011).

At micro level the value can be instrumental and psychological. Instrumental encompasses new or strengthened managerial skills, leadership opportunities, technical and sector knowledge, broadened perspectives; on the other hand, emotional benefits involve the individual's psychic satisfaction which derives from the contribution to social improvement and from the development of new friendships with colleagues from the partner organization (Austin and Seitanidi 2012).

Moving to the external value creation, collaborations aim to generate social, environmental, and economic value for the broader external community or society. Austin and Seitanidi (2012) notice that ironically, although societal betterment is the fundamental purpose for cross-sector partnerships, this dimension is the most neglected in both literature and practice.

Figure 1.7 shows the benefits and costs external to the partnership depicted by Austin and Seitanidi (2012); namely, the levels of the outcomes from micro to macro encompass individuals, other organizations, society and systemic change.

Partnership Outcomes external to the partnership		
<i>Level of Outcomes</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Costs</i>
Individuals (intended and unintended)	Increased disease/illness awareness and prevention, reduced death rates, increased life expectancy, improved health, improved well-being, improved social inclusion, improved independence and responsibility, reduced asymmetry between consumers and business, improved literacy, increased disposable income	Potential accountability, credibility, and implementation problems
Other organizations	Adoption of technological advantage through available open innovation/intellectual property, adoption of social innovations, improved standard, reduced social costs, increased profit margin, increased long-term value potential, increased potential to meet government's and society's priorities, development of new markets	Costs for the development of new markets, appropriateness of the standards developed
Society (including outcomes to the environment)	Decreased pollution, deaths; increased recycling, improved adoption rates of new practices; improved environmental standards; improved global governance mechanisms; reduced social costs; increased capacity of societies to create social well-being; increased values; increased long-term value potential; improved social standards; enabling societies to take charge of their own needs, interacting with government, and jointly designing welfare provision	Decrease in the credibility of the institution to partnership to deliver in case of rhetorical claims, increase in cynicism, potential decrease in institutional trust in business and non-profit organizations, diluting ethical and emotional dimensions of social problems and replacing with instrumental perceptions, appropriateness of the standards developed
Systemic change	Introduction and adoption of new technology by industries, reduced social costs through interaction effects of social problems, improves cross-sector relations, increased global value, improved health, improved well-being, improved social inclusion, improved independence, and responsibility	Decrease of trust across sectors in case of mismatched partners, negative publicity, and inability to deliver

Figure 1.7: Partnership's external outcomes

Source: adapted from Austin J., Seitanidi M. (2012). *Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering Between Nonprofits and Businesses: Part II*, p. 950-951

1.2.7. Management of firms-NPOs partnerships

For what concerns the management of the partnerships between firms and NPOs, one of the topics addressed regards the extent of the usage of formal or informal mechanisms. This subject will be declined in a twofold way: first with a focus on the governance, and especially on the NPOs' point of view, and subsequently on the evaluation process, with an eye on the firms' perspective. Finally, the issue of tensions that may arise between the company and the NPO during the partnership will be analysed, with a focus on both causes and strategies to manage them.

Governance

Formal mechanisms, such as contracts or mutually agreed sets of rules and procedures, are described as an instrument to protect from opportunism and conflict (Simpson et al 2011, quoting North 1990, Rondinelli and London 2003, Williamson 1985). Nonetheless, the relationships between firms and NPOs are different from the other typologies of collaborations, due to their focus on a social issue and to the intangible and non-financial nature of their outcomes (Simpson et al. 2011, quoting Berger et al. 2006; Wymer and Samu 2003). Therefore, even if formal governance mechanisms can provide clear standards and norms, they might shift the focus of the relation from the social purpose to rules, while firms-NPOs partnerships might require a higher degree of flexibility (Simpson et al. 2011).

Conversely, informal mechanisms guarantee greater levels of trust, information sharing and coordination; they develop through regular meetings, frequent communication, visits and so on, which lead each organization to a better understanding of the partner's activities. This kind of governance mechanisms reduce the reliance on the contract, but the adverse effect is that greater interaction can also lead to a familiarity that limits independence and objectivity (Simpson et al. 2011, quoting Heide and Wathne 2006).

In the non-profit literature it is common the assumption that NPOs tend to use only informal relationships with their corporate partners, but conversely it was found that they employ formal governance mechanisms even when they could be avoided, which suggests that many partnerships are still characterized by low levels of trust (Simpson et al. 2011).

Many NPOs described on one hand the importance of personal interaction and maintenance of relationships (informal mechanisms) but at the same time the criticality of relying only on them and the necessity of well-defined and shared rules, memorandum of understandings and other formal practices.

In conclusion, cross-sector partnerships are characterized by the employment of both formal and informal mechanisms, which allows to balance the divergent ideologies of the two parties (Simpson et al. 2011) and to minimize the disadvantages of each, while at the same time exploiting the advantages of both.

Evaluation practices

Evaluation process is constituted by the practices implemented in order to assess the progress and the results of the partnerships, both internally and jointly with the partner, and plays a crucial role. Internal evaluation is aimed to make informed decisions, especially regarding the possibility to continue investing in the partnership or not (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021, quoting Bryson et al. 2006, van Tulder et al. 2016); conversely, joint evaluations is intended to sustain the partners' commitment, to facilitate the communication among the partners and also to effectively communicate the partnerships' results.

While theory suggests the relevance of formal evaluation practices to perform a rigorous assessment, there is a gap between this conceptualization and the evidence from the field (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021), as depicted hereafter.

For what concerns the internal evaluation, the growing number of cross-sector partnerships could induce firms to formalize, but the complexity due to the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the issues addressed in such partnerships might be a strong barrier to formalization (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021). Organizational research suggests that firms are reluctant to formalize complex knowledge and working tasks into codified systems and procedures, because it is considered difficult and costly and can cause rigidity and inertia (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021, quoting Hwang and Powell 2009, Levitt and March 1988).

Regarding instead the joint evaluation process, a number of studies argues that NPOs consider formal evaluation practices as irrelevant or impractical, and accordingly previous research has often highlighted the importance of trust-based or informal governance mechanisms in case of cross-sector partnerships. Conversely, other researchers emphasize that pressures for accountability from stakeholders and funding institutions pushed more formal impact assessments and professionalization in NPOs (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021, quoting Baur and Schmitz 2012, Hwang and Powell 2009, Sakarya et al. 2012).

The paper "*Formalization of Firms' Evaluation Processes in Cross-Sector Partnerships for Sustainability*" (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021) provides relevant insights regarding this topic, suggesting that the resources required (e.g., monetary, time, personal efforts) and the complexity in defining appropriate formal evaluation practices can

definitely obstacle formalization, but do not prevent it: if drivers are present, firms formalize despite additional necessary resources and involved complexities.

The drivers for formalizing the internal evaluation process are pressure for resource effectiveness in the firm (if the firm must internally justify the investments, it will invest time and efforts to collect the data and to enable systematic measurements) and criticality to reach a strategic target of the firm (if a partnership is critical in order to implement a specific strategic target, the company is willing to invest significant effort into defining partnership targets or KPIs) (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021).

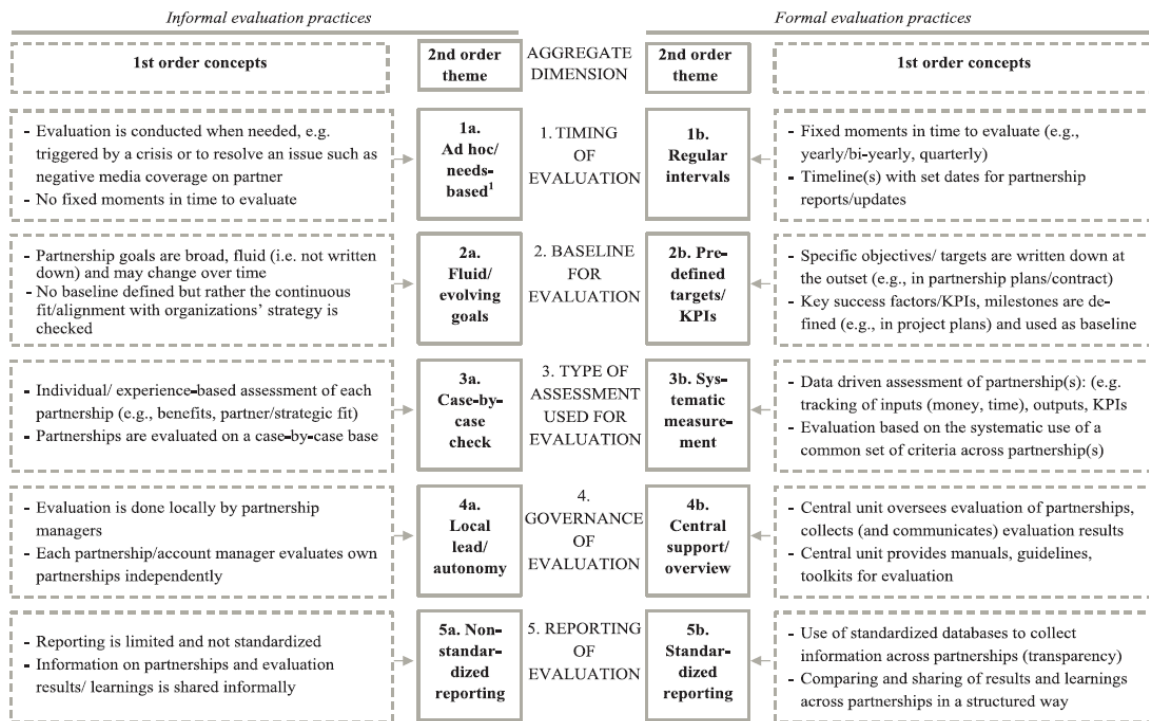


Figure 1.8: Conceptual framework on formalization of internal and joint partnership evaluation process

Source: adapted from Feilhauer S., Hahn R. (2021). *Formalization of Firms' Evaluation Processes in Cross-Sector Partnerships for Sustainability*, p. 706

Regarding instead the formalization of the joint partnership evaluation with NPOs, the main driver depicted is that “Having a formalized partnership baseline and assessment in place ensures transparency and allows the NPO to independently control and to credibly endorse the firm’s achievements toward external stakeholders such as consumers and the media” (Feilhauer and Hahn, 2021 p. 711).

Feilhauer and Hahn (2021) also suggest the practices implemented in the evaluation process of cross-sector partnerships, comparing the formal and informal ones along five dimensions: timing, baseline, type of assessment used, governance and reporting of evaluation.

For what concerns the establishment of metrics and indicators, Hartman and Dhanda (2018) state that *“It is both true and tautological to assert that partnerships cannot succeed if the partners fail to establish metrics of success and track progress toward these desired outcomes”* (Hartman and Dhanda, 2018 p. 193); nonetheless, it is not an easy task due to a multitude of reasons.

- *Quantification problem*: if it is usually easier to quantify companies' contribution, whether they are funds or services, common ideological biases can obstacle the recognition of the value added by NPOs as a measurable outcome; furthermore, legitimacy or knowledge of the social issue addressed, although notably valuable, are more difficult to measure (Hartman and Dhanda 2018, quoting Molina- Gallart 2014). This difficulty can prevent from considering the impact of these contributions to the outcomes at micro, meso and macro level (Hartman and Dhanda 2018);
- *Attribution problem*: isolating the specific contribution of the partnership from other effects is a complex challenge, since collaborations between firms and NPOs typically address multifaceted problems (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021, quoting Brinkerhoff 2002);
- *Assessment problem*: results at societal level are often intangible and evolving, and therefore difficult to assess;
- *Standardization problem*: lack of standard guidelines and indicators is broadly acknowledged in literature; as so, the ultimate performance indicator is the extent to which the social mission is accomplished, but there is no consensus regarding the criteria that should be used to measure (Sanzo-Perez et al. 2017). In this direction, Feilhauer and Hahn (2021) underline the risk of an inconsistent evaluation which relies on managers' personal commitment to the cause or to the NPO rather than on the best interest of the firm and the society, since partnerships involve many actors with different skills, backgrounds and judgment of partnerships' benefits;
- *Misalignment problem*: the lack of familiarity between firms and non-profit organizations, which have different goals, organizational processes, values and so on ultimately risks to exacerbate the situation (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021).

Sanzo-Perez et al. (2017) propose to use two productivity indicators, which are considered especially relevant given the competitiveness of the environment.

The first measure adopts the “Cost per impact” (1.1) approach, which is constituted by two components: cost and social impact. Cost is measured by the investments made to realize the impact, while the measurement of social impact is more controverse. Indeed, it is commonly argued that the focus should be on the outcome (the results of the work) and not on the output (the amount of work), in order to measure the concrete effect on the beneficiaries’ lives. However, it is argued that: “[...] the majority of non-profits cannot answer these questions. Many don’t even know with much reliability who they serve, how often and for how long” (Sanzo-Perez et al. 2017 p. 9, quoting Hunter 2009). The final decision in this case was to adopt a critical output measure, as the number of beneficiaries served.

$$\text{Cost per impact} = \frac{\text{Investment to realize the impact}}{\text{Number of beneficiaries served}} \quad (1.1)$$

The second productivity indicator is the quotient of the non-profit’s total annual revenues and the volume of human resources (1.2), which encompass both paid employees and volunteers. Even though the profit is not the ultimate goal of NPOs, this indicator is a relevant measure because non-profit organizations must be able to obtain funds in order to pursue their mission (Sanzo-Perez et al. 2017).

$$\text{Revenues per HR} = \frac{\text{Total annual revenues}}{\text{Volume of human resources}} \quad (1.2)$$

The hypothesis of the study is that, overall, the existence of a partnership with a firm fosters the foundation’s productivity; the results confirm this theory and therefore suggest that NPOs’ managers should be open to the development of collaborations and partnerships with the appropriate firms (Sanzo-Perez et al. 2017).

Conflict and tensions’ management

The study “*Managing Tensions and Divergent Institutional Logics in Firm–NPO Partnerships*” (AhmadSimab and Chowdhury 2021) makes a major contribution to research offering some important insights into tensions arising in the context of cross-sector partnerships and their management.

It is widely acknowledged in literature that the differences between the two partners can lead to tensions and conflicts, and the situation is exacerbated in the cross-sector collaborations by the eventual incompatibility of missions, values and organizational characteristics between firms and NPOs (Sanzo et al. 2015), as described more in detail in Paragraph 1.2.4 “Barriers, challenges and risks of firms-NPOs partnerships”.

The objective of the study is to analyse the conflicts coming from different understandings of partnership objectives due to divergent institutional logics (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021, quoting Ashraf et al. 2017, Chowdhury 2012, Vurro et al. 2010, Googins and Rochlin 2000) and different values, norms, and assumptions that are shaped at the field level but produce tension at the organizational and practice levels (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021, quoting Friedland 2013, Friedland and Alford 1991). The main findings of the study will be summarised hereafter, and the framework proposed in the research is represented in Figure 1.9.

The primary cause of initial tensions is the lack of familiarity of each organization regarding the fundamental values of its partner: under-developed trust between the two entities leads to tensions primarily rooted in different organizational objectives, values and cultural background. At the beginning of the partnership, organizations tend to maintain the differences in order to protect their values: the adoption of acceptance strategies allows to acknowledge and embrace the differences between the organizations rather than reject them, therefore avoiding the emergence of a conflictual relation (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021).

In this phase, one of the processes to reconcile are joint pilot projects, which enable continuing interactions between the two organizations, providing the opportunity to communicate their points of view, to become familiar with the day-to-day work of the partner and to better comprehend which are the resources that they could mutually offer. Furthermore, management commitment resulted to be a key factor in order to reconcile the two organizations: indeed, it allows to solidify the relation and engage the staff (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021).

Following, tensions occurring during the formal collaboration are more related to the operational level, with differences in organizational practices and daily activities rather than values and mission. However, Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury (2021) state that thanks to the understanding built during the initial phase “*Partners had developed greater insight into their counterpart’s values and had already identified solutions to avoid tensions resulting from different value positions*” (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury, 2021 p. 667). This finding is notably relevant because it provides a positive interpretation of the tensions occurred in the initial phase, perceived as

useful to facilitate the resolution of tensions arising during the formal partnership phase.

Examples of tensions occurring in this phase are: differences in the financial control systems used, together with the attitude of firms to consider NPOs unreliable in the management of their money; differences in expectations about timetables, such as deadlines or time required in order to perform some activities, and differences in the priorities. In addition, firms might expect NPOs to emulate them for what concerns the organization, while NPOs can have difficulties in understanding the organizational structures of their partners (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021).

One of the mechanisms depicted to cope with these tensions is the negotiation of common short and medium-term objectives. The determination of common deadlines, cost limits or targets surely contributes to provide a shared direction for the efforts of both NPO and firm and to the accomplishment of practical tasks, but also helps the partners to understand the type and scope of their interaction (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021).

The second suggestion is monitoring and learning, which provide a “*Platform for mutual understanding*” (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury, 2021 p. 665) that helps firms and NPOs to develop greater familiarity and comfort with their counterparts, to engage more deeply and thereby increases the likelihood of continuing the collaboration (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021).

Finally, the willingness to change existing organizational practices for the sake of improving the collaboration is a crucial aspect: although difficult, it shows commitment to each other and also to the broader goals of the collaboration. Indeed, it can be easy to agree on the objective and the social purpose, but strong efforts are needed to agree on the process (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021).

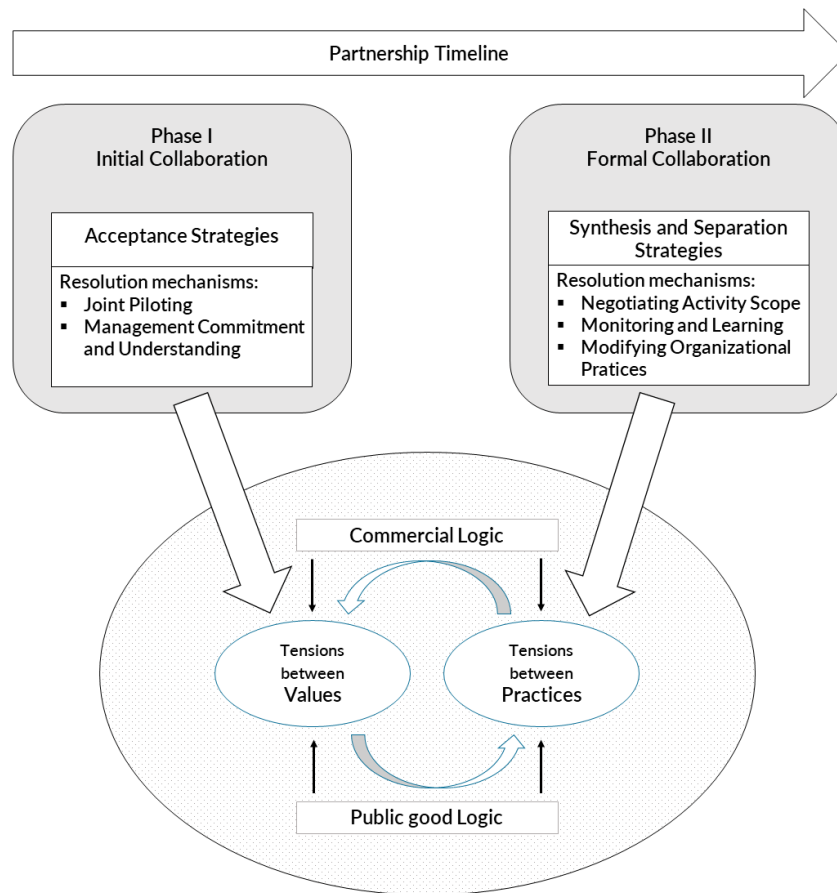


Figure 1.9: A process model of firm–NPO partnership

Source: derived from Ahmadsimab A., Chowdhury I. (2021) *Managing Tensions and Divergent Institutional Logics in Firm-NPO Partnerships*, p. 666

1.3. Context of empirical research: inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market

After the introduction of cross-sectorial partnerships and the in-depth analysis of firms-NPOs partnerships, this section is dedicated to the field of application chosen for the study of firm-NPO partnerships, that is inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. Through the description of different elements, including for instance the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from being included in the labour market and the Italian legislative framework, this section wants to provide an overview of the issue with two aims.

The first responds to the need to have a clear vision of the context in which the partnerships under analysis take place: contextual elements are closely linked to the reasons and to the ways in which a partnership is developed, and therefore a

complete study cannot disregard their analysis, even though they seem to be outside the main scope of the research.

The second reason is that contextual elements substantiate the relevance of the issue and illustrate the roles played by both companies and NPOs, and therefore contribute to clarify and explain the rationale behind the choice of the application field.

The approach of this section is therefore the following: the first paragraph introduces the reasons that led to the definition of inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market as field of the empirical research, while the following paragraphs are devoted to deepening those reasons and to provide an overview of the context.

1.3.1. Rationale behind the choice

Resource-based view has been used in Paragraph 1.1.1 to explain the rationale behind the creation of cross-sector partnerships, underlining that this typology of collaborations are essentially driven by the reciprocal necessity of the two parties to acquire critical and valuable resources one of the other. Literature regarding the specific case of collaborations between firms and NPOs confirms this theory, indicating among the drivers for non-profits the need to acquire physical and monetary resources, competences and skills, and for companies the interest in meeting their social responsibilities, improving their reputation and in gaining access to knowledge and competences.

The field of application chosen as the object of this research is the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, since it is characterised by peculiarities that make it remarkably suitable for the implementation of partnerships between firms and NPOs and that are illustrated below.

Companies have to fulfil a legal obligation reserving a certain number of jobs for people with disabilities, as will be further detailed in Paragraph 1.3.2, but at the same time they lack the knowledge and know-how necessary to be compliant with the law and to develop efficient projects of inclusion. On the other hand, NPOs working with disabled people have the necessary knowledge and skills, but lack the employment potential and means needed in order to realize concrete projects of inclusion in the labour market.

Hence, in addition to all the drivers described in the context of partnerships between firms and NPOs in general, which include for instance the increasingly necessary competences and skills typical of the for-profit world for NPOs or reputational benefits for firms, in this context it is possible to recognize distinctive

complementary resources, element recognized by Austin and Seitanidi (2012) as a key antecedent of value creation. Indeed, companies have a significant employment potential needed by NPOs and need knowledge and skills to be compliant with the law, while NPOs have the required knowledge and skills and need the employment potential.

In conclusion, the strong legislative push and the need to access to complementary and distinctive resources make the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market a particularly suitable and relevant field in the study of partnerships between firms and NPOs.

In addition to the above considerations, it is crucial to highlight the relevance of the topic, which emerges from the prominence of the issue in various national and international treaties, guidelines and policies, from the number of people with disabilities still excluded from the world of work and who face barriers on a daily basis, which are the subject of the following paragraphs.

In conclusion, the peculiarities that make inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market a remarkably suitable field for the implementation of partnerships between firms and NPO, together with the relevance of the topic, represent the rationale behind the choice of partnerships between NPOs and firms aimed at the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market as the context for the empirical research.

1.3.2. European policies and Italian legal framework

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948) is unanimously recognized as a milestone in the history of human rights; proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, it defined for the first time fundamental human rights to be universally protected. Specifically, Article 23 is dedicated to the right to work and states:

23.1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

23.2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

23.3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

The principles of human rights are universality, inalienability, indivisibility, and interdependence and interrelatedness (UNFPA 2005). It is crucial to emphasize this latter concept, which means that each right contributes to the realization of a person's human dignity and that the fulfilment of one right fully or partially depends on the fulfilment of others (UNFPA 2005). In the context of the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, for instance, it means that a person with a disability who is unable to work and to earn a fair salary may be consequently unable to reach a proper standard of living and to fully participate in society. Conversely, violations of other human rights as the right to education can affect the ability of people with disabilities to realize their right to work.

The central role of work is also stated in the Italian Constitution; thereby, the first article recognizes that *"Italy is a democratic Republic founded on work"*, while according to Article 4: *"The Republic recognizes the right of all citizens to work and promotes conditions to fulfil this right"* (Italian Constitution 1948).

Nonetheless, people with disabilities face additional barriers and are commonly excluded by the labour market; therefore, alongside and in support of Member States' policies, the European Union introduced a number of legal provisions, initiatives, actions and strategies aimed to improve the employment situation of disabled people.

Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU, ex-Article 13 TEC) states that *"[...] the Council, acting unanimously in accordance with a special legislative procedure and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation"* (TFEU 1957).

Furthermore, the III Title of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Union, declared in 2000 and become legally binding with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, is dedicated to Equality; in particular, Article 26 refers to the integration of people with disabilities and states that: *"The Union recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community"* (Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Union 2000).

Moreover, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP), signed by Italy on 30 March 2007, provides detailed guidance on how to adjust laws and policies in order to improve the participation of people with disabilities in society, including in the labour market: the CRPD does not create new rights, but rather it takes existing rights and interprets them in the context of persons with disabilities.

Specifically, Article 27 declares that: *“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities”* (CRDP, 2016). In order to preserve and promote the right of work for people with disabilities, a number of steps is suggested in the CRPD; among them, there are:

- d) Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
- e) Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;
- h) Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures.

The main instrument supporting the CRPD's implementation and the creation of a *“barrier-free Europe”* (European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, 2010 p. 3) is the European disability strategy 2010-2020. One of the eight areas of action identified by the Commission is precisely Employment, with the aim of enabling *“Many more people with disabilities to earn their living on the open labour market”* (European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, 2010 p. 7); among the actions proposed by EU, it is possible to find the analysis of the labour market situation of people with disabilities; the fight against those disability benefit cultures and traps that discourage people from entering the labour market; the development of active labour market policies; the increase of workplaces' accessibility and the development of services for job placement, support structures and on-the-job training.

In 2017 the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) was launched: it is a tool aimed to promote and protect social rights of EU residents, with the collaboration of the European institutions together with Member States, civil society, social actors and social partners. The principle 17 is *“Inclusion of people with disabilities”* and states that: *“People with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures living in dignity, services that enable them to participate in the labour market and in society, and a work environment adapted to their needs”* (EPSR 2017).

Subsequently, in March 2021 the European Commission adopted the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, which builds on the results of the one formerly introduced. Indeed, people with disabilities face significant barriers

despite of the progress made in the past decade, and one of the objectives still is “*Fostering access to quality and sustainable jobs*”, which contributes to the wider right to decent quality of life and living independently.

The employment of people with disabilities is also included in the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations; specifically, the Goal 8 is “*Decent work and economic growth*”, and the target 8.5 is to “*achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value*” by 2030.

Italian legal framework

For what concerns the Italian legal framework, the law 68/1999 “Regulations for the right to work of the disabled” is the fundamental national legislation for the integration of people with disabilities in the labour market.

It radically changed the work placement, transforming it from “mandatory” to “targeted”: the focus is on personalized instruments for the placement, which take into account the peculiar needs of the workers and allow to properly assess them according to their work capacity and to place them in suitable jobs.

The legislation establishes reserved quotas for disabled people, which the employer is obliged to respect: namely, there is an obligation to employ one disabled worker for firms between 15 and 35 employees, two disabled workers between 36 and 50, and the extent of 7% of the employed workers for firms which have more than 50 employees. If companies do not comply with this obligation are subject to sanctions, while economic and fiscal incentives, established on the basis of the type of contract signed with the disabled person and the latter's specific features, are provided for recruitment.

By going to the Provincial Employment Centre with the necessary documents, including certificate of disability, educational and professional qualifications and family status, workers are registered in the targeted employment lists. Then, companies have different alternatives regulated by the law.

- *Recruitment by ranking*: the employer requests job placement for a certain number of workers with disabilities. Then, the Employment Centre indicates the workers who have compatible characteristics with the needs of the applicant according to the order in which they are placed on the list;
- *Nominative recruitment*: the employer can cover the reserve quotas by hiring workers registered in the special lists without taking into account the order in which they are placed on the list, for instance if the employer

has already appreciated the worker during an internship. There are limits to this method, which vary according to the number of workers in the company, but in order to facilitate the employment of people with mental disabilities, employers can use nominative recruitment beyond the limits and benefit from a series of advantages.

Moreover, it has been considered the “convention system” as one of the ways to pursue the aim of targeted employment; in particular, Law 68/1999 provides the possibility for the companies to enter in different typologies of conventions, which allow to meet a wide range of needs.

- *Ordinary or programme conventions*: stipulated between the province and the employer in order to plan a multi-year program aimed at gradually filling the reserved quotas. These programmes allow the employer to establish the times and methods of recruitment, which include for instance the possibility of nominative recruitment, fixed-term contracts and training periods. Furthermore, they can also be adopted by employers who are not subject to the legislative obligation and have the advantage of accessing the hiring incentives provided. Even though successful, the practical application revealed some criticalities such as the identification of tasks suitable for the person with disabilities;
- *Work integration conventions*: stipulated between the Employment Centre and the employer; they are especially suitable for people with intellectual and/or relational disabilities, who might have difficulties in the relation with the colleagues. In addition to the characteristics described in relation to the ordinary conventions, these agreements provide forms of support, tutoring and counselling delivered by the competent services for the work integration;
- *Ex art. 14 or job orders with type B social cooperatives*: establish the assignment of work orders to social cooperatives by the companies, in order to insert workers with disabilities in the cooperatives and to cover the mandatory reserved quota; therefore, this typology promotes the employment in protected contexts of disabled people with particular difficulties in integrating into ordinary working cycles. Fondazione Cariplo (2019) highlights on one hand the risk of mistaking real integration with the assignment of work orders to social cooperatives, but on the other this instrument offers opportunities to the most disadvantaged people, who otherwise would not have the possibility to be included in a working context.

Finally, Fondazione Cariplo (2019) suggests that companies, besides a number of successful cases, did not show remarkable responsibility regarding this issue, and preferred paying the requested penalties rather than integrating people with disabilities in the company. Furthermore, it is argued that, after the economic crisis, firms have increasingly abandoned more sympathetic attitudes and have started demanding more and more specific figures, which makes difficult to find compatibility between tasks and people. These criticalities cannot be specifically attributed to law 68/1999, but rather can be related to the changes which characterized the labour market, and in particular the increasingly remarkable polarization between overspecialized professional figures on one hand and a wide range of unskilled and precarious professions on the other. This dichotomy, caused among other aspects by the automation and digitalization of the processes, resulted in the disappearance of those “intermediate position” which used to be more compatible with intellectual and psychic disabilities.

1.3.3. Analysis of the current situation

Despite the attention on the international scene and the presence of ad hoc laws, the situation is far from being fair and inclusive; the purpose of this paragraph is therefore to provide the most relevant information in order to depict the employment situation of people with disabilities in Italy.

Firstly, the employment condition of people with disabilities will be analysed among a number of relevant socio-demographic dimensions, such as gender and level of education. Subsequently, a representation of the labour market in Italy will be provided, for instance in terms of number of positions reserved for people with disabilities, sectors of employment and typologies of contracts.

Consistently with previous research (Lindsay 2011, quoting Kaptein et al. 2009, Chan et al. 2005, Rosenheck et al. 2006), Figure 1.10 (a) shows that a higher level of severity corresponds to lower chances in the labour market: the reasons can be found in the difficulties with personal health and self-care, but also in the employers' concerns about productivity.

In addition, data in Figure 1.10 (b) compare the employment level of people with and without disabilities in Italy divided by age groups. From the chart, it can be seen that the trend is similar for both the categories, with lower rate of employment among group age 16-24 and the highest peaks between 35 and 44 years old and between 45 and 54 years old. However, the percentages of employment are lower for people with disabilities in all the group ages. In particular, the gap between the two categories is especially significant in the group age 45-54 (with employment

rate of disabled people of 60.7%¹ against 78.3%¹ of non-disabled people) and 55-64 (with employment rate of disabled people of 43%¹ against 61.9%¹ of non-disabled people), while it is limited in the youngest segment of the population.

It is then possible to analyse the employment status, detailed in “*Employed*”, “*Looking for employment*” and “*Other conditions*”, according to two further dimensions, namely gender and education level, as visually represented in Figure 1.10 (c).

In particular, it is suggested that the intersection of gender and disability results in aggravated forms of discrimination, with the percentage of women with disabilities employed being lower than the percentage of non-disabled women. Nonetheless, it is a common pattern among people with and without a disability, and therefore it is difficult to draft conclusion specifically related to disability. However, other studies argue that disabled women suffer from a double discrimination due to their gender and their disability (Lindsay 2011, quoting Bell and Heitmueller 2009).

Finally, the education level is proved to have an impact on the employment status of people with disabilities. In Italy 63.4%² of people with at least a bachelor’s degree are employed, while the percentage drops dramatically when considering people with high school diploma and especially middle school certificate (23.5%²); indeed, the majority of people in this latter category falls into “*Other condition*”, which encompasses inactivity caused by discouragement due to low chances of finding a job.

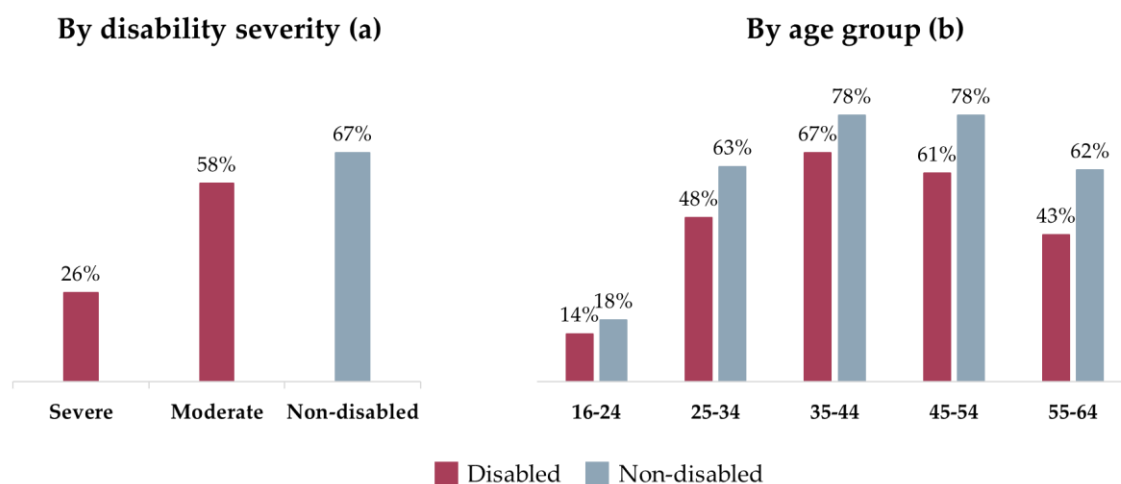
¹ Grammenos, S., & Priestley, M. (2020). *Master tables concerning EU 2020: year 2018*. Source of data: EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1

² Fondazione Studi Consulenti del Lavoro (2019). *L’inclusione lavorativa delle persone con disabilità in Italia*.

3 million and 150 thousand

is the number of persons in Italy who have disabilities

Employment rate of disabled and non-disabled people in Italy



Employment status of disabled in Italy by gender and education level

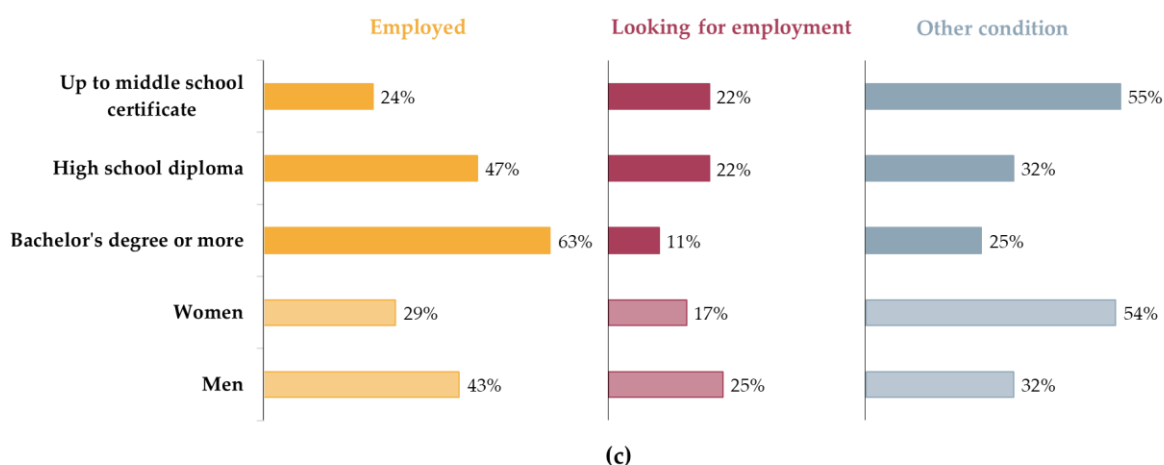


Figure 1.10: Employment situation of people with disabilities in Italy, dashboard
 Sources: own elaboration. Data from: *EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1* and *L'inclusione lavorativa delle persone con disabilità in Italia* (Fondazione Studi Consulenti del Lavoro 2019)

For what concerns the typologies of contracts, in Italy overall 93.7%² have permanent contracts, against 6.3%² of fixed-term or other flexible contracts. Nonetheless, this data significantly change if we move to an analysis by generational segment: indeed, it emerges that the incidence of temporary forms of employment, which include fixed-terms contracts, temporary work and others, involves 27.9%² of those employed under. The same trend emerges with regard to working time, as evident in Figure 1.11 (a), with part-time being recorded in 27.2%² of cases among people over 60, compared to 49.3%² among those under 30. In addition, a difference is evident in terms of gender: 44.3%² of women have part-time contracts, against 27.3%² of employed men.

Moreover, the large majority of people with disabilities are employed in the private sector (75.7%²), with the highest percentage in Lombardy region, against on average 24.3%² working in the public.

Finally, together with the employment situation of people with disabilities with reference to socio-demographic characteristics, type of contracts and sectors, it is extremely significant to observe the figures regarding the number and distribution of jobs for disabled people that have not yet been filled. Indeed, in 2018 in Italy 145,327² jobs reserved for people with disabilities were uncovered, which correspond to 29% of the total number, as highlighted in Figure 1.11 (b). The percentage of unfulfilled positions with respect to the total requested for each sector is very similar between public and private sectors: 28.7%² against 29%²; however, it is significant to notice that the absolute number of reserved quotas is remarkably higher within private organizations; therefore, they have the highest occupational potential with the 77.4%² of the total number of unfulfilled positions which report to them, as reported in Figure 1.11 (c).

Private organizations' occupational potential highlights the necessity to analyse the current and future role of firms in the employment status of people with disabilities, and to study the configurations and the projects which allow to obtain efficiency and effectiveness in terms of satisfaction of both beneficiaries and enterprises, in order to fill the gap currently present.

In conclusion, the data described above show that despite the universality and inalienability of the right to work, together with the policies and laws developed in order to enforce this right, equal opportunities and inclusion in the labour market are a goal far from being achieved. In light of the situation, it is especially relevant to investigate the barriers encountered by people with disabilities, which are the subject of the following paragraph.

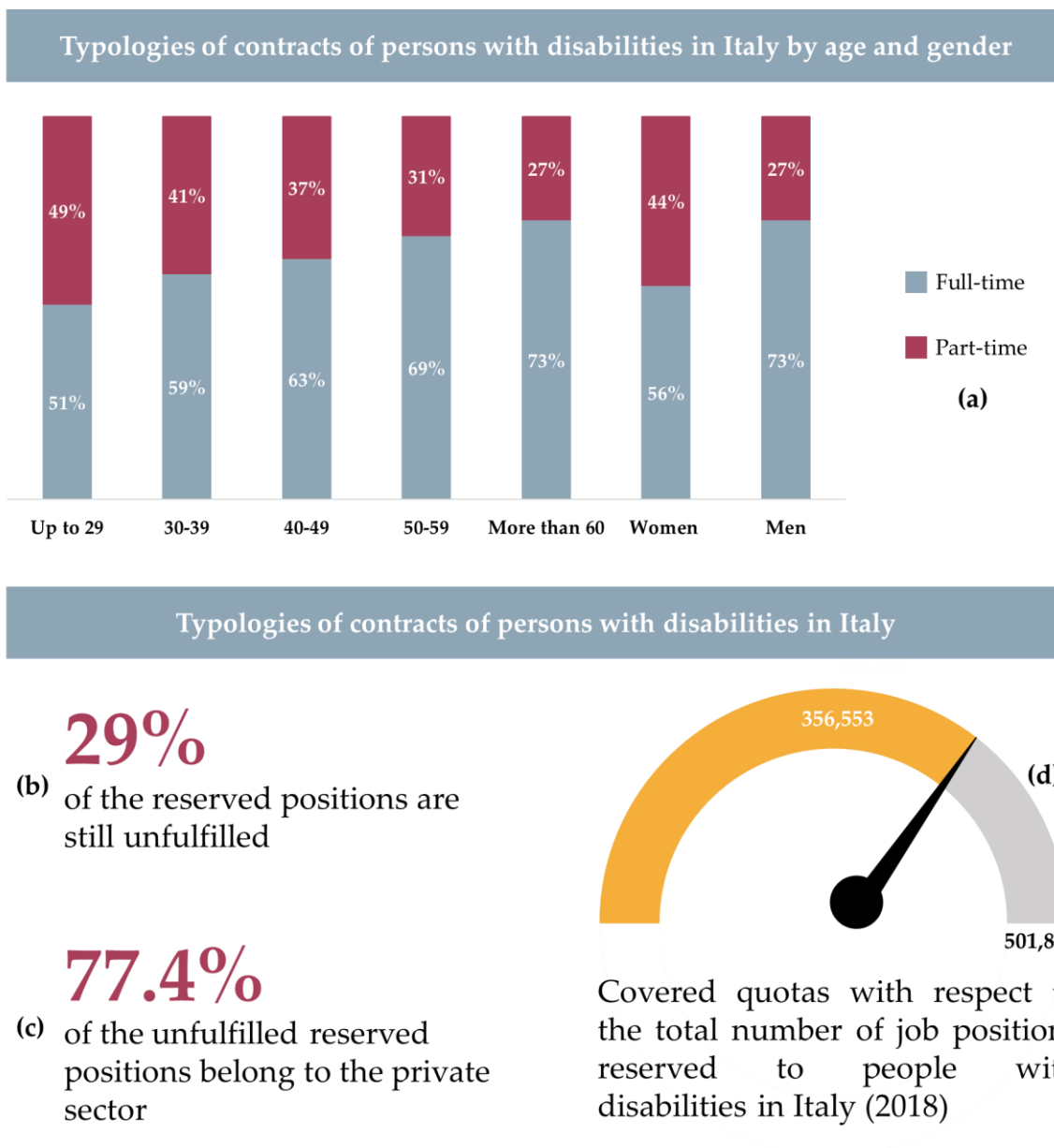


Figure 1.11: Situation of the labour market for people with disabilities, dashboard
 Sources: own elaboration. Data from: *EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1* and *L'inclusione lavorativa delle persone con disabilità in Italia* (Fondazione Studi Consulenti del Lavoro 2019)

1.3.4. Barriers to inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market

A large number of barriers which prevent people with disabilities from exercising their right to work can be found in literature; in particular, they can be distinguished in personal and societal.

A considerable amount of literature recognizes education as one of the most significant personal barriers: in many countries persons with disabilities are still not included effectively in mainstream education, which leads to lower level of education with respect to the general population (ILO 2018) and limits access to employment. Verulava and Bedianashvili (2021) notice that governments implemented some steps to increase the education of persons with disabilities, but the development of inclusive education is still critical, and the lack of educational qualifications represents a competitive disadvantage in the search for jobs. Furthermore, O' Day (1999) stresses that people with disabilities do not usually have the opportunity to get part-time jobs during high school and college, nor are led to think realistically about the skills they would need in order to gain a competitive advantage in the labour market, which results in the lack of the experience adequate to their age and of marketable skills. It is also noticed that even though disability itself is a hedge to perform certain jobs and tasks, the lack of information about possible job opportunities represents the pivotal challenge for people with disabilities, since the information regarding job vacancies are often in inaccessible formats, as suggested by Verulava and Bedianashvili (2021).

Together with the personal, societal barriers are widely recognized in literature: they are endemic to social environment and must be confronted by people with disabilities regardless of their personal attributes or skills, nor these barriers can be overcome thanks to individual perseverance, acquisition of skills or experience. Lindsay (2011 p. 1341) suggests that *"The position of disabled people in the labour market is linked to a broader pattern of social and environmental barriers [...]. Thus, work organisations often create an environment that reflects and reproduces the culture and social inequalities of larger society"*.

In this respect, it is possible to recognize inaccessibility of public transport as well as of the workplace: traveling to the job represents a barrier, especially for those who don't live in metropolitan areas and urban centres, and the buildings are usually un-adapted and unsettled. Furthermore, employers tend to assume prohibitive the costs of implementing adequate accommodation for employees with disabilities. In addition, stereotypes and prejudices regarding people with disabilities are still widespread. Employers with disabilities are often perceived as less productive (ILO 2018), not intelligent and slow to learn; evidence show that

stereotypes and prejudices result in inappropriate and intolerant behaviours during the recruitment phase, when the abilities and skills of the applicant are doubted and questioned (Notaroberto and d'Angelo 2020). Notaroberto and d'Angelo (2020) emphasize that many organizations and employers consider the employment of a person with disability as a liability necessary in order to be compliant with the legislation, and not as a professional who can contribute to the business. Discrimination can be seen also in the types of jobs that people with disabilities are employed in, with a concentration in lower-paying and lower status occupations and under-representation in managerial and professional roles. In addition, Kocman et al. (2017) address the theme of the ongoing changes in the labour market, arguing that Industry 4.0, with developments as the automation of manual and repetitive tasks and the increasing demands for highly educated employees, will lead to the decrease of employment options for people with intellectual disability in future, despite the efforts toward the integration on the job market.

1.3.5. Role of the third sector in the inclusion of people with disabilities

The relevance of the topic emerges clearly, and also the role played by companies in the labour inclusion of people with disabilities is evident: the legal obligation and the potential for recruitment make companies one of the key actors in achieving full inclusion and integration. The last piece of information needed to fully explain those characteristics that make the field of work inclusion of people with disabilities a very suitable one for the study of partnerships between firms and NPOs is the role played by the latter.

Although companies are obliged by law to have reserved quotas for people with disabilities, they usually lack the knowledge and skills necessary to be compliant with the law, and even less to go beyond the obligation and implement successful inclusions for the company itself and for the beneficiaries.

It is in this context that the role of third sector is crucial; it is constituted by foundations, associations, cooperatives and other types of organisations whose core activities are related to the employment of people with disabilities. Non-profit organisations fill this gap through the provision of a variety of services aimed at both companies and beneficiaries. The type of services and the way they are delivered vary from organisation to organisation, but in general they include training, guidance, tutoring and coaching for beneficiaries, training, disability management and identification of suitable tasks for companies. In addition, non-profit organisations have contacts with provincial institutions and other non-profit organisations, and therefore they also provide support in searching and selecting the most suitable candidate for a given position.

Along with the services described above, type B social cooperatives play an active role in the creation of jobs through conventions ex. art. 14, which are aimed at people with particularly severe disabilities and fragilities that make the inclusion in a business context complex and unsuitable.

In conclusion, the third sector is a fundamental interlocutor for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, because it brings together companies, users and public institutions, provides expertise and knowledge on disability management to support companies and beneficiaries, and offers a suitable working environment when the inclusion in a corporate context is not feasible.

2 Research objectives and research questions

This Chapter presents the description of the gap emerged from the literature analysis, subject of Chapter 1. Indeed, the gap represents both the output of the literature search and the input for the definition of the goal and of the research questions of the present work. In particular, they are the scope of the second paragraph, whose aim is to state the objective of the research and to present the research questions, together with the rationale behind their development and their connection with the literature gap.

2.1 Literature Gap identification

The literature review performed in the context of this research, described in Chapter 1, serves a two-fold purpose: it allows to highlight and systematically represent all the most significant elements on the subject and also to identify an eventual literature gap, as suggested by Webster and Watson (2002), who note that “*A review should identify critical knowledge gaps and thus motivate researchers to close this breach*” (Webster and Watson 2002, p. xix). If the former objective is considered to be achieved by the State of the art (Chapter 1) in its totality, the latter is the subject of the present paragraph.

Jacobs (2011) identifies six kinds of research gaps, including “*knowledge void*”: the author explains that it occurs when knowledge does not exist in the actual field of research, but in a related research domain; therefore, in this case scholars have to refer to theories and literature from related research domains. Moreover, Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) add two sub-categories, including “*theory application void*”, which “[...] *arises when theory should be applied to certain research issues in order to generate new insights*” (Muller-Bloch and Kranz, 2015 p. 8).

The literature gap revealed in this work and the reasons why it belongs to the second category are explained hereafter.

Cross-sectorial partnerships are recognized as a successful and powerful instrument in order to face complex social issues, and several studies have been performed to analyse aspects as drivers, risks, outcomes and management practices, as depicted in Section 1.1.

Furthermore, a considerable amount of literature exists regarding the specific typology of cross-sectorial partnerships which are formed between firms and NPOs; a large number of authors, from Austin to Rondinelli and London and many others, have over the years developed studies and research with the aim to explain drivers, critical success factors, outcomes, as well as insights regarding the management of this typology of partnerships, as exhaustively described in Section 1.2.

In addition, the peculiarities which make the field of inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market a particularly suitable context for the implementation of partnerships between firms and NPOs have been proved and explained (Paragraph 1.3.1), and include a strong legislative push, the need of firms to access to a specific know-how possessed by NPOs and the employment potential of the private sector. This suitability seems to be substantiated by the effective and useful partnerships between firms and NPOs developed and implemented in order to foster the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Finally, inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market is an issue of recognized national and international relevance, as shown by the strategies, treaties and actions developed at European and Italian level and briefly reported in Paragraph 1.3.2, and at the same time inclusion and equality are a goal still far from being reached, as data depicted in Paragraph 1.3.3 clearly highlight.

So far, however, no study has applied the theories developed for partnerships between firms and NPOs in general to the specific field of inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, as demonstrated by the scarcity of results found during the systematic search attempt on this specific topic, described in Paragraph 3.1.

It was hence depicted a lack of investigation regarding the distinctive features of partnerships between firms and NPOs aimed to labour inclusion of people with disabilities, which include drivers, barriers, critical success factors and outcomes, as well as regarding their configurations.

Therefore, this is the literature gap emerged by the literature review and addressed in the present work, which is visually represented in Figure 2.1.

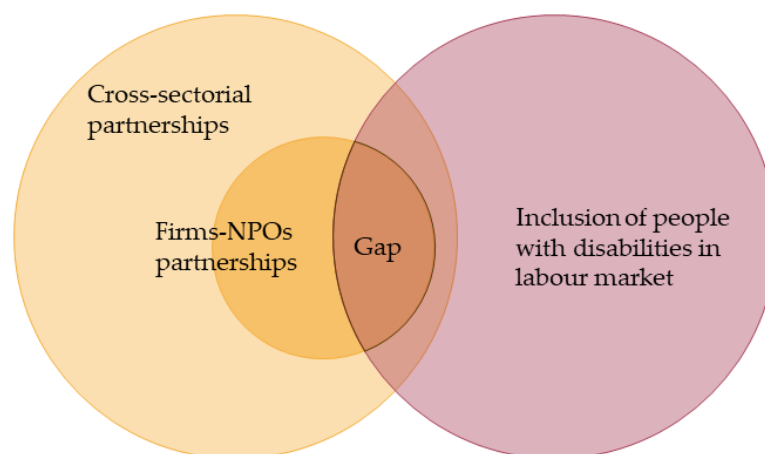


Figure 2.1: Visual representation of the literature gap emerged from literature review

2.2 Research objective and research questions

Robinson et al. (2011) suggest that research gaps represent an output of literature reviews and at the same time are an input that can motivate further research.

Partnerships between firms and NPOs aimed to work inclusion of people with disability is a relevant issue, as substantiated in the Introduction, with regard to

which there is a lack of structured knowledge and whose study might provide both theoretical and practical contributions.

Concerning the theoretical contribution, it is possible to underline that the study and the analysis of partnerships between firms and NPOs aimed to the inclusion of people with disability in the labour market can contribute to the development of new and shared knowledge, capable to fill the gap present in literature and described in the previous paragraph.

Secondly, practical contribution because in order to concretize the shared value which can be delivered by this typology of partnerships, it is necessary to effectively govern the collaboration, which requires shared, evidence-based and solid knowledge on the subject, which contributes to draw guidelines and best practice.

These reasons led to the definition of the objective of the present work, which is presented hereafter.

Objective: *Investigating the distinctive features of partnerships between profit and non-profit organizations aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.*

Based on the purpose of the research, a number of key research questions and sub-questions has been identified; they are reported hereafter together with the rationale behind their development.

Research Question 1: *Why and how do profit and non-profit organizations create partnerships aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market?*

- Sub-question 1.1 What are the drivers of the establishment of the partnerships?
- Sub-question 1.2 What are the risks and the barriers encountered by the NPO and the firm?
- Sub-question 1.3 What are the critical success factors of the partnership?
- Sub-question 1.4 What are the most recurring outcomes for NPO and for-profit company? How do they generate value for the beneficiaries?
- Sub-question 1.5 How do firms and non-profit organizations manage the partnership?

As emerged from the literature review, the most relevant elements in order to build a comprehensive and clear overview and analysis of cross-sectorial partnerships are drivers, barriers, CSFs, outcomes and management practices. Therefore, the first research question focuses on these elements, specifically related to the case of NPOs-firms partnerships for labour inclusion of people with disabilities, with the aim to fully or partially confirm the elements and the relations present in the cross-sectorial partnerships literature and to generate new and meaningful insights specifically related to the case of NPOs-firms partnerships aimed to inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Research Question 2: *How partnerships between firms and NPOs aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market are recurrently configured?*

The literature gap also revealed a lack of knowledge about the configuration of partnerships per se. "*Configuration*" refers to the activities that are carried out during the partnership, the actors involved and other distinctive elements, which may be for example the choice to carry out a pilot project or the tasks identified as most appropriate. Thus, the objective of the second research question is to enter into the content of the collaboration, identifying and systematising these elements in order to obtain a clear and complete vision of how the partnership functions.

In summary, Research Question 1 focuses on the aspects related to the collaboration between the two partners, while Research Question 2 is aimed to enter in the contents of the partnership itself, summarized with the word "*configuration*". The combination of these two research questions should result in a comprehensive answer capable to fill the literature gap.

3 Research methodology and method

The purpose of this Chapter is to describe the main methodological choices made in the context of the present research. The first paragraph contains the most relevant information about the literature review, which allowed to identify the literature gap and to develop the research questions. Then, the subject of the second paragraph is the empirical research, with the description of the preliminary methodological choices (such as the type of research and the research strategy), the illustration of data collection and finally of data analysis. The ultimate aim of the present Chapter is to link the first part of the work, which has a theoretical nature, and the subsequent empirical analysis, through the description of the logical sequence linking the research questions, the empirical data and the final conclusions, together with the choices made at each stage of the research, the rationale behind them and the process performed.

3.1. Literature search methodology

The purpose of this paragraph is to detail the objective, the rationale and the methodology followed in performing the Literature Review, object of Chapter 1.

The aim of the Literature Review is to build a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge necessary to fully understand partnerships between NPOs and firms aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. In this respect, four lines of research from general to specific were followed: cross-sector partnerships, partnerships between firms and NPOs, partnerships between firms and NPOs for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market and finally a research dedicated to the current situation about the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market. The details of each stream of research in terms of objectives, methodology and results are presented hereafter.

Cross-sector partnerships

The aim of this line of research is to provide a knowledge base about cross-sector partnerships, which is necessary as a starting point for research on the specific case of collaborations between firms and NPOs. Specifically, the purpose is to clarify shared language and definitions of cross-sector collaborations and to highlight their main features through the investigation of drivers and outcomes.

In this case, the “*Backward Snowballing*” or “*Reference Tracking*” approach was used. The initial number of papers was 70, then the first screening was performed analysing the title and using a number of exclusion criteria, including the examples reported hereafter:

- *Criterion 1*: the main topic is not cross-sector partnerships, which are only a marginal element of the study;
- *Criterion 2*: the object of the report is a partnership which addresses a specific issue outside the scope of interest (e.g., environmental issue);
- *Criterion 3*: the specific context of application are emerging countries.

The number of studies resulting from the first screening was 31. Subsequently, their eligibility was determined based on the consistency of the abstract; the number of papers analysed in depth after this second screening was 13, of which 6 were actually included in the Literature Review.

Partnerships between firms and NPOs

The second stream of research is the core part of the Literature Review, since partnerships between firms and NPOs are the typology of cross-sector collaborations chosen as subject of the study; therefore, a systematic approach was followed in order to determine the state of the art and systematize the existing knowledge about the topic.

Scopus was the database used and the search strategy was characterized by the combination of key words from three main semantic fields, described hereafter:

- The object of the research are partnerships: *e.g., partnership, collaboration;*
- The collaboration is established between for profit companies: *e.g., company, firm;*
- And not for profit entities: *e.g., non-profit, NPO*;*

The words were inserted in the field “*Title, abstract or keywords*”, with the use of the Boolean operator “AND” between the different semantic fields and “OR” within each of them. The search string used is:

(partnership OR collaboration*) AND ("for profit*" OR compan* OR enterprise* OR firm*) AND ("non-profit*" OR "nonprofit*" OR "social enterprise*" OR "cooperative societ*" OR NPO*)*

The results obtained were 699 reports, which were archived in and managed through the software Mendeley Desktop. Their eligibility was determined based on the coherence of the title and then of the abstract; the number of papers analysed in depth after the screening was 25, of which 18 were actually included in the Literature Review.

An Excel sheet has been used as personal database to classify the papers selected according to the main topic, the point of view adopted (firms or of NPOs) and the methodology used, specifically case study or interviews.

“*Citation tracking*” method has been adopted as complementary approach with respect to the database search; as previously described, the screening was based on the title and then the abstract and subsequently on an in-depth analysis. The number of papers resulted from this phase is 13.

Finally, *Google Scholar* was used for grey literature with the same key words, which led to the inclusion of 2 additional papers.

In conclusion, the studies included were 33; the process is described through the FLOW diagram (Figure 3.1).

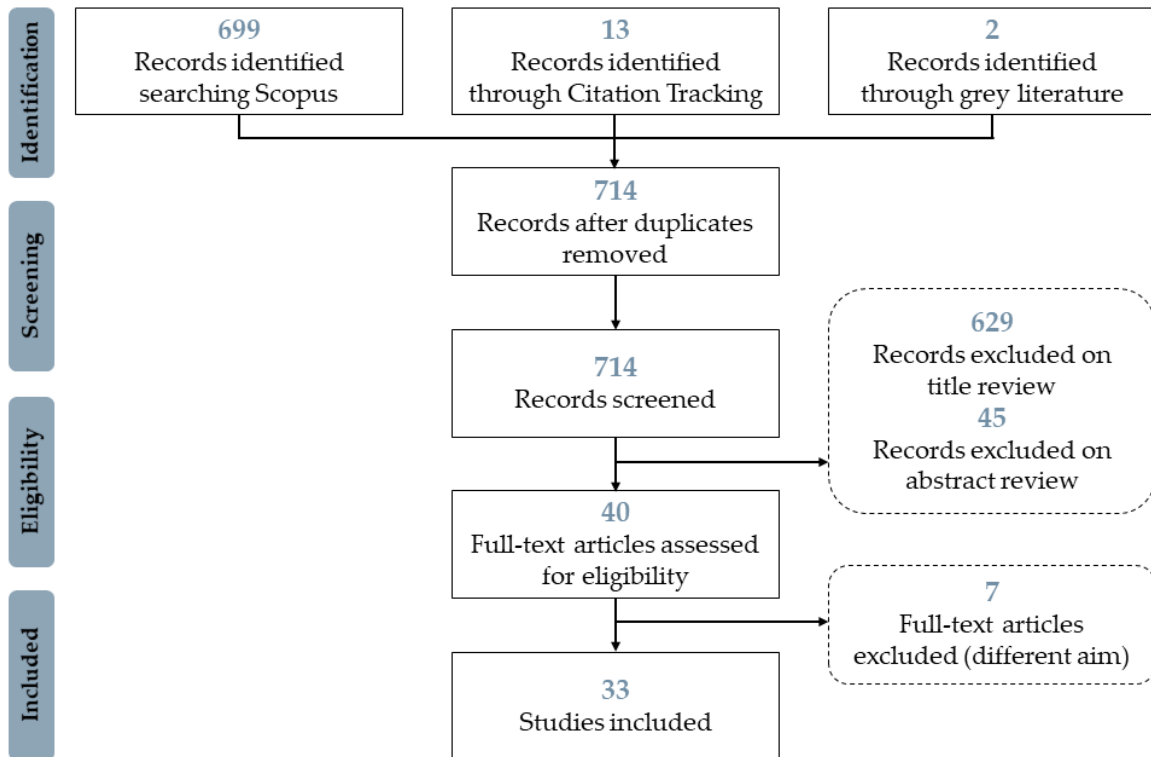


Figure 3.1: Flow diagram

Firms-NPOs partnerships for the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market

Subsequently to the previous analysis, the purpose of this stream of search was to gather the existing knowledge regarding NPOs-firms partnerships specifically in the field of research of the present work, that is the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Therefore, a systematic research was performed, following the same steps described in the previous paragraph. In particular, *Scopus* was the database used, with the key words inserted in the field “Title, abstract or keywords”, with the use of the Boolean operator “AND” between the different semantic fields and “OR” within each of them. The search string used is:

(partnership OR collaboration* OR project*) AND ("for profit*" OR compan* OR enterprise* OR firm* OR business*) AND ("non profit*" OR nonprofit* OR "social enterprise*" OR "cooperative societ*" OR npo* OR ngo*) AND (inclusion OR "working*

inclusion" OR "*working integration*" OR *employment* OR "*labour market*" OR *job*) AND (*disability* OR "*disability management*" OR "*ill**" OR "*disable*" OR "*disadvantaged*")

The results obtained were 61 reports, which immediately highlighted the lack of material on the subject. 22 papers remained after an initial screening on the title, and 8 after the analysis of the abstracts, while the grey literature search carried out with Google Scholar revealed 4 results.

From the full-text reading of the papers, it appeared that they could contribute to provide elements useful to understand the context, however they were not specifically focused on the partnerships' characteristics nor disclosed structured information sufficient to perform a literature review. Hence, the most relevant elements emerged from the above-mentioned studies have converged in the last stream of research, dedicated to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market

Finally, it is crucial to analyse the context of the empirical research, that is inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, for two distinct although interrelated objectives: build a comprehensive and clear overview of the context and explain the rationale behind the choice of this field of application. Therefore, a number of questions was developed to identify the most significant elements in order to accomplish the two purposes, followed by a targeted research for each of them; the initial question, the rationale and the results of each topic will be discussed hereafter.

- *What is the context?* As a social issue of national and international relevance, an overview of European policies provides a measure of the relevance of the topic and relates individual partnerships to the wider context of which they are part. The targeted research about the right to work led to the inclusion of 2 legal sources, as the Italian Constitution, and 2 papers from grey literature, while one report and 6 legal sources which include among others European strategies, treaties and conventions were used in order to frame the context. In addition, it is essential to understand the Italian legal framework in general, in order to comprehend the boundaries within which entities move and which define the possible alternatives to comply with the legislation: in this regard, 2 papers from grey literature were used;
- *How is the current situation?* The answer to this question can be provided by the analysis of the most significant data regarding the employment condition of people with disabilities and the labour market in Italy, for

instance in terms of number of positions reserved for people with disabilities;

- *Why is the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market a complex and difficult issue to implement?* To provide an answer it is necessary to investigate what barriers people with disabilities face in finding and keeping a job. In this respect, 5 studies and 1 paper from the grey literature were included;
- *Who are the actors involved?* With respect to this question, it is especially relevant to understand the role of third sector. In particular, the information gathered through the previous research were used to clarify the position of the third sector in this field.

Results

In conclusion, the nature of the sources used in order to build the Literature Review, the methodologies adopted, the inclusion criteria and the topics addressed are vary. A synthetic overview is reported hereafter (Table 3.1), with a total of 57 sources included.

Research stream	Methodology	Nr of sources
Cross-sector partnerships	Backward Snowballing	6
Firms-NPOs partnerships	Systematic Literature Review	33
Inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market	Targeted research	18

Table 3.1: Synthesis of the sources included downstream of the literature research

3.2. Design of the empirical investigation

The literature review was a fundamental phase of the present research, as it was necessary to identify and systematize the knowledge already present on the topic of partnerships between firms and NPOs and to identify the gap in the literature. However, the main methodology used for this study is the empirical investigation: it is therefore the subject of this section, whose goal is to describe in detail the essential elements related to the method used to design and conduct the research.

In particular, Paragraph 3.2.1 describes the methodological choices underlying the research and preceding the actual conduct of the research, such as the research strategy; Paragraph 3.2.2 introduces and describes the case studies analysed; Paragraph 3.2.3 contains the main information regarding the data collection, and finally Paragraph 3.2.4 explains in detail how the researcher carried out the analysis of the data collected.

3.2.1. Research strategy and research design

Different definitions of “*research*” can be found in literature, and Kumar (2011) notices that they all show a clear and common interpretation of research as the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information in order to gain knowledge; the author also adds that research must be “*Controlled, rigorous, systematic, valid and verifiable, empirical and critical*” (Kumar 2011, p. 28).

Furthermore, research can be classified according to three different perspectives, which are not mutually exclusive: namely, they are application, objectives and enquiry mode. Hereafter, the choices made in the context of the present work against each perspective will be explained and are highlighted in Figure 3.2.

Firstly, from the perspective of application, applied research was chosen: it means that the techniques, procedures and methods adopted during the research are applied to the collection of information regarding an issue in a way that allows to use the information gathered in other ways, as to enhance the understanding of a phenomenon.

Secondly, from the perspective of the objectives it is a descriptive study. Indeed, it is aimed to methodically describe and to systematically provide the most relevant information about a phenomenon.

Finally, from the perspective of enquiry mode it is a qualitative research, which is opposite to the quantitative one. Quantitative research is characterized by the objective of measuring and quantifying the phenomenon, and therefore it predominantly involves quantitative variables, that are structured and statistical; it is characterized by a large number of responses which are used to study the occurrence and are interpreted in order to generalize the result on larger population. On the other hand, qualitative research collects non-numerical data and has the purpose of describing a phenomenon without quantifying it; it requires fewer respondents and allows to analyse multiple issues, to gain insights and underlying reasons. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis have advantages and limitations, and the choice between the two depends on the research problem itself and on the purpose of the study. Qualitative research is suitable for the present study, since it

provides more detailed information necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of a complex phenomenon, which requires to analyse multi-faceted opinions and to get meaningful insights that cannot be captured by quantitative data.

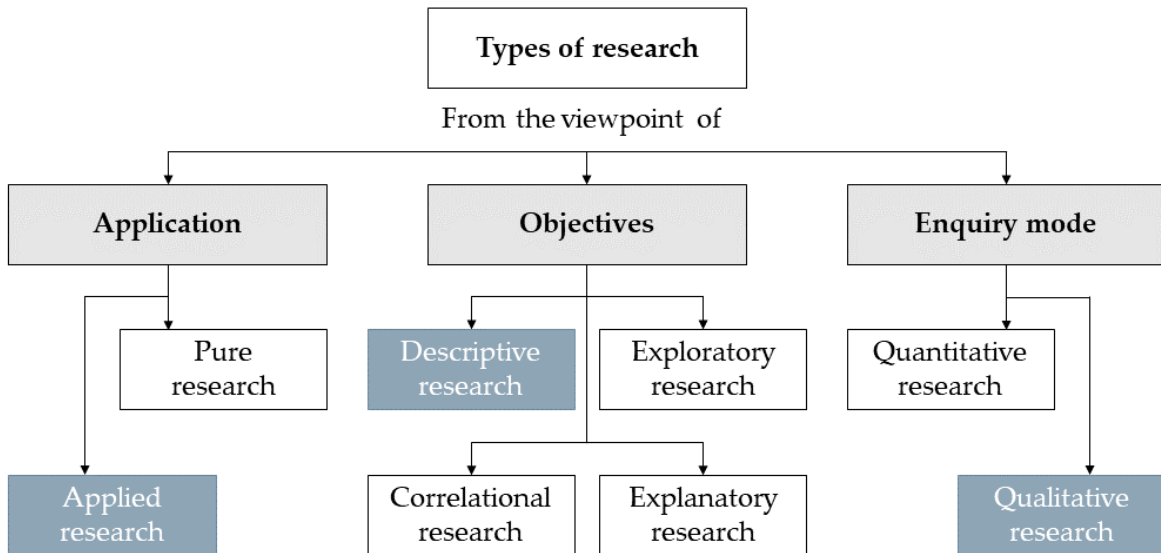


Figure 3.2: Types of research

Source: adapted from Kumar R. (2011). *Research Methodology, a step-by-step guide for beginners*, p. 29

Research strategy: case study

Research strategies are the way of collecting and analysing empirical evidence in order to provide an answer for the research questions; it is possible to depict a number of different research strategies, including among the others case study, survey, archival research and experiment, each of them with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Even though there is an ongoing debate regarding the different alternatives, Yin (2003) underlines that they should not be arrayed hierarchically and that the choice among different strategies depends on three conditions, that are the type of research question, the extent of control that the investigator has over actual behavioural events and the degree of focus on contemporary events. For what concerns the present work, the research questions, presented and analysed in Paragraph 2.2, focus on “*how*” and “*why*”, the aim is to study contemporary events and the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. Therefore, as is evident from Table 3.2, which summarizes the relations of the three above-mentioned conditions with the

different research strategies, all these elements point to case studies as the correct choice.

Strategy	Form of Research Question	Requires Control of Behavioral Events?	Focuses on Contemporary Events?
Experiment	How, why?	Yes	Yes
Survey	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes
Archival Analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/No
History	How, why?	No	No
Case study	How, why?	No	Yes

Table 3.2: Relevant situation for different Research strategies

Source: derived from Yin R. (2003). *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*, p. 5

Furthermore, it is relevant to underline that a specific advantage of case studies is the possibility to use a large variety of evidence, as documents, interviews and artifacts, and that case studies are especially appropriate for the study and the analysis of complex phenomena, since they allow to consider the nuances of an issue and to explore it to provide generalizations and identify key features. In addition, Meredith et al. (1989) notice that case studies allow to study a phenomenon within its context, and therefore to obtain a complete overview of all the aspects analysed in the case study.

In conclusion, the combination of the characteristics regarding partnerships between firms and NPOs aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities and regarding the objective of the present work make case studies the correct choice as research strategy.

Given the identification of case study as the methodology adopted for the present work, other choices should be made in conducting the research. Voss et al. (2002) raise in particular the issues of case number and time horizon.

For what concerns the number, single case studies provide a greater opportunity for observation in depth, but they are characterized by a lower generalisability of the conclusions. Multiple cases have opposite advantages and disadvantages; therefore, although with reduced depth, they increase the external validity and allow to identify characteristics and topics transversal to the cases, which lead to the development of more accurate theories: for these reasons, the researcher made use of multiple case studies.

In terms of time horizon, the choice is between longitudinal or cross-sectional cases. Longitudinal case studies are characterized by the observation of the same subject several times over a long period, in order to capture the changes and establish sequences of events, while cross-sectional studies analyse a situation at a single point in time taking into consideration several variables. The present work is not aimed to analyse the evolution of the phenomenon, but rather to identify the most relevant elements regarding partnerships between NPOs and firms at the present time; therefore, cross-sectional cases were chosen.

Quality of research design

Guidelines and criteria in order to guarantee quality of the research design and methodological rigor have been provided by a number of authors; though, the four fundamental and commonly used tests in order to ensure quality are Construct validity, Internal validity, External validity and Reliability. However, Internal validity should be applied only to explanatory studies (Yin 2003), and therefore it will not be considered in the present work, which is a descriptive research.

Yin (2003) gives a major contribution, offering the description of several tactics to deal with these tests in the context of case studies; Table 3.3 summarizes the different tactics together with the phase of the work when the test and the tactic should be used, and highlights which are the strategies employed in the present work.

Tests	Case Study Tactic	Phase of research in which tactic occurs	Employed
Construct validity	▪ Use multiple sources of evidence	Data collection	Yes
	▪ Establish chain of evidence	Data collection	Yes
	▪ Have key informants review draft case study report	Composition	
External validity	▪ Use theory in single-case studies	Research design	
	▪ Use replication logic in multiple-case studies	Research design	Yes
Reliability	▪ Use case study protocol	Data collection	Yes
	▪ Develop case study database	Data collection	Yes

Table 3.3: Case Study Tactics for Four Design Tests

Source: adapted from Yin R. (2003). *Case study Research, Design and Methods*, p. 36

Construct validity is defined by Yin (2003) as “Establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 2003 p. 36). The tactics adopted in order to ensure it in the present work are the utilization of multiple sources of evidence, which will be described in detail in the following paragraphs and include interviews, webinar and social reports, and the establishment of a chain of evidence. The principle here is to allow an external observer to follow the derivation of any evidence, from research questions to conclusions and vice versa.

External validity refers to the possibility to generalize a study’s findings beyond the case study itself, which represents a critical issues for case studies; however, Yin (2003) suggests to employ the “replication logic” in contrast with “sampling logic”. Literal replication means that cases should be selected so that the differences between them are irrelevant to the findings, and therefore they predict similar results.

Finally, Reliability should guarantee that a subsequent research, performed using same procedures and same studies, obtains the same results and conclusions. Hence, Yin (2003) states that: “*The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study*” (Yin, 2003 p. 37). The tactics employed for this last test happen during the data collection phase and are the utilization of a case study protocol, that is to document all the procedure followed during the case and to develop a case study database. The protocol typically contains an overview of the case study project, data collection procedures, case study questions and outline of the report. For what concerns the case study database, it is crucial to have data and investigator’s report separated, where database can potentially be the subject of a secondary analysis independent from the report of the original investigator; in the case of the present work, the database contains notes (as investigator’s interviews) and documents.

A synthesis of the decisions made in the context of the present work regarding the research design is presented hereafter, in Figure 3.3.

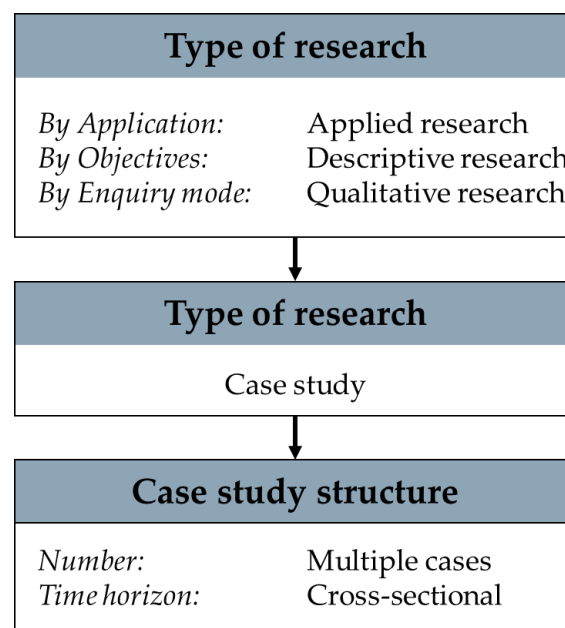


Figure 3.3: Synthesis of decisions regarding the research design

3.2.2. Case studies

Unit of analysis is an aspect of primary importance in case study-based research (Yin 2003); in the context of the present work, it is constituted by projects aimed to inclusion of people with disability in the labour market developed thanks to partnerships between NPOs and firms.

Therefore, in order to identify the case studies, it was performed a targeted search for projects created through cross-sectoral partnerships that met the criteria of this work, that are:

- Involvement of non-profit organization and firm;
- Project aimed to work inclusion of people with disability;
- Beneficiaries of the project included in the computation of the reserved quotas;
- Project developed in Italy.

Downstream of the research, more than 20 projects involving a total of 56 organisations were identified and they were organised in an Excel database containing the main information about the project and the partners involved.

Both firms and NPOs' employees were contacted through different channels, mainly LinkedIn and business e-mail, and the case studies were selected if the organisations responded positively. As a result of this process, the final set is made by 9 case studies with a total of 17 organisations involved.

Table 3.4 summarizes some relevant information about each case study: organizations involved, whether they are firms or NPOs, number of employees, industry for firms and typology of organization for NPOs.

It is relevant to underline that one case involved 4 organisations because the NPO developed a project model that can be replicated and implemented in partnership with several companies, with the active participation of another non-profit organisation during the project.

From Table 3.4 it is also possible to point out that the research involved 7 firms against 10 NPOs: this imbalance is due to the fact that in three cases it was not possible to get in touch with the for-profit company involved in the project under analysis. Although it can be a limitation, they were selected because the presence of multiple data sources allowed to gather sufficient information about the partnership.

Case study ID	Organization ID	Firm or NPO	Number of employees	Industry/Typology
C1	a	NPO	8	Foundation
	b	Firm	5,400	Consulting
C2	c	NPO	16	ONLUS
	d	Firm	6,500	Sportswear
C3	e	NPO	15	Type B cooperative
	f	Firm	4700	Fashion
C4	g	NPO	12	Foundation
	h	NPO	37	Foundation
	i	Firm	16,000	Consulting
	j	Firm	2,000	Employment
C5	k	NPO	12	Type A and B cooperative
	l	Firm	6,300	IT
C6	m	NPO	124	Type B cooperative
C7	n	NPO	32	Non-profit social enterprise
	o	Firm	2,600	Mechanical company
C8	p	NPO	9	Type A and B cooperative
C9	q	NPO	38	Foundation

Table 3.4: Information about case studies

3.2.3. Data collection

As explained in Paragraph 3.2.1, one of the tactics employed in order to ensure construct validity is the utilization of multiple sources; furthermore, it allows to develop “*converging lines of inquiry*” (Yin, 2003 p. 98) through the process of data triangulation: triangulation means that the facts of the case study are supported by more than a single source of evidence, which makes findings more convincing and accurate (Yin, 2003).

The researcher, among the possible sources of evidence, made use of open-ended interviews and of documents; in particular, semi-structured interviews represent the principal technique for gathering primary data, combined with the analysis of a number of different documents as secondary data.

Semi-structured interviews were employed because they are targeted and insightful (Yin 2003); targeted means that they specifically and directly focus on the case study's topic, and insightful means that they allow to gather opinions and judgment of the respondents, and therefore to capture the nuances of a complex and multi-faceted issue as partnerships between NPOs and firms aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Finally, the utilization of secondary sources was relevant: social reports, newspaper articles, websites, reports produced by the organisations involved in the study and webinars were analysed. The advantage is two-fold: on one hand it is represented by the inherent characteristics of documents, which are unobtrusive and stable, that is are not created as a result of the case study and can be reviewed repeatedly, and on the other the analysis of multiple sources makes "*converging lines of inquiry*" possible, as explained at the beginning of the paragraph.

Interviews

The texts of interviews, integrally reported in Annex 1 and Annex 2, are divided into the six main topics: configuration; drivers; barriers, challenges and risks; critical success factors; outcomes; management.

The choice of the above-mentioned topics was the natural consequence of the literature review and thus of the definition of the literature gap; indeed, they are the elements that together provide the knowledge necessary to develop a comprehensive and structured answer to the research questions. The research involved the development of two different questionnaires, one aimed at corporate respondents and the other at NPOs' respondents; although the topics, the structure and the core elements are the same, some targeted modifications were made to adapt to the specificities of the two sectors.

A total of 17 interviews were conducted between September 2021 and January 2022, based on the availability indicated by the interviewees, with the involvement of 21 persons, since in three cases the interviewees were more than one. They were performed in Italian, as the mother tongue of all the interviewees, by phone or via Microsoft Teams, recorded if agreed by the respondent and then manually transcribed verbatim: a synthetic overview of data regarding the interviews is provided in Table 3.5.

17	N. of interviews conducted
9	N. of interviewees from firms
12	N. of interviewees from NPOs
43	Average length of an interview (min)
727	Total length of the interviews (min)

Table 3.5: Synthesis of information about interviews

In addition, Table 3.6 provides more detailed information about each interview: for each case study, the role of the interviewee and the interview length are specified.

Case study ID	Organization ID	Role of interviewee	Length of interview
C1	a	Secretary General Responsible of Project Development	55 min
	b	Head of Diversity & Inclusion	39 min
C2	c	Vice-president	33 min
	d	Diversity & Inclusion Manager	33 min
C3	e	President	68 min
	f	Head of Corporate Responsibility	35 min
C4	g	Project Manager	56 min
	h	Project Coordinator	42 min
	i	Managing Director	27 min
	j	Responsible of Diversity & Inclusion Projects	40 min
C5	k	General director	33 min
	l	Human Resources Supporter	36 min
		Human Resources Manager Human Resources Manager	
C6	m	Vice-president President	52 min
C7	n	Project Manager	34 min
	o	Human Resources Manager	40 min
C8	p	Volunteer	63 min
C9	q	Project Manager	41 min

Table 3.6: Information about interviewees

3.2.4. Data analysis

After completing the data collection phase, data analysis was carried out. The analysis of qualitative data can be challenging, as it is necessary to identify the most important elements, synthesise and represent them in a coherent and convincing way in order to provide an adequate answer to the research questions, which offers insights loyal to the data (Miles et al. 2013).

One of the methodologies which allow to safeguard the focus on empirical material, to obtain findings grounded in the data and to guarantee transparency in the development and presentation of results is coding. The coding operation consists of examining the empirical data, identifying segments of meaning in the data (a word or a sentence) and labelling them with a code, which is "*A word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data*" (Saldaña, 2015 p. 3).

In particular, the advantages of coding have been described by several authors (Saldaña 2015 and Miles et al. 2013). Among them are the possibility of:

- *Acquire deep and comprehensive insights into the data:* the researcher deeply analyses each sentence and paragraph in the data and makes a judgement about its meaning. Thus, coding allows to revisit all aspects of the empirical material, especially those not perceived during the actual data collection;
- *Make the data easily accessible and retrievable:* data are sorted into labelled segments, and this approach enables to quickly and easily access and retrieve the data;
- *Sort and structure data:* coding allows to reduce the amount of data and to make the analytical tasks more efficient and effective;
- *Ensure transparency about how conclusions are linked to the data:* interpretation is an essential part of the researcher's tasks, but showing the data to the reader forces to develop a chain of evidence depicting the arguments and showing how conclusions have been reached (Pratt 2009);
- *Ensuring validity:* coding helps in maintaining coherence between the objective and the results.

In particular, there are two approaches to coding: inductive and deductive. In the deductive approach, codes are defined by the researcher during the analysis, and are developed directly from the data. The advantage of this approach is that it allows one to be faithful to the data, but the drawback is the complexity and lack of focus in the process.

The second approach, as well as the one adopted in this research, is inductive: in this case the researcher defines a priori a list of codes, called "Theory-driven topics", which are concepts or theoretical themes extrapolated from the literature and which will be used to label the portions of empirical data. This approach was chosen because it allows to maintain a strong link to the literature while providing the flexibility needed for analysis.

During the coding process, Theory-driven topics are used to label individual words and sentences from the interviews and secondary sources, which are called Data-driven codes.

So, in summary the steps of coding with a deductive approach are:

- Identify and define Theory-driven topics;
- Read the empirical material and assign to each code (a significant word/sentence of the empirical material) the Theory-driven topic that best describes it. Specifically, they are called "Data-driven codes".

The coding process can be carried out using basic software such as Word, in which it is sufficient to highlight text segments with different colours for all Theory-driven topics, or dedicated software. Given the amount of empirical material collected, the researcher made use of a dedicated site to carry out the coding process: in fact, a total of 817 Data-driven codes were identified.

Table 3.7 shows the Theory-driven topics defined for the coding process carried out in this research, each accompanied by a brief definition and by the number of Data-driven codes identified.

This process was performed case by case, and the final output was an Excel file containing all the Data-driven codes identified, divided by Theory-driven topic.

Theory-driven topic	Definition
<i>Driver</i>	Factor which influences and leads to the choice of partnering
<i>Selection</i>	Methods, strategies and processes for selecting a partner organisation
<i>Barrier</i>	Challenge, risk or in general element which obstacles the partnership
<i>Critical success factor</i>	Element required to ensure the success of a partnership, necessary condition for value co-creation
<i>Outcome</i>	Final effect of the collaboration
<i>Outcomes' measurement</i>	Considerations regarding monitoring and measuring impacts of partnership
<i>Evaluation</i>	Mechanism used to externally and internally evaluate the partnership
<i>Management</i>	Practices of partnership management and communication between partners
<i>Initial tension</i>	Conflicts and tensions occurring between the two organizations during the initial collaboration
<i>Tension during collaboration</i>	Conflicts and tensions occurring between the two organizations during the formal collaboration
<i>Activities</i>	Activities characteristics of partnership's development and implementation
<i>Training</i>	Training activities for beneficiaries, employees and/or others
<i>Characteristics</i>	Others distinctive elements, e.g., on site or remote work, mansion
<i>Actors</i>	Subjects involved in the partnership

Table 3.7: Theory-driven topics

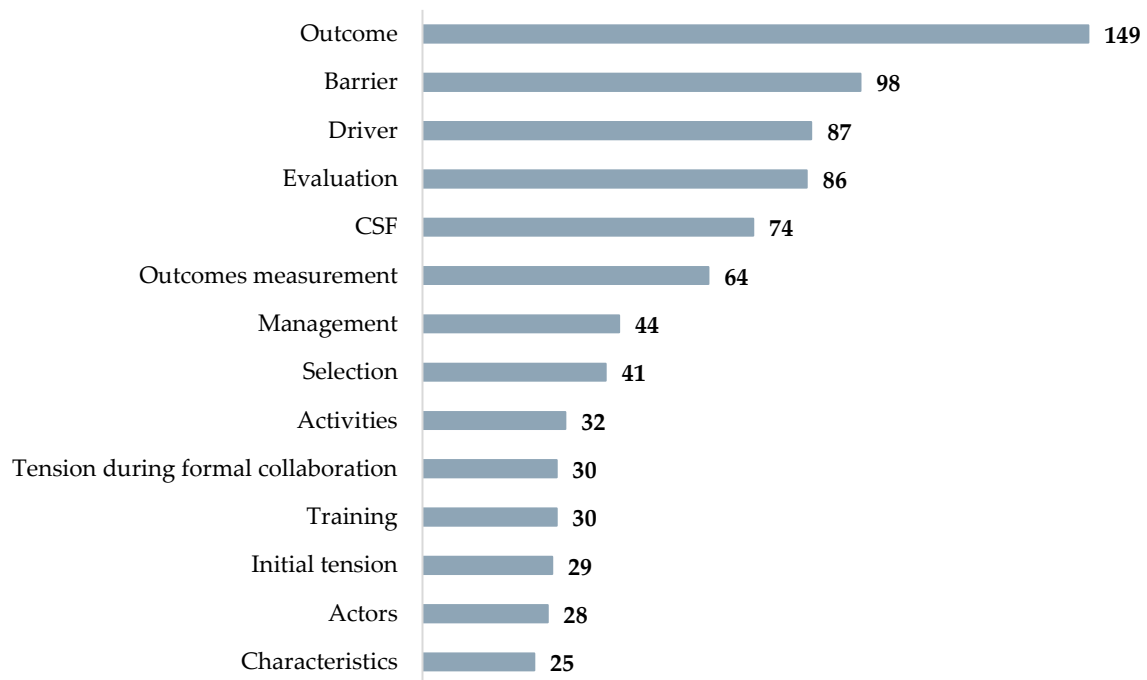


Figure 3.4: Number of data-driven codes identified during the analysis for each Theory-driven topic

This allowed to start the data analysis: the first step is the cross-case analysis or vertical analysis. For each Theory-driven topic (Barriers, CSF, outcomes etc.), all the Data-driven codes of all the case studies were analysed as described below:

- reading the Data-driven codes and assigning a synthetic and representative label;
- aggregation of the labels identified in the first phase into more synthetic and inclusive categories.

For a better understanding see Figure 3.5, in which a part of the analysis carried out for the Theory-driven topic "Barriers and risks" is shown as an example.

This process allowed to systematise, synthesise and generalize all the empirical material collected during the interviews and coming from the secondary sources, using as guidelines and as a "skeleton" the elements that emerged as the most significant from the literature analysis.

The second phase, on the other hand, integrated the comparison between the case studies, allowing to identify and highlight the relationships between the different elements previously synthesised and abstracted, to identify the differences and to generalise the conclusions drawn.

In conclusion, the steps performed during the data analysis are the following:

- Definition of Theory-driven topics;
- Coding: read the empirical material and label the Data-driven codes (significant portions of the empirical material) using the Theory-driven topics previously depicted;
- Vertical analysis: analyse all the Data-driven codes identified for each Theory-driven topic, assign to each a synthetic label and then aggregate the labels in further categories significant, synthetic and inclusive;
- Comparison: analyse all the Data-driven topics for each case study, compare the different case studies in order to highlight relationships between the elements and to generalize the conclusions.

It is an iterative process, since in the light of the information gathered at each step it might be necessary to revise the choices made in the previous ones.

Downstream the analysis, it was possible to present the results in a systematic and structured way and to develop a comprehensive framework to provide an exhaustive answer to the research questions (Chapter 4), and finally to use all the knowledge collected in order to interpret the results (Chapter 5).

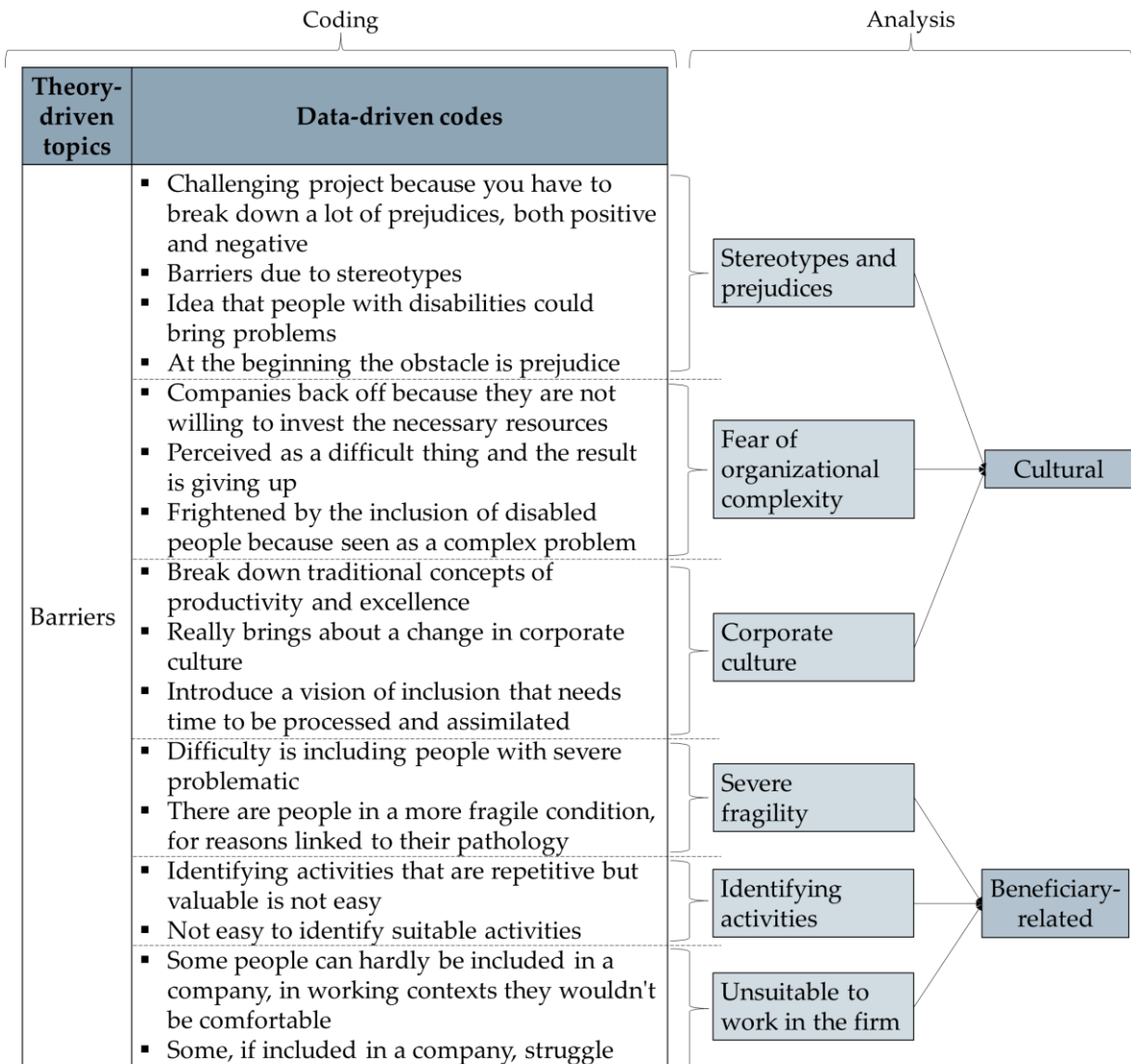


Figure 3.5: Example of analysis of Theory-driven topic “Barriers”

4 Findings of the empirical investigation

This Chapter presents the findings resulting from the data analysis; therefore, the output is a systematized, comprehensive and precise description of what emerged from the empirical material collected. The Chapter is divided in different sections, which reflect the approach described for the research questions and subsequently for the data analysis: indeed, Section 4.1 focuses on the aspects related to the collaboration between the two partners, and therefore describes the findings with respect to drivers, barriers, critical success factors, outcomes and management practices, while Section 4.2 explores the configuration of the partnership itself, presenting the results in terms of actors involved in the partnership, activities conducted, location and tasks.

4.1. Why and how firm-NPO partnerships for inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market are developed

The aim of this section is to systematically and accurately present the findings emerged from the qualitative analysis of the data collected during the empirical research. Investigating the drivers, barriers and risks, the critical success factors, the process of partner selection, the outcomes and finally the management practices, it is possible to develop a comprehensive overview of the crucial elements regarding firm-NPO partnerships aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. This section, thus, provides an answer to the first research question, introduced in Paragraph 2.2, aimed to investigate why and how these partnerships are developed. Finally, it contributes to the fulfilment of the main objective which guided the entire course of the present research, namely, to investigate the distinctive features of partnerships between companies and NPOs aimed at work inclusion of people with disabilities.

4.1.1. Drivers

Analysing the interviews, a clear distinction emerged from the outset between the reasons which lead firms and NPOs to the development of partnerships aimed to inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

For what concerns firms, the most frequently cited driver is the need to fulfil the legal obligation, an aspect evident from sentences as "*It starts from the need to respect the legal obligation*" (C1) and "*The driver is that it is mandatory*" (C5). If the legal obligation imposes a constraint on companies regarding the employment of people with disabilities, it is not sufficient on its own to explain the reasons that lead to the development of partnerships with NPOs. Indeed, the legal obligation is the initial condition, the "*driver zero*" on which the others are based, as emerges for instance from the sentence "*We start from the legal obligation, and then a more structured project is needed to ensure that the person is really included*" (C1).

Specific knowledge, targeted skills and qualified personnel are needed to manage the inclusion of people with disabilities in an effective way for both the beneficiaries and the company. However, the interviewees unanimously underlined the lack of these elements in the companies ("*The companies are not equipped to deal with these critical issues*", C6). Therefore, the need for external support in order to acquire and exploit these resources is identified as the second driver for companies, because "*An insertion carried out without external support often does not lead to a correct inclusion: the*

risk is that the resource is inserted and allows to fulfil the obligation, but does not become a real colleague" (C1).

Companies often express the need to delegate not only the management of disability per se, but also all aspects of administrative, legal and technical nature, as well as the management of the network, which are corollary to the management of inclusion and are as well outside the company's expertise.

Finally, the company's desire to fulfil its social responsibility emerged as a driver for the development of these partnerships. The attention to CSR is due to two different reasons: on one hand there is the desire to have a positive social impact: "[a company like this] cannot disregard social issues, because since it is a systemic company, it has to intervene and take action for this" (C4), and on the other hand the return in terms of reputation. Indeed, in two cases it was stressed that consumers are more conscious now than in the past to Diversity & Inclusion policies, and that "For companies it is therefore also a reason for brand positioning and real sales, especially for the new generations" (C1).

It is therefore possible to summarise the companies' drivers in: need to fulfil the legal obligation, lack of know-how and need for support, possibility to delegate the management of elements outside the company expertise and attention to CSR.

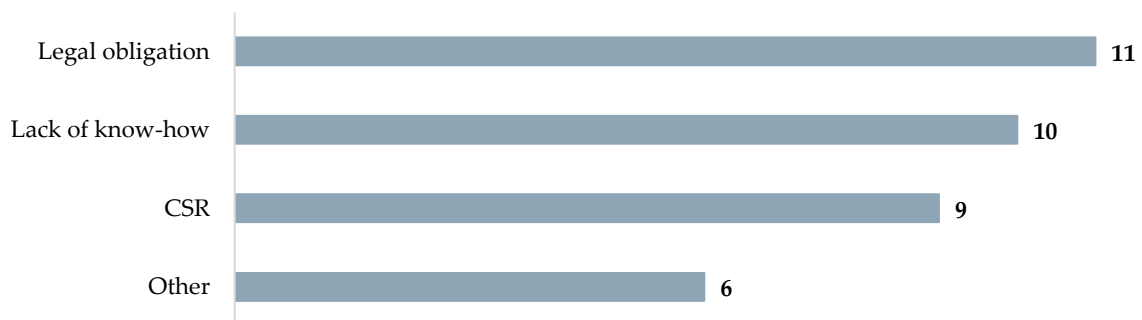


Figure 4.1: Number of data-driven codes "Drivers" for firms

For what concerns NPOs, the most cited driver is the employment potential offered by companies, which is higher with respect to the third sector alone, as confirmed for example by the statement: "Building a strong network between companies and the social world allows for greater job placement potential" (C2).

Collaborating with companies means having access to a wider range of jobs, which is reflected both in volume and quality. Volume because the number of possible job positions is higher, and consequently the number of employable beneficiaries. From the point of view of quality, instead, NPOs underline that the collaboration with

firms allows to have diversification of sectors: "[partnerships with firms allow] to stay out of the traditional markets of social cooperation, as cleaning and green maintenance, but to address more actual labour markets" (C5), and broadening of tasks: "They allow us to diversify, to offer more qualified jobs for the beneficiaries" (C6).

The second driver for NPOs is the possibility to increase awareness about both the organisation itself and the social issue addressed. Indeed, if collaborating with a company is strategic to increase its visibility and name recognition, the main objective expressed by NPOs is to "Spread the culture of inclusion in the world of work and society in general" (C9).

Another driver is access to resources of various kinds: skills and knowledge but also economic resources. "Approaching big companies in the labour market means accessing to a lot of resources, which then obviously go to support the paths and activities of the NPO" (C4). Among them, economic resources are crucial because closely linked to the stability of NPOs' projects: in collaboration with companies, projects and placements can be long-term, and allow NPOs to give stability to the organisation and to the beneficiaries who use their services.

Finally, NPOs underline that one of the drivers is the willingness to achieve full inclusion for the beneficiaries, which can be obtained through the insertion in a business reality.

In summary, the drivers for NPOs are: access to greater employment potential (both in terms of volume and quality), access to resources, stability of projects, awareness (of the organisation and the social issue) and achieving full inclusion for beneficiaries.

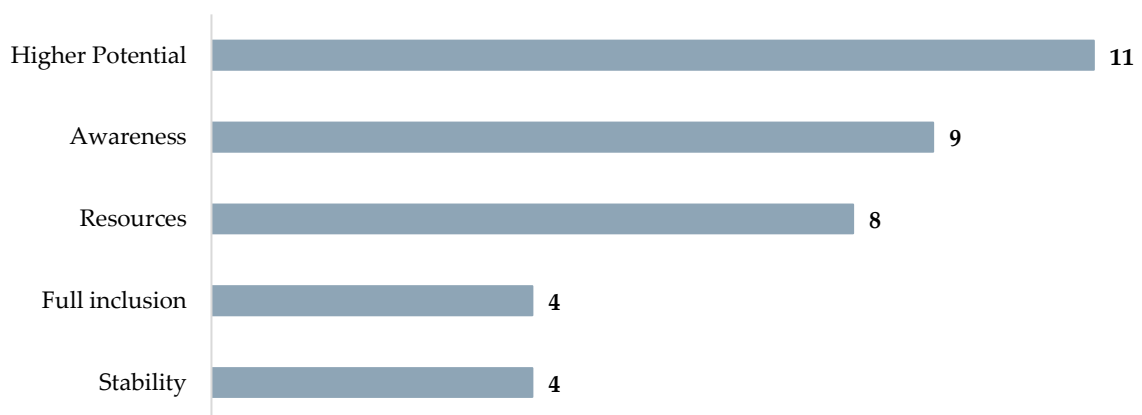


Figure 4.2: Number of data-drive codes "Drivers" for NPOs

Finally, the analysis of the interviews revealed two drivers that companies and NPOs have in common.

The first driver is the awareness that collaboration allows to create a win-win relationship, in which each of the two parties can have access to resources otherwise not available, thus creating benefits within the organization itself. This aspect was underlined in several interviews, for example through the statements *"If you bring to the for-profit world some of the mentality that animates the non-profit world, and vice versa you bring to the non-profit world the organisational capacity and efficiency of the for-profit world, both parties gain as an ecosystem"* (C4), *"There is a lot of collaboration: firms recognise the power of knowledge, NPOs recognise the power to hire"* (C4) and *"On the one hand there are resources, and the whole non-profit world can be of help to companies for corporate welfare"* (C4).

Secondly, the willingness to co-create additional value emerged as a driver, that is the awareness that collaboration not only brings value within the organisation, but also increases value externally. In the interviews, the synergy between for-profit and not-for-profit was emphasised: joining forces can make better use of available resources and have a greater positive impact, as illustrated by the statement *"We strongly believe that social impact is more effective, stronger, wider, if not limited to the not-for-profit world"* (C4). Table 4.1 summarises the drivers described so far, highlighting the division between firms, NPOs and drivers that the two partners have in common.

Drivers		
Firms	NPOs	Both
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal obligation ▪ Lack of know-how and need of support ▪ Delegating the management of elements outside the company's expertise ▪ Attention to CSR for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive social impact - Reputation benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher employment potential: in terms of volume and of quality ▪ Resources: monetary, competences and knowledge ▪ Project' stability ▪ Awareness: for the organisation and for the social issue ▪ Full inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Win-win relation ▪ Co-creation of additional value: synergy between profit and non-profit

Table 4.1: Synthesis of drivers emerged by the analysis

4.1.2. Barriers and risks

"Barriers and risks" is the second most numerous theory-driven topic, with a total of 98 data-driven codes identified during the coding process.

For what concerns barriers, the distinction between firms and NPOs is less clear-cut with respect to what emerged analysing the drivers. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, there are elements that transversally concern both partners; secondly, a braking element for the firm has the indirect effect of preventing or hindering the development of the partnership also for the non-profit and vice versa.

The latter is for example the case of the so called "cultural barriers", defined below.

Before going into details, it is important to point out that they were cited by 8 out of 11 NPOs interviewed, but were not mentioned by a single company. In this case, therefore, the findings express the NPOs' experience and perception regarding phenomena typical of the corporate world.

Barriers defined as "cultural" include several aspects, starting from stereotypes and prejudices about disability. The strong stigma and the stereotyped towards disability is exacerbated for certain types, including psychic and cognitive disability: "*When we meet companies, it happens that they first say which types of disability they do not want as target of the project, for example people from psychiatry*" (C1) and "*You have to break down a lot of stereotypes, both positive and negative: either they expect the genius or they expect the nutcase*" (C1). In one case, it was pointed out that this attitude is more typical of small and medium-sized enterprises, whereas multinationals have a less stigmatising and prejudiced approach. Other elements that emerged are the need for companies to question the concepts of "productivity" and "excellence" rooted in their corporate culture and the fear of organisational complexity ("*The organisational aspect often has a very strong weight: the company does not hire a person with a disability because it is perceived as something very difficult and the result is to say <<No, we don't do it>>*", C4). Although the fear of complexity is disproved by the successful stories of companies that overcome this barrier and decide to develop the partnership, it is difficult to obtain the involvement of the whole company, since work inclusion is often considered a marginal issue compared to the firm's core business, which could absorb time and resources from the core business.

The second barrier related to companies is the prejudice towards the partner, namely the "*Distrust of the pure entrepreneurial system towards the third sector, which is still felt as second class*" (C5). NPOs underlined the difficulty, in some cases, to be perceived as professional partners, actually able to create and deliver value beyond the aspect of "being good".

Finally, regarding reputation, two companies underlined the risk of *perceived instrumentalization*, i.e., that the project developed by the company is interpreted and perceived by consumers as instrumental.

Regarding NPOs, in two cases the risk of instrumentalization was highlighted: it refers to the possibility that companies are engaged in the project and in the partnership exclusively for reasons related to their own reputation: "*You always have to understand how much is a productive activity and how much it becomes a communication activity for them*" (C3).

However, the analysis does not reveal any concern that collaboration with companies has a negative effect on the legitimacy and reputation of the non-profit organisation, but rather the opposite: "*Public approval is exactly the opposite: working with prestigious companies is a sign of goodwill and it attracts more investors, more members, etc.*" (C5).

Moreover, although NPOs in several cases acknowledged a certain asymmetry in the relationship, no power imbalance was found to prevent or seriously hinder the partnership. The initial decision-making power and economic advantage of the company, although present, do not have remarkably negative effects on the relationship: "*The power of the company is to give work, which is very important, but it does not become an obstacle*" (C4). Indeed, as explained in several cases, the imbalance is circumscribed to the initial phase, and it is subsequently balanced by the fundamental role played by the non-profit: "*It is the company that decides whether or not to entrust a project and whether or not to insert a person, therefore in the initial phase of decision and definition of the project it has more power, but in the actual management of the partnership this imbalance is lessened*" (C7) and "*In the initial phase the for-profit organisation feels more powerful, then we feel at the same level, because the for-profit world needs us*" (C3).

Barriers across NPOs and companies are: external barriers, misalignment and user-related barriers.

External barriers are not related to the collaboration with the partner or to the project, but rather to bureaucratic and regulatory difficulties; "misalignment" refers instead to the differences between companies and NPOs, indicated by sentences as "*Profit and non-profit sectors are two opposite worlds, with differences in culture, background, knowledge etc. and dialogue is often not easy*" (C1).

First of all, NPOs and companies have intrinsically different objectives and missions: if non-profits have social objectives as their main purpose, companies "*Have a completely different goal, which is precisely that of making profit*" (C9).

In addition, companies are often much larger than NPOs, are organised in departments and divisions, have offices dedicated to marketing and communication and more rigid hierarchies. The difference in terms of dimension results into several difficulties, from the implementation of projects due to the more rigid hierarchy and presence of many different structures to interface with, to the financial aspect (*"You can't think that such a small organisation can accept payment terms that are acceptable to any supplier that is more structured and financially covered"*, C3).

Misalignment results into the difficulty to communicate: it is often stressed that companies and NPOs *"Speak two different languages"* (C6).

Finally, some barriers related to the beneficiaries themselves emerged. Some personality traits make insertion difficult both from a relational and an operational point of view, for example because identifying suitable activities and tasks can be complex (*"Identifying monotonous and repetitive activities but at the same time valuable is not easy"*, C4). In addition, direct placement in the company is not always possible (*"Some people in work settings would not be comfortable, we have to think about wellbeing and the conception of work we have now is not necessarily ideal for everyone"*, C3), and it is necessary to work to identify a viable and valuable alternative.

The barriers and risks described so far are summarised in Table 4.2.

Barriers and risks	
Firm	<p>Cultural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stereotypes and prejudices ▪ Corporate culture ▪ Fear of organisational complexity ▪ Reluctance to address the issue
	<p>Prejudices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Third sector seen as second class ▪ Difficulty in seeing the market value of NPOs, beyond the aspect of “being good”
	<p>Reputation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived instrumentalization: projects perceived as instrumental by consumers
NPO	<p>Legitimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instrumentalization: companies engaged only for their reputation ▪ Absence of legitimacy risk
	<p>Power imbalance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asymmetry in the initial phase, does not obstacle the partnership
Firm and NPO	<p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beyond the relationship, e.g., legislation
	<p>Misalignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Goals and Background ▪ Communication ▪ Dimension
	<p>User-related</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personality characteristics ▪ Severe fragility due to the pathology ▪ Unsuitable to work directly in the company ▪ Difficulty in identifying activities

Table 4.2: Synthesis of barriers and risks emerged by the analysis

4.1.3. Critical success factors

Critical success factors (CSFs) are those elements necessary to achieve the objectives, the fulfilment of the mission of a project.

With regard to partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, five main factors emerged: they are related to the company, to the NPO or both. In addition to this distinction, it is important to underline that in almost all cases they are present both before and during the partnership, although declined in different ways.

To the question *"What are in your opinion the factors and elements that have determined and determine the success of this partnership?"* (Question number 6 of the interview for NPOs, number 5 for firms) in two cases the answer was given using exactly the same words, namely: *"People make the difference"* (C5, C9). The first success factor therefore refers precisely to the human element, a very broad area which is summarised by the wording *"Personal characteristics and relationships"*.

It emerged that one element of success is the presence in the company of people who are already sensitive to the issue, who are involved and committed to it and have a developed cultural background, especially if they hold important and responsible roles and are therefore able to involve the whole company in turn: this element must be present before the actual collaboration, but determines its success. During the collaboration, however, the key element are the personal relationships that are built between the employees directly involved in the partnership.

Despite the importance of the human element, it was stressed that *"You can't just rely on people, because roles change and maybe you work many years with a person, then that person changes and maybe he/she doesn't have the same sensitivity as before"* (C9). The second critical success factor, *"Project quality and structured approach"*, is based on this consideration. As far as the phase preceding the actual collaboration is concerned, a critical element is the presence in the company of a structure dedicated to diversity management, which brings together a pool of different professionals with transversal skills, including human resources, project managers, logistics and legal experts, and which deals with the inclusion and enhancement of people with disabilities. For what concerns the partnership's execution, *"The success factor is making good plans"* (C2). This sentence, in its simplicity and clarity, emphasises the need to pay close attention to project design, planning and development. The governance of the project, the definition of tasks and activities, the choice of suitable candidates, monitoring and so on are fundamental choices and key elements for the success of the collaboration and of the project.

The third CSF is "Alignment", which can be briefly explained by the expression "*Being on the same wavelength*" (C3). This idiom refers to the fact that the company and the NPO have the same vision of labour inclusion, seen as a positive element for the whole organisation and not only as an obligation to be respected, and of collaboration, that results in the willingness to create an effective and functional common project, going beyond the concept of "being good" and fundraising or charity. During the actual collaboration, "Alignment" translates into the creation of a network made up of serious and fair professional relationships (especially non-profits stress the importance of being perceived as partners in a professional relationship), the communion of intentions, and therefore the definition of clear and shared objectives from the initial stages.

Another factor defined as essential for a successful partnership is "Continuous support". In contrast to what has been described so far, it relates only to the NPO and only during the actual collaboration. Sentences as "*The company must always feel supported and never left on its own*" (C1) and "*There must be constant supervision: this is the element that so far, especially with large companies, has made the most difference*" (C6) underline how continuous support from the NPO to the company is a key element to ensure the success of the partnership. More in detail, it emerged that the support should be: from the operational and from the relational point of view, about technical and social aspects, in ordinary and extraordinary situations, namely both in the daily management of the project and in case of difficulties, problems or unexpected events.

The last main CSF is "Trust" which, just like "Continuous support", is only expressed during the actual collaboration. Indeed, although trust is a necessary element even to start a collaboration, it is during the course of the partnership that it is strengthened and fully expressed, thanks to the close cooperation, the common will to overcome problems and the daily work carried out together, as expressed by the sentence "*In my opinion, trust is created precisely in the acts, in the mutual relationship and in trying to smooth out the things that do not work*" (C3). Trust has to be mutual and full, both in the relationship with the partner and in each other's role.

The graph in Figure 4.3 shows the number of data-driven codes identified during coding for each critical success factor described so far.

In addition to these five critical success factors, which were identified as the main because they were most frequently mentioned in the interviews, other relevant elements for successful collaboration emerged.

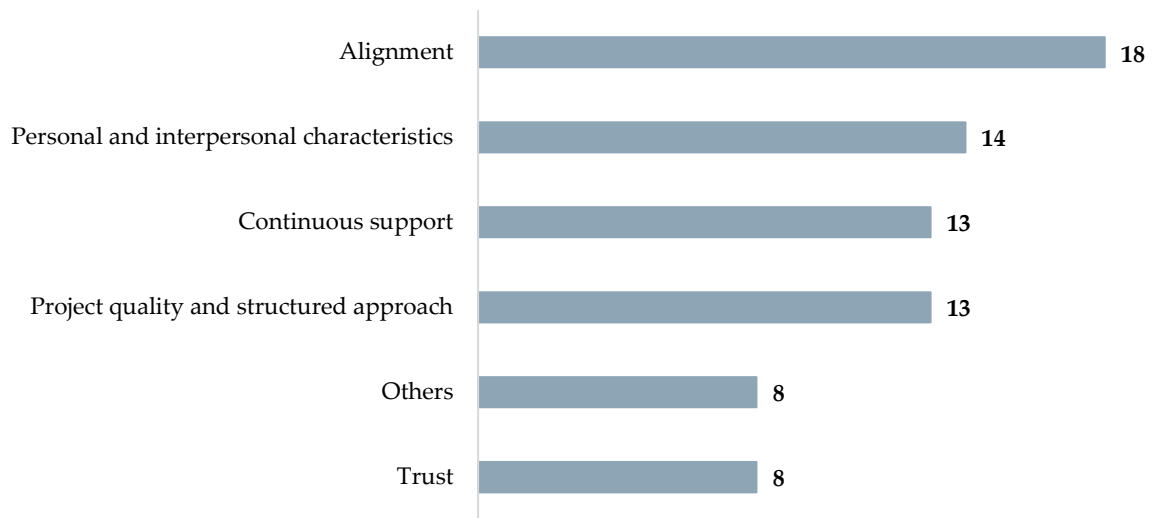


Figure 4.3: Number of data-driven codes “CSF”

Among them, it is possible to list the commitment of the two partners, the engagement of the whole organisation in an active and inward way (*“Collaboration is never just dropped from above, success is linked to the involvement of the company from the inside: if the administration does not believe in it and the manager does not believe in it, it is difficult for it to work, because the value of the project has to cascade to the whole organisation”*, C1), and a clear communication of the positive aspects of the collaboration as well as of the elements to be improved.

Furthermore, in one case it was highlighted that the development of a project allows to demonstrate the feasibility of such partnerships and effective work inclusions to the most sceptical organisations, especially among companies. This aspect is remarkably significant because it can lead to the development of further partnerships, or to the expansion of the existing project.

Finally, the need for willingness and flexibility on the part of both the company and the NPO emerged. If willingness is about being ready to confront and collaborate, flexibility was defined as *“Having a predisposition to try to overcome obstacles by finding all possible strategies”* (C3).

All critical success factors described so far are summarised in Table 4.3, which highlights how they are declined with respect to the time dimension, that is before and during collaboration.

Critical success factors		
Name	Before the collaboration	During the collaboration
Personal characteristics and relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sensitivity to the topic ▪ Personal culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good personal relationships
Project quality and structured approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dedicated structure in the company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Definition of tasks and activities ▪ Choice of suitable candidate ▪ Project characteristics
Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work inclusion as a positive element and not as an obligation ▪ Willingness to create a common project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional relationship ▪ Clear and common objectives
Continuous support		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuous and all-around support
Trust		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mutual trust
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involvement of all members of the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commitment and professionalism ▪ Clear communication ▪ Cooperation and availability ▪ Flexibility

Table 4.3: Synthesis of CSFs emerged by the analysis

4.1.4. Partner selection: process and strategies

It is tautological to highlight the fundamental role played by the partner in a cross-sector partnership, whose selection therefore constitutes both a challenge and a success factor for the collaboration. The elements that emerged from the analysis of the interviews are presented below, divided into selection strategy and selection criteria.

As far as strategy is concerned, from a first analysis it soon became clear that there is no single strategy commonly adopted by different organizations, and that even within the same organization different alternatives co-exist.

However, although both NPOs and firms highlighted the plurality of partner selection strategies, in most cases NPOs actively move to expand their network and develop partnerships with firms.

The first strategy indicated is scouting: "*We basically go to the firms and ask <<do you want to be more inclusive?>> or <<do you need to reach the quotas?>>*" (C4) and "*There is a big work of ours to research the firms*" (C9). Thus, the non-profit organisation conducts a research, for instance leveraging on networks and already existing associations of companies, to identify possible partners; then, with a so-called "*commercial approach*" (C4), the NPO presents the project or the idea of collaboration.

In other cases, the NPO contractually agrees with the existing partners the promotion of the collaboration through the company's channels or word-of-mouth, and finally some NPOs invest resources to carry out awareness-raising and promotional initiatives that lead the organization to be known and contacted by companies. Hence, in these two cases it is the company that contacts the NPO, but following targeted and precise initiatives developed by the NPO.

Interviews with companies also revealed different strategies for partner selection, even if it was clear that there is a preference to work with long-standing partners or with organisations already known, as underlined by sentences as "*We tend to work with organisations with which we have an already consolidated relationship*" (C1) or "*For what concerns the selection of the non-profit organisation, we have a historical one*" (C5). However, when looking for a new partner, companies tend to use word of mouth and personal knowledge, or the employment lists of the province.

The elements and reasons for choosing one strategy over another were not made explicit during the interviews; only in one case, a non-profit organisation suggested that it depends on the size of the company. Large companies have a department dedicated to Diversity & Inclusion and CSR, they have a dedicated programme and budget every year and it is not uncommon that they actively search partners; on the contrary, the scenario is different for small and medium-sized enterprises, which often do not have a strategy and are simply pressed to meet the minimum quotas given by the law: "*Hardly an SME looks for a non-profit, because the obligation is perceived as a cost and a burden; companies think they are not compatible with the inclusion of people with disabilities, but sometimes they just need to be accompanied in this path*" (C1).

For what concerns the selection criteria used by NPOs, no organisation mentioned any partnership-specific or particular selection criteria. Despite the absence of

company-specific criteria, in three cases the non-profit identified a market industry particularly suited to its needs and sought to engage companies belonging to it. In particular, the sectors are: IT, because it is growing and has an ever-increasing demand for labour; retail, because it is considered a particularly welcoming sector; and hospitality, because it has numerous tasks suitable for project beneficiaries.

Even in the case of companies no detailed criteria were defined, but rather a tendency to choose one NPO over another on the basis of the economic proposal and the diversification of services offered.

	Selection process	
	NPO	Firm
Selection strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scouting ▪ Contractually agreed “word of mouth” ▪ Promotion and awareness-raising initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preference for NPOs already known ▪ Word of mouth or personal knowledge
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No partnership-specific criteria ▪ Industry (IT, hospitality, retail) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No partnership-specific criteria ▪ Economic proposal ▪ Differentiation of services

Table 4.4: Synthesis of selection strategy and criteria emerged by the analysis

4.1.5. Outcomes at macro, meso and micro level

"Outcome" refers to the results, the effects of the partnership; with a total of 149 codes, it is the theory-driven topic with the highest number of data-driven codes identified during the coding process.

Outcomes vary according to the level of analysis (micro, meso and macro) and the subject (NPO, company, beneficiaries, society): therefore, the results obtained from the analysis will be presented below using these two dimensions.

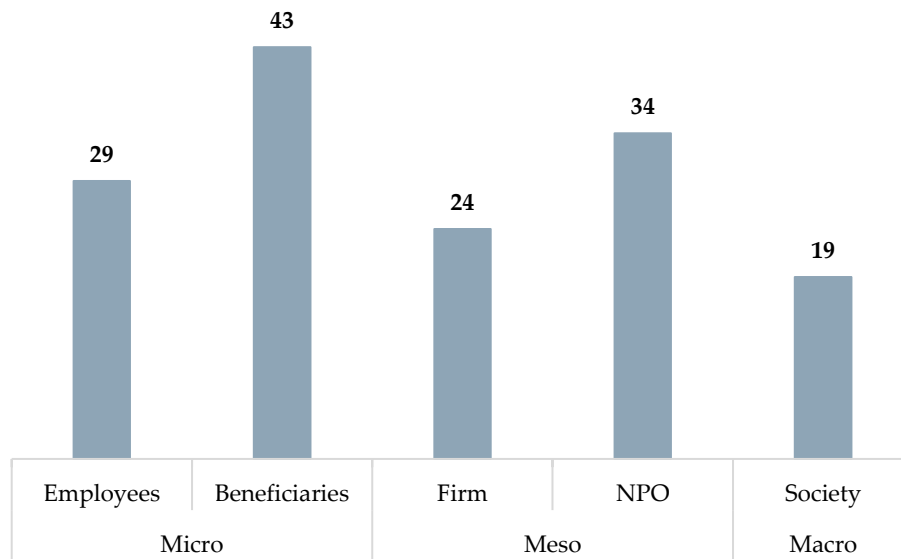


Figure 4.4: Number of data-driven codes "Outcomes"

"Micro" level refers to the benefits created by the collaboration for individuals, who are NPO employees, company employees and project beneficiaries.

Starting from the NPO employees, one of the effects expressed by the interviewees is the development of new competences and skills due to the contamination with the corporate world. Among these, it was highlighted that people involved in the partnership acquire a more specific language property: *"We noticed the acquisition of an adequate language, which is often lacking; you understand how to name things, what is the right wording"* (C4) and improve their networking skills: *"You learn to network, a very important skill but still to be developed in the nonprofit world"* (C2). Moreover, it was highlighted that even though people working in non-profit organizations tend to be already sensitive and interested in social issues, this kind of collaborations allow employees to gain more knowledge and further increases their engagement: *"Subsequent projects have been experienced with a lot of care and attention by people in the organization, because after working on this issue there is a desire to work with attention"* (C4).

As far as employees of companies are concerned, the opportunity to be exposed to different values and cultures was emphasized: *"They have the possibility to come into contact with diversities, contents, values, cultures etc. that they would never have encountered in their for-profit career and that are of great enrichment for the teams"* (C1) and consequently to develop a greater attention to the topic, overcoming prejudices, stereotypes and initial fears. There are also effects from the point of view of professional enrichment, for example the development of greater adaptability and

flexibility ("*Working with people who have different needs etc. requires you to adapt in a way that is very enriching at a professional level*", C4) and the improvement of lateral thinking ("*Facing projects of this kind makes you improve your lateral thinking, <<out of the box>>*", C3).

Although the interviews revealed positive effects on a micro level for the employees of NPOs and companies, the greatest emphasis was certainly placed on the benefits for the users of the projects, that is people with disabilities who are included in the labour market thanks to the partnerships object of the present research. The sentence "*We are in a historical moment in which the disabled adult population is increasing a lot, so the issue of job insertion is very hot, because it affects not only the economic aspect but also the identity, the possibility to assume a full adult role as a working adult*" (C2) summarizes the relevance of these outcomes and the key elements, described in more detail below.

One of the benefits most often cited is increased independence, not only from the economic point of view: working means going out, learning to move to new places and managing autonomously relationships outside the family and close affections. Work is a tool for social inclusion: "*Work integration means entry into active society*" (C4) and allows an increase in the self-esteem of beneficiaries, who are part of a common production process and have a well-defined role that brings value to the whole organization. All these benefits, linked to the possibility of working, are amplified by the collaboration between for-profit and non-profit organizations. Indeed, "*The risk of not-for-profit associations is that they do a great job but within their own services*" (C4), while partnerships between firms and NPOs allow beneficiaries to return "*Mentally and physically to the world*" (C4). Finally, outcomes on beneficiaries have a very strong impact also on their families, both in terms of motivation and available resources.

"Meso" level refers to the organization, and therefore a distinction is made between companies and NPOs.

Starting with non-profit organizations, the outcomes can be summarised in financial support, visibility and reputation, expansion of the network, marketing and improvement of the services offered. Financial support is fundamental, because although non-profit organizations do not aim to make a profit, they have significant structural costs and expenses linked to the projects: a lasting relationship with a company guarantees the security of having the necessary funds to carry out the activities, and therefore allows to fulfill the mission in a financially sustainable way and to make further investments.

Visibility is another fundamental aspect: developing a partnership with a company means improving one's reputation and perceived reliability, it means obtaining a better positioning and therefore being able to get in touch with other companies (e.g. suppliers of the partner): *"When we achieve important results with companies, our reliability in their eyes and in the eyes of the surrounding companies increases, because very often companies know what each other does, and our diffusion in this environment increases"* (C9).

If at micro level we talk about the acquisition of business-related skills by individual employees, at meso level we can identify the "Commercialization" of the NPO as a result of partnerships with companies: *"The business dynamics are very important for us because it is true that the non-profit world in recent years is becoming very entrepreneurial, but the non-profit can still take a lot of knowledge from companies"*. (C4). Among the effects, the creation of departments linked to marketing and external relations was highlighted.

Furthermore, working closely with companies can improve the quality of the service provided, for three different reasons: it allows to develop a greater knowledge of why companies are reluctant to hire, and knowing in depth the causes of the problem can lead to the design of more effective strategies and projects; the implementation of funded and structured projects allows to qualify training and monitoring activities, which would otherwise be devalued; and finally knowing the company dynamics, trends, needs and policies allows the NPO to understand in which direction the market is going, and to manage the work inclusion project accordingly. Finally, and crucially, thanks to their access to the employment potential of companies, NPOs have the possibility to include more beneficiaries. Besides improving the quality of the service, therefore, there is a direct effect on the mission of NPOs in terms of volume.

For what concerns companies, it is first of all important to underline that these partnerships make it possible to comply with the legal obligation, without having to deal with the operational management and with all the related aspects which are outside the competence and knowledge of the company, from the legal aspects to the actual inclusion.

In addition to this fundamental aspect, other benefits have emerged. One of them is related to reputation: the inclusion and representation of diversity in the company is a lever on consumers, and at the same time it gives a great ability to retain and attract new talents within the company.

In addition, partnerships for the work inclusion of people with disabilities have a positive impact on productivity: both because *"It is proven by several studies that in a*

team the more diversity there is the more productivity and ideas" (C1), and because entrusting some time-consuming tasks to the beneficiary frees up other resources in the team, who "Can invest it in things for which they would otherwise have less time" (C4).

Finally, one company pointed out that: *"The benefit is that now we know that it can be done, to the extent that we are now starting a new and much bigger project" (C1). One effect, therefore, is the awareness that these partnerships can really be effective and useful, which can lead to the replication or expansion of the partnership and project.*

The last level of analysis is "macro", which refers to the large-scale effects at society level. In this regard, the first element to emerge is the economic one, with respect to which it was said: *"It is not the only element nor necessarily the most important one, but it is the most easily measurable" (C5). In particular, it was pointed out that integrating a person in the labour market means taking him or her away from at least part of the social assistance costs of the welfare state that come from the public. In turn, it allows to free up resources for people for whom this is not possible or is possible to a lesser extent, and thus improving the quality of the welfare service which is still necessary: "It is possible to widen the pool of beneficiaries because I free up resources of people who can gradually develop greater autonomy and independence" (C3).*

Finally, cross-sectoral partnerships for the inclusion in the labour market of people with disabilities often involve activities aimed to the dissemination and promotion of the project, and have the effect of disseminating and spreading the culture of inclusion, helping to raise awareness in society and to overcome the stigma and taboo of frailty and disability.

All the outcomes described so far are summarized in Table 4.5.

Micro level – Employees	
NPO	Firm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional growth (expanding skills, learning to network, acquisition of appropriate language...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal growth (sensitivity to the topic, lateral thinking, exposure to different values and cultures)
Micro level – Beneficiaries	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunity to work ▪ Social inclusion ▪ Independence and autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal satisfaction ▪ Assumption of a full adult role as a working adult
Meso level	
NPO	Firm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased quality and volume ▪ Economic benefits ▪ Market positioning, increased reliability, visibility ▪ Widening of the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reputation, positioning and talent attraction ▪ Increased productivity ▪ Fulfilment of the obligation ▪ Awareness of the feasibility
Macro level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Freeing up resources and increasing the quality of the welfare service ▪ Dissemination, spreading the culture of inclusion ▪ Overcoming the taboo and stigma of frailty and disability 	

Table 4.5: Synthesis of outcomes emerged by the analysis

4.1.6. Management practices: operational and tensions management and evaluation practices

For what concerns the management of the partnership, it was decided to focus on three aspects in order to build a comprehensive yet synthetic overview. They are: practices and methods of partnership management and communication between

partners, strategies implemented in order to face the tensions arising between the partners during the collaboration and mechanisms put in place to evaluate the partnership.

Operational management and communication

The aim is to identify the mechanisms used by the two partners to manage the partnership and to communicate with each other.

In particular, the interviewer asked whether, during the course of the partnership, the two organisations communicate and work using formal or informal mechanisms, and subsequently what they are and why.

Firstly, formal and informal mechanisms emerged in all cases; they have different advantages and disadvantages and are therefore used in different circumstances and for different reasons, as illustrated below.

Among the formal mechanisms used, the definition of protocols and procedures, necessary to clarify the perimeter of the collaboration, the role and responsibilities of the partners, the activities and the timeframe were mentioned. Among the steps, it was also mentioned the identification of formally recognised contact persons within the company, in order to have clear and shared points of reference and formalised project governance. Communication takes place through formal channels and monitoring meetings are established in advance in occasion of project milestones.

Respondents emphasised that formal mechanisms guarantee clarity and seriousness on both sides. For this reason, they are more widely used in the initial phase of the partnership, when knowledge between the two partners is still superficial: clearly establishing the terms and perimeter of the collaboration, the structure of the partnership, its functioning and the role of each partner gives subsequently space to informal mechanisms during the collaboration.

Indeed, it emerged that, once the partnership has started, the mechanisms used are mainly informal. Meetings are often needs-based and are not formalised, but rather serve to exchange ideas and perceptions. Coordination occurs through frequent and unscheduled contacts and communication is carried out by email or telephone. The scenario changes because the employees of the two organisations rely on mutual trust in each other's work, they no longer feel the need to rely on formal mechanisms and they manage operations by maintaining a constant and informal relationship. Besides, informal mechanisms provide the speed and flexibility needed to face and solve difficulties, as stressed by several interviewees, for example: "*In everyday work you need to be informal, in order to have an important element of problem solving*" (C5),

thus allowing problems to be overcome and working in a perspective of continuous improvement.

The analysis regarding the managerial practices adopted during the collaboration revealed unequivocally the coexistence of formal and informal mechanisms, implemented at different stages and in different contexts due to their complementary advantages. However, the preponderance of one or the other in the partnership depends partly on the approach of the non-profit, which may give greater importance to the advantages of one or the other, and partly on structural elements as the dimension of the partnership: fewer placements allow the use of simple procedures and informal communication, while larger projects require a higher level of formality in management.

	Formal	Informal
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protocols ▪ Institutionalised working methods ▪ Procedures ▪ Formal identification of roles ▪ Definition of monitoring meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Face-to-face meetings to exchange ideas ▪ Communication by phone or email ▪ Constant relationship ▪ Mutual trust ▪ Frequent and unscheduled contacts
Context	Initial phase of the partnership and milestones	When difficulties and problems arise
Advantages	Guarantee clarity and professionalism	Enable speed, flexibility, continuous improvement and problem solving

Table 4.6: Synthesis of operational management and communication emerged by the analysis

Tensions management

One of the aspects that have been investigated in relation to partnership management concerns the tensions that have arisen during the collaboration. The results will be presented hereafter: the aim is to highlight both the reasons for the tensions and the strategies implemented to overcome them, and to distinguish between the initial phase and the actual implementation.

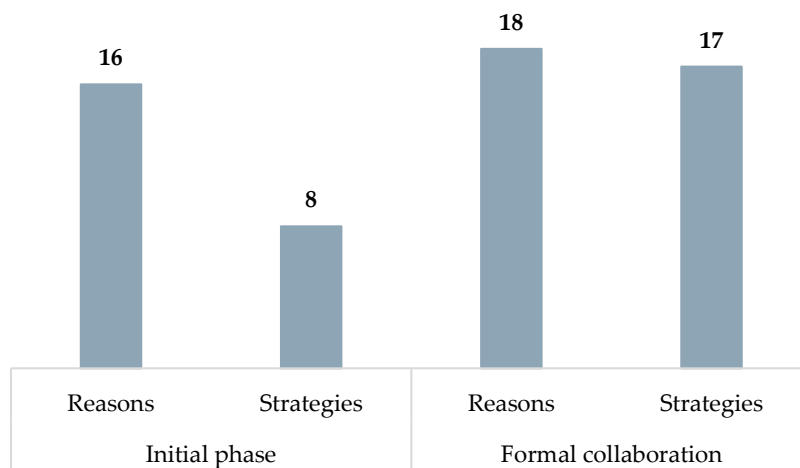


Figure 4.5: Number of data-driven codes “Tensions”

Before going into the details of the results, it is essential to stress that, since the case studies represent examples of successful collaborations, no cases of strong conflicts between the two organisations were reported. When asked “*Were there tensions and conflicts during the partnership? What were they?*” many of the answers were characterised by premises such as “*There were never any real clashes, maybe different views and expectations*” (C1), “*More than tensions are misunderstandings*” (C4), “*Real conflicts did not happen, maybe differences of opinion*” (C7). It emerged that, in cases of particular difficulties, the partnership did not succeed and the project did not start; however, these cases do not fall within the perimeter of this research, whose results instead refer to all cases in which tensions and conflicts did not prevent the collaboration.

As far as the initial phase of the partnership is concerned, the reasons for tensions can be grouped into: divergence of expectations, problems related to the company, timing.

The divergence of expectations was brought to light by NPOs and refers mainly to the economic aspect. Indeed NPOs, through sentences as “*Very often the tension arises*

when you discover that the work we do also has a cost" (C9), complain that companies frequently have the expectation to develop the partnership and participate in the project for free, as they do not always recognise the value of the work of the NPOs and the need for it to be recognised also from an economic point of view. In addition, in some cases the company had the expectation of placing specific profiles in a short period of time, and was not willing to use economic resources and time to train the beneficiaries.

Problems related to the companies were also highlighted by the NPOs, and included several elements. Lack of communication between different functions within the company was reported, as well as misalignment between the central level of the company and the peripheral levels: *"It happens that agreements are made at national level, but the director of the local office is not fully aligned and it is necessary to recalibrate the modality" (C2).* In addition, company procedures for partnership approval often involve long and not always clear processes, where the contact persons frequently change and it is not formally clear who should give the final approval.

Finally, long internal formalisation process within the company, bureaucratic problems caused by procedures that are not always clear and slowness due to the rigid hierarchy of the corporate world may lead to the extension of timeframes, and therefore to delays with respect to what was planned and agreed upon in principle.

No particular strategies emerged to overcome tensions due to internal company issues and timeframes; the key element is openness on both sides to seek common ground.

With regard to the divergence of expectations, the main element is the importance of clarifying from the outset the expectations and operating methods to be implemented during the collaboration; the initial clarity must then be complemented by moments of confrontation to recalibrate expectations and performance, clarify any doubts and continue to work jointly in accordance with the initial common purpose.

The strategies can be summarised as: finding a common ground through communication and mutual availability, clarification of expectations and operating methods at an early stage through dedicated meetings.

It was pointed out that it is more common and more frequent to find difficulties and have tensions at the beginning of the partnership, because the knowledge between the two partners is scarce and mutual trust has yet to be built. As time goes by, the only tensions reported are those related to operations.

An example are the difficulties related to the planning of activities, also due to a slower learning curve in the initial phase, and the lack of effective communication between the two partners, which can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Furthermore, once again emerged the slowness of the corporate world, caused by the more hierarchical organisation, which prevents difficulties and problems from being tackled with the flexibility and speed typical of non-profit organisations and can be a source of tension between the two partners.

Finally, it was pointed out that tensions can arise when a beneficiary decides, for different reasons, to leave the partnership: *"This puts everyone in difficulty, because the partnership that has its core in the person is broken. The company may react by saying let's work together to find another person, or they may take it out on us, and so in that case there may be some tension"* (C4).

The first strategy that emerged for the resolution of tensions during formal collaboration is the joint analysis of work processes and the search for improvement actions.

In addition, the importance of planning ad hoc meetings to find common ground was again emphasised, as well as the importance of communication to clearly define roles and responsibilities, and to avoid situations in which *"It was not clear who should intervene, how and when"* (C1).

In one case, it was unavoidable to change the company team in which the worker was placed because the relationship was not working.

		Tensions	
		Initial phase	Formal collaboration
Reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NPO's work not recognized by the firm ▪ Timing: delayed start and slowness ▪ Different expectations ▪ Lack of mutual knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ineffective communication ▪ Difficulty in planning ▪ Slower learning curve in the initial phase ▪ Delays and different timing 	
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finding a common ground through communication and mutual availability ▪ Clarification of expectations and operating methods at an early stage through dedicated meetings ▪ Extreme ratio: project not started 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint analysis of work processes and search for improvement actions ▪ Communication to find common ground and adjustment of roles and activities ▪ Extreme ratio: change of team or termination of partnership 	

Table 4.7: Synthesis of tensions management emerged by the analysis

Evaluation

"Evaluation" refers to all the practices necessary to judge the progress and results of the partnership, and is one of the most numerous Theory-driven topics with more than 140 Data-driven codes identified during the coding process.

The objectives of the questions included in the questionnaire were to understand whether the companies and NPOs involved in these partnerships carry out an evaluation process of the partnership and what practices are used: the results are therefore presented below.

Regarding the presence of practices for partnership evaluation, in all case studies analysed the answer was yes. The first result in this sense is that during the collection of empirical data, two types of evaluation emerged: indeed, on one hand the object of the evaluation is the partnership as a whole and thus the progress of the collaboration with the partner, while on the other hand respondents often referred to the monitoring and evaluation of the progress and success/failure of the

single inclusion. In addition to this distinction, during the interviews the differentiation between internal evaluation, i.e., without involving the partner, with the aim of deciding whether or not to continue the collaboration, and joint evaluation, i.e., carried out jointly by the two partners to facilitate communication between partners and communicate the results of collaboration, was highlighted. The empirical analysis hence revealed the presence of four types of evaluation, which arise from the intersection of the dimensions partnership/single inclusion and internal/joint evaluation. This categorisation is not always clear-cut, but in almost all case studies there were references to all four types of evaluation, while the emphasis on one aspect rather than the other varies from interview to interview.

Once these four typologies were identified, a case-by-case analysis was carried out in order to understand how evaluation is carried out.

With regard to the evaluation of the partnership as a whole, the most commonly used practice is that of meetings and assemblies between the different actors, designed to discuss the progress of the partnership and which can be formal or informal. For what concerns internal evaluation, formal occasions for evaluating the progress of the partnership take place on average once a year, in the perspective of drafting the social report and assessing the year's situation; in addition to these, there are periodic moments of comparison (monthly working tables or internal checks between the managers involved).

The joint evaluation of collaboration, which was mentioned more often during the interviews than the internal one, also envisages the coexistence of formal and informal practices. Informal moments are characterised by the absence of a specific schedule, quantitative indicators and predefined objectives, but are nevertheless regular and pre-established (*"The informal moments of confrontation are not casual, the modality is informal but not the fact that they are there"* C2), except when they are carried out following specific needs (*"Sometimes the relationship does not start well and it is necessary to understand immediately what did not work and understand how to improve it"* C7). Formal moments, on the other hand, serve to periodically present the results obtained with the collaboration up to that moment, to monitor possible aspects to be improved and to define the next steps and the expectations of both partners and typically see the involvement of the management.

Finally, in one case study it was highlighted that impact assessments are occasionally carried out by external bodies, as part of research and/or studies, while in two other cases it was mentioned that the impact assessment was an integral part of the project being partnered on, and was therefore agreed upon and formalised in advance.

It is rarer that meetings are also accompanied by the measurement of project outcomes and the monitoring of specific KPIs. The problems indicated in this regard are numerous and include:

- Lack of skills and expertise on the part of non-profit organisations for data collection and information management;
- Lack of data or too high level of aggregation, which translates into the impossibility to trace results (*"sometimes there is a bit of chaos on the side of the non-profit organisation, which gives disaggregated data or does not give them at all, so at the level of traceability of results sometimes there is some gap or some deficiency"*, C4);
- Lack of standards and research on indicators needed to monitor activities (*"The difficulty lies in the lack of standards and therefore in the need to build and develop everything"*, C6);
- Perception of the measurement of indicators as unimportant, marginal or non-strategic (*"This aspect has never been seen as important and necessary within the structure"*, C6);
- Difficult quantifiability and measurability (*"It's a difficult part, because in inclusion there are elements that how is it possible to calculate? It's a worry of ours and it's not certain that we will be able to turn everything into numbers"*, C3).

Some issues therefore depend on intrinsic characteristics of project outcomes, which are difficult to measure, while others are due to a lack of experience, especially on the non-profit side, and knowledge about them. In spite of the issues described above, 9 organisations stated that they measure parameters, while 3 others pointed out that they have already addressed or plan to activate actions to implement and/or strengthen their system of measuring indicators and performance monitoring; the indicators indicated in the interviews are reported in Table 4.8, together with a summary of the measurement issues.

Outcomes measurement	
Indicators	Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of persons included ▪ Number of renewals ▪ Number of recruitments following internships/traineeships ▪ Number of unsuccessful placements ▪ Type of contract ▪ Financial monitoring ▪ Number of companies involved ▪ Type of disability included ▪ Expenditure per service ▪ Hours used by each person ▪ Creation of a dedicated structure in the company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of expertise by non-profit organisations, aggregated or missing data resulting in an inability to track results ▪ Unstructured methodologies ▪ Lack of standards ▪ Lack of defined indicators ▪ Lack of research on the subject ▪ Aspect seen as marginal and not strategic or critical for NPOs ▪ Difficult quantifiability and measurability

Table 4.8: Synthesis of outcomes measurement emerged by the analysis

Finally, a practice used, although not very widespread (in the perimeter of the present research, it was mentioned in 2 case studies as a consolidated practice and in 1 as a modality addressed for the near future) is that of the satisfaction questionnaires: *"We use a lot the questionnaires in which the persons of the companies have to indicate a series of actions that have been done and objectives that have been achieved"* (C8).

As far as the evaluation of the individual placement is concerned, it is possible first of all to make some considerations on the diffusion: in 78% of the case studies under analysis there are practices to evaluate the individual placement, in 3 cases there are both internal and joint practices, while in the others they are present only with the involvement of the partner organisation. Again, the most used practice is that of meetings and gatherings, and there is the coexistence of formal and informal activities, but with a clear preponderance of the latter.

There are therefore assessment meetings scheduled at regular intervals (e.g. monthly or biannually), formalised in the initial phase of the partnership, structured and which may see the involvement not only of local tutors but also of more managerial positions; finally, in one case it was highlighted that *"There are formal moments, for example the calculation of the employed/unemployed hours and consequently*

the definition of actions that must be done in order to understand how to continue" (C4). In addition to these, however, monitoring takes place through daily or almost daily unscheduled meetings, which take place through informal channels (phone calls, emails) and which serve to keep the beneficiary's progress monitored, to identify possible areas of improvement ("informal check in which we try to understand which are the areas of improvement of a specific job stationer", C4) or to face critical situations and difficulties which may emerge throughout the partnership.

In conclusion, although the importance of formally recognised steps to monitor the progress of the partnership and individual placements is acknowledged in order to guarantee the quality of the projects and the functioning of the partnership ("*It is necessary to have formal moments to set milestones and moments in which checks are made: serious work cannot disregard formal moments of verification*", C2), informal practices are more frequent, since the objective is generally an exchange of opinions, a confrontation oriented to the identification of areas of improvement and definition of next steps, and therefore the flexibility guaranteed by informal practices is more important than rigour.

4.2. How firm-NPO partnerships for inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market are configured

The present section contributes to fulfilling the general objective of the research, investigating the distinctive features of partnerships between NPOs and companies for the work inclusion of people with disabilities. Showing the results that emerged from the analysis regarding the actors involved in the partnership, the activities foreseen in the project perimeter and the characteristics (a term that includes several aspects, such as the location established and the tasks chosen), this section answers the second research question. Introduced and explained in Paragraph 2.2, it refers to the configuration of partnerships between firms and NPOs aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market: therefore, it enters into the actual collaboration in order to obtain a clear vision of how these partnerships function.

4.2.1. Actors involved in the partnership

The theory-driven topic "Actors" aims at identifying all the actors involved in the collaboration, their role and the relationships between them. In particular, the interviewees highlighted actors at organisation, team and individual level: the results will therefore be presented following this logic.

At organization level, the two fundamental actors are the NPO and the firm that decide to develop the partnership. How they come into contact varies, as described in Paragraph 4.1.4 (Selection) and the active role of the two partners may differ according to the type of project implemented and the agreements made between the two. However, they concretely develop the partnership, define the project and operationally manage it.

Although they are the main actors at an organisational level, they are not the only: in some cases, the presence of one or more supporting non-profit organisations (for instance cooperatives or associations), which work with disabled people but do not deal directly with work integration, was highlighted during the interviews. Their role is therefore to indicate potential beneficiaries to the NPO partner of the collaboration, which then carries out the selection and involves them in the project. In addition, sometimes both companies and NPOs stated that they contact the province: indeed, this institution can put in contact the profit and no-profit world and signal potential beneficiaries.

Between the organisation level and the individual level there is the corporate team in which the resource is inserted. Since it is the working group that is in closest contact with the beneficiary, it plays a key role in the way the beneficiary is included, in the dynamics that are created within the group and thus in summary in the success of inclusion.

Finally, at individual level there are the non-profit tutor, the corporate tutor and the beneficiaries themselves.

The tutor from the non-profit organisation is typically a psychologist; at least in the initial phases of the partnership, the tutor physically accompanies the person placed in the company and has a dual role, as she/he interfaces with both the beneficiary and the company tutor and the whole team. As far as the beneficiary is concerned, the tutor, if necessary, offers support on the actual work, but above all intervenes in case of need on personal and psychological issues: *"The figure of the tutor is very important, because she/he has deep psychological knowledge and supports the person with disabilities during the day. So, if discomfort or difficulties arise, she/he is there to support them, which is not normally the case in the corporate world"* (C4). Thanks to his or her physical presence in the workplace, the tutor is also the first point of reference for people within the company in case of doubts or difficulties that emerge during work, for example related to the way of relating.

The company tutor, on the other hand, is an employee of the firm part of the team in which the resource is placed. She/he is formally recognised within the perimeter of the partnership and, typically, is chosen because stands out both for her/his

recognised leadership within the team, as well as for a particular sensitivity towards the issue: *"She/he must have a particular sensitivity, an attention also to the human aspects"* (C4).

Having a role formally recognised by all and being in all respects an integral part of the team allow the two supervisors to facilitate the insertion of the beneficiary and to improve the relations with other employees, being a point of reference for all those involved. Moreover, being present "on the field" they have the possibility to witness the dynamics, to monitor the progress of the work and to intervene quickly and promptly in case of need.

Finally, the projects are aimed at beneficiaries with different types of disabilities (Down's syndrome, autism spectrum, cognitive disabilities and mental pathologies were mentioned during the interviews), but also with different personal backgrounds. Some projects are designed and implemented for people with no previous work experience: *"Trainees do not have any previous work experience and are just trained and introduced to the working environment"* (C6), while others target workers with pathologies or disability experienced during their working life.

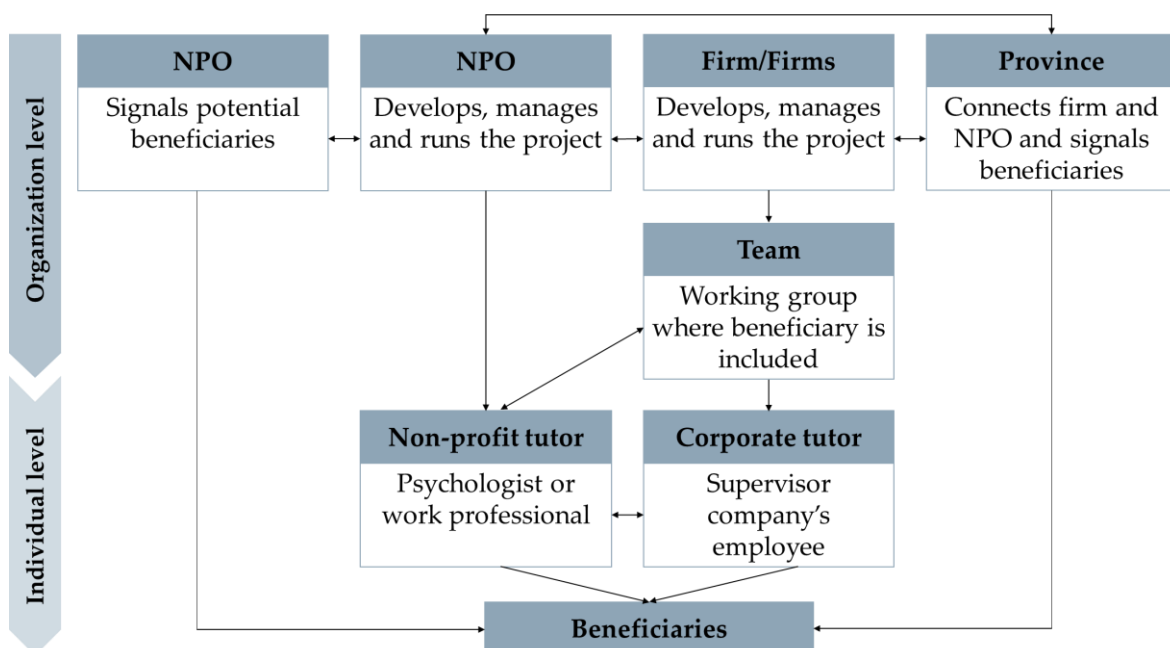


Figure 4.6: Synthesis of Theory-driven topic "Actors"

4.2.2. Activities envisaged in the partnership

The activities envisaged by the partnership are a fundamental element to study and understand its configuration; moreover, is one of the areas where most use has been made of secondary sources. Indeed, the interviewees described the functioning of the project, and the primary data were integrated with the information present on the websites of the partners involved, in Social Reports and other documentation related to the partnerships and projects. What emerged is that, despite the differences between the case studies, there are numerous common and recurring activities. They are temporally positioned in two different phases: the first one is the initial phase of the partnership, while the second one is the actual implementation of the work inclusion, named "Execution phase".

With regard to the initial phase, it was possible to identify four areas of activity: technical support, analysis, selection and adaptation, and training. The first three are described below, while training will be analysed in depth in the last part of this paragraph.

Technical support is mainly related to legal aspects, and therefore to the knowledge and implementation of the alternatives and constraints indicated by the legislation, to the management of administrative aspects, the choice of the type of contract, the need to interface with the province and the management of these relations. These types of activities, which are not marginal for the development of the partnership and defined as "*Demanding and burdensome*" (C3) also in terms of resources, were indicated both by NPOs and companies, which recognize the value of the work done by the non-profit partner in this sense: "*NPOs know the legislation very well, they have excellent contacts, they know how to move, they are very prepared*" (C5).

For what concerns the analytical activities, the NPO often carries out a mapping of the company in order to highlight the partner's needs and to identify possible tasks suitable for labour inclusion. Indeed, the importance of identifying the right jobs was highlighted in order to develop a work inclusion project that brings real value both to the beneficiary and to the company: "*There can be jobs and tasks that the entrepreneur didn't perceive as suitable or useful, for example tasks that take away other employees' time, so we carry out the mapping in order to do not a top-down but a bottom-up insertion*" (C5).

Finally, there are the analysis of potential beneficiaries' skills and the selection of candidates: these activities can be conducted by the NPO, by the NPO and firm together or by the firm after a specific training for the HR, as will be further depicted in the context of training activities. In several cases it emerged that, after the selection, the tasks are adapted in the light of the specific characteristics of the

chosen beneficiaries: *"The predispositions of the beneficiaries were identified and the chosen tasks were adapted and assigned accordingly"* (C1). Therefore, the process is iterative and can be synthesized through the following steps: identify tasks valuable for the company, choose beneficiaries suitable for the chosen tasks, further adapt the tasks to the needs of the individual beneficiaries.

As regards the activities characteristics of the Execution phase, the most often mentioned is tutoring: as previously explained in Paragraph 4.2.1 (Actors), the partnership often foresees the joint work of two figures, the company supervisor and the non-profit tutor. The latter supports the beneficiary during the working day, with modalities, frequency and intensity that depend on the needs of the worker and on the duration of the partnership: *"The people inserted must be supported, first in a continuous way and then occasionally, and the NPOs take care of this"* (C5). In addition, monitoring of the insertion progress is carried out, together with targeted support activities in case of difficulties expressed by beneficiaries or colleagues.

Initial phase	Execution phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical and legislative support ▪ Company's mapping and identification of needs ▪ Identification of suitable jobs ▪ Analysis of potential beneficiaries' skills ▪ Selection of candidates ▪ Adaptation of tasks to make them more suitable for the candidate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tutoring ▪ Monitoring ▪ Support in case of difficulty ▪ Adaptation of the project

Table 4.9: Synthesis of activities envisaged in the collaboration

As mentioned at the beginning of the present paragraph, a key activity in the perimeter of partnerships between firms and NPOs for the inclusion of people with disabilities is training, mentioned in all the 17 interviews conducted during the data collection.

Training activities are addressed to company's employees, HR and beneficiaries: the number of Data-driven codes identified for each category is represented in Figure 4.7.

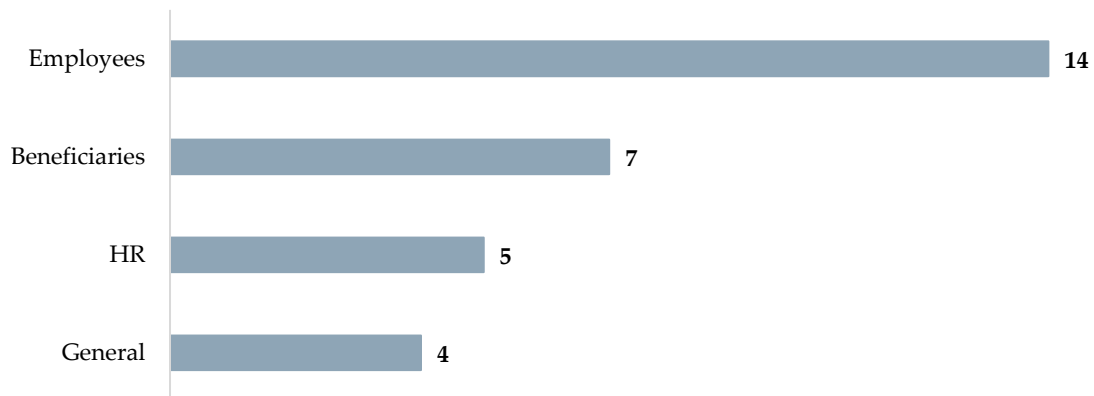


Figure 4.7: Number of data-driven codes “Training”

It is evident from the graph that the codes referring to the training of employees are the most numerous, an element that gives a first signal of the importance of these activities, further confirmed by what emerged during the interviews. In some cases, a first phase of training dedicated to people with disabilities in general was reported, followed by a specific focus that considers the peculiarities of the candidates who will be included in the team; in other cases, instead, only this second type of training is present. The rationale behind the training activities is linked to the presence of prejudices and fears among the future colleagues: *"A part of training and awareness-raising on the subject is always necessary, in order to break down the fears that may exist on the part of colleagues, who do not know if they should have the same attitude or if they should adopt different ways of relating, what they can ask and what not and how to do it"* (C1). The main topic concerns the way to relate: NPOs provide practical indications and good practices to interface with beneficiaries. In particular, the elements emerged are:

- Avoid infantilisation: *"There is often a tendency to relate to people with Down's syndrome as if they were <<perpetual children>>, but they are actually future workers and work colleagues"* (C1);
- Use simple and clear but not condescending language to indicate requests, deadlines and feedback;
- Point out mistakes and giving indications for improvement;
- Avoid an overly intimate and unprofessional relationship.

The objective is therefore to provide the theoretical knowledge and practical tools to replace fears and prejudices with good working practices and appropriate ways of relating, in order to face the path of work inclusion in a conscious and effective way.

A separate category of training for company employees is that dedicated to Human Resources, which was mentioned in only 2 out of 9 case studies. The training in this case is mainly dedicated to the management of the interview: also through simulations, the objective is to learn which modality to adopt (*"For example, for some people it can be better to send the slides with the written questions, for others it is fine the oral interview at a distance or also in presence"* C1), how to formulate the questions and how to react in front of different situations (*"The person can seem aggressive and very direct, the point is to remodel the request, the words to use, small nuances"* C2).

Finally, training is given to beneficiaries who will be included in the labour market. In this case, the issues addressed are different and concern what has been defined *"training to be a worker"* (C3) or *"education to work"* (C1): in particular, the objective is that beneficiaries learn to recognise and express their skills, potential and desires, to move to get to the workplace, to relate with colleagues, to respect timetables, deadlines and tasks to be carried out and so on.

4.2.3. Characteristics: distinctive elements of the project

In addition to the actors involved and the activities envisaged, it is possible to identify other distinctive elements that characterise the partnership and the project in place. During the analysis, these elements were labelled with the theory-driven topic "Characteristics" (described as "other distinctive elements") with the aim of identifying and subsequently systematising and synthesising them.

What emerged from the analysis is the presence of two main topics: location and tasks. It is significant to underline that the analysis of the actors and activities revealed many similarities between the case studies, while with regard to these "other characteristics" several alternatives occurred, forming a more fragmented and diversified panorama.

"Location" precisely refers to how beneficiaries are included in the work team, with particular reference to the place. Although the objective would be inclusion in the company, in the same location where the rest of the team works, this option is not always feasible and there are situations of fragility in which it might not be the most appropriate choice: *"Our objective is always inclusion in the company, because we are for full inclusion, but there are young people for whom it is very difficult and therefore we have always tried to find different opportunities"* (C3).

The alternatives that emerged, listed from the one closest to inclusion in the company to the one furthest away, are the following:

- Work carried out in a specific environment created within the company: *"Within the company a space is built for these activities"* (C6). This solution guarantees the inclusion of the beneficiary in the workplace and all the elements that are part of the "education to be a worker" (e.g., relations with colleagues and adaptation to the workplace), while ensuring a protected and tailor-made environment;
- Work carried out in a dedicated environment outside the company: *"The person is not catapulted into the company, where the chance of success in work would be low because the company contexts are stressful. We start with protected environments, which however are not places to be ghettoised, they are only beginnings, transition centres which facilitate the transition in the company, which is complex"* (C4). The idea is therefore to create ad hoc spaces outside the company context, putting the person at the centre and working to facilitate the transition, where possible, in the company environment;
- Remote work: finally, the last alternative is remote work, of which it was said during the interviews that *"We have seen that for the beneficiaries it is one less constraint: in presence there are noises, different places, which represent a difficulty"* (C1).

As for what concerns location, different trends emerged regarding tasks, mainly related to the characteristics of the beneficiaries. The two trends are:

- Jobs characterised by repetitiveness and therefore not stressful: data entry, secretariat, back office;
- Diversified jobs: logistics positions, mail management, warehouse management and so on, i.e., positions in which the person is more integrated into the company reality and which allow more qualified roles to be proposed to the beneficiary.

Therefore, on the one hand there is a tendency to diversify the tasks proposed, to favour integration in company teams, to offer more qualified and more up-to-date roles, in expanding sectors characterised by the need for technical training (e.g., IT roles). On the other hand, it is recognized the value and the importance of repetitive and non-stressful tasks, and of roles which allow the employment of people whose insertion in a team would be very difficult.

In conclusion, the analysis of the empirical material collected revealed the co-existence of different alternatives in terms of location and tasks, whose suitability depends on the needs and characteristics of the targeted beneficiaries, since they have opposite advantages and disadvantages.

Characteristics	
Location	Tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Firm with the team ▪ Dedicated location inside the firm ▪ Dedicated location outside the firm ▪ Remote work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Repetitive, non-stressful tasks ▪ Job diversification and qualified positions

Table 4.10: Synthesis of characteristics of the project

Finally, in three case studies, respondents pointed out that the partnership had started with a pilot project, characterised by a reduced time horizon and scope; following the success of this first experience, it was then decided jointly by the two partners to include more resources and expand the collaboration.

4.3. A comprehensive framework of Firm-NPO partnerships for inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 describe in detail the findings emerged from the data analysis and provided an exhaustive answer to both research questions, while this paragraph presents the results in order to lead to a general understanding of the phenomenon, highlighting the key concepts and the relationships between them.

The coding, the punctual analysis and finally the drafting of the findings offered the opportunity to reflect in depth on the empirical material found, also in the light of the literature analysis previously performed. The work conduct in the various phases finally led to the elaboration of a graphical representation, considered to be effective as it enables a set of concepts to be collected in a rational manner in order to describe a phenomenon and provides a synthetic but complete and comprehensive vision of it. In particular, the framework that will be described and explored in this paragraph is represented in Figure 4.8.

Before analysing the specific elements, it is important to suggest which are the dimensions through which it is possible to read and interpret the framework, i.e., the "views" supported by the representation.

The first is the temporal dimension; in particular, three macro-phases were identified: *"Before the partnership"*, *"During the partnership"* and *"Downstream of the*

partnership". Although the first and last may seem outside the scope of the present research, they are essential to obtain a complete overview and to answer the research questions. Indeed, the study of the phase preceding the actual partnership is crucial to understand what leads the company and the NPO to the decision to establish a cross-sectoral collaboration for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, what conditions must be present, what reasons lead to the choice and what are the potential impediments. In addition, analysing the effects downstream of the partnership, the evaluation of the impact achieved and of the results are an integral part of the study of the partnership itself. Finally, the phase "*During the partnership*" was further subdivided into "*Initial phase*" and "*Execution phase*". During the initial phase the partners are willing to collaborate, get to know each other, establish the terms of the partnership, the activities and the characteristics of the project. Secondly, during the execution phase, the partners officially and operationally implement the project and work together for the work inclusion of people with disabilities. The decision to segment the "During" phase is rooted in the observation that these two moments are configured differently.

Supporting the temporal view, the framework allows on one hand to visualise and analyse each phase as a whole, and on the other hand to highlight the evolution of elements over time. For example, it is possible to investigate the overall characteristics of the phase "Before the collaboration" and also to examine how barriers change according to the phase in which the partnership is.

The second dimension, or "view", characteristic of the framework is that of the subject. Since the object of the research are partnerships between companies and NPOs aimed at the work inclusion of people with disabilities, it is possible to identify at least 3 relevant actors: the two partners, i.e., the company and the NPO, and the beneficiaries of the projects resulting from the collaboration. In the phase "*During the partnership*" this distinction is minimized because the elements emerged are similar for the two partners, and it was therefore decided to privilege the temporal dimension also from the graphic point of view. However, in the other two phases there are significant differences, whose recognition and distinction is crucial to understand the dynamics of the collaboration.

In addition to the two dimensions described so far, the framework is divided into domains: drivers, barriers and risks, critical success factors, management, activities, characteristics, outcomes and evaluation. They are the most significant aspects for the study of cross-sectoral partnerships for work inclusion and represent a common thread for the entire research: they first emerged as the crucial aspects in the literature analysis of the literature on firm-NPO partnerships, represent the focus of the research questions and then led to the definition of the theory-driven topics used

during the coding activity. In conclusion, they are the key areas necessary to build a complete and in-depth analysis of the topic.

In addition, the framework allows to visualise the intersection of the two dimensions. The result is thus the possibility to understand how each domain (drivers, barriers, management and so on) is declined in each phase of the collaboration and for each of the actors involved.

In conclusion, the framework enables the user to read it at different levels of detail, with different granularities and adopting different perspectives. The decision of the researcher is to present the results following the temporal order, but underlining the links between the phases where relevant. As a final note before addressing the content, it is worth noting that not all the elements reported in the framework were present in all the case studies, but the analysis by theory-driven topic and the comparison between the cases made it possible to focus on shared and common aspects, and to develop a comprehensive overview.

A comprehensive framework to describe firm-NPO partnerships for inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market

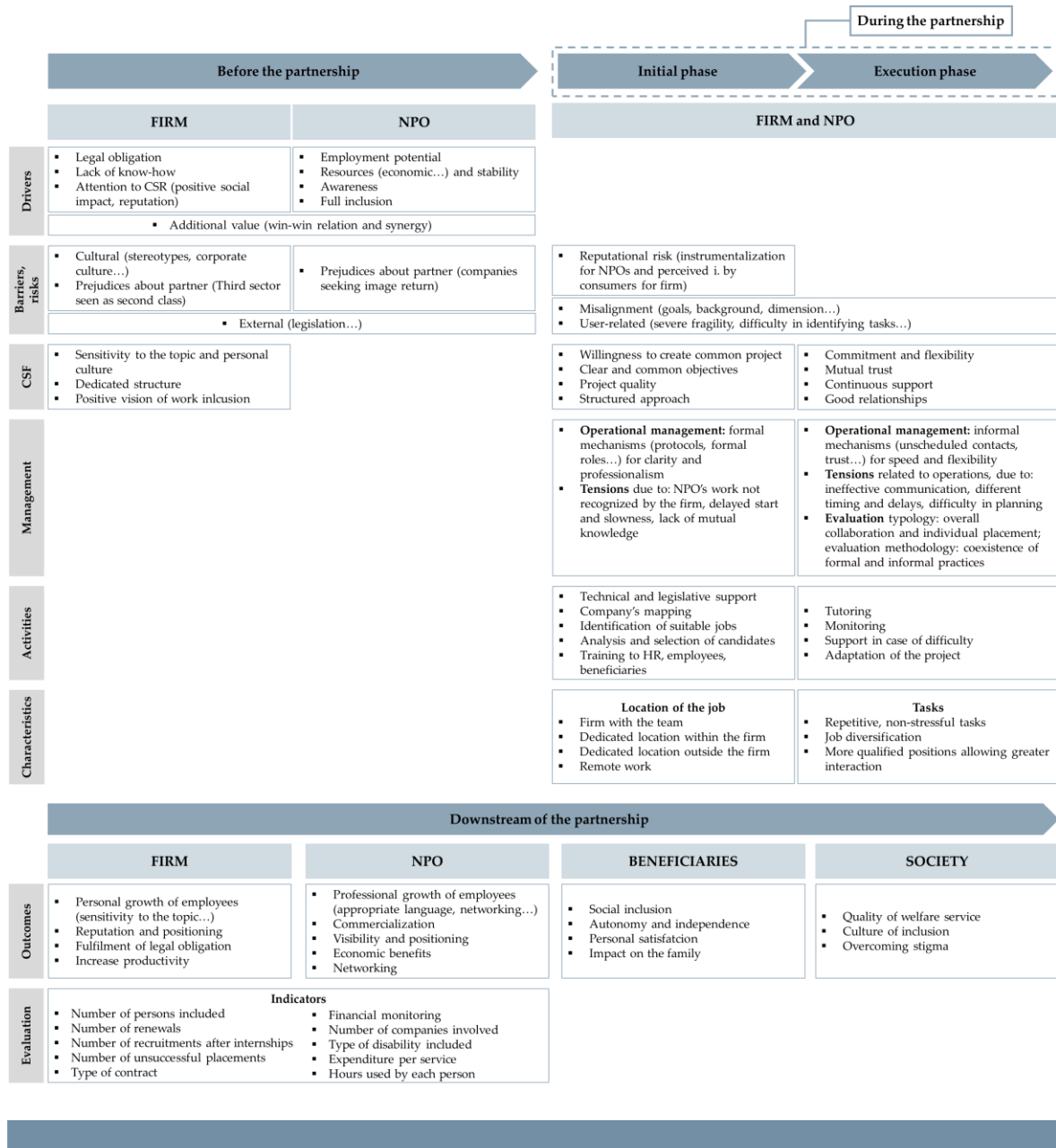


Figure 4.8: A comprehensive framework to describe firm-NPO partnerships for inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market

Before the partnership

In the phase preceding the definition and development of collaboration, the role of drivers is prominent compared to the other domains under analysis. Regardless of which organization makes the first concrete move towards the other to initiate the collaboration (a process explained in Paragraph 4.1.4 which often sees the NPO as protagonist), the drivers represent the starting point of the partnership. As evident from the framework, they are substantially different for companies and NPOs, who however can have in common the belief that they can create added value through the synergies that arise from collaboration. The desire to implement a partnership for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, therefore, is the result of the convergence of various drivers, arising from the individual and distinct processes of the two partners.

The non-profit organisation needs the recruitment potential of the private sector, it needs to develop medium-term projects (up to a few years) in order to guarantee stability to the beneficiaries and it works to increase both its own visibility and collective awareness regarding the work inclusion of people with disabilities.

As far as the company is concerned, the need to comply with the legal obligation has been defined as the "*driver zero*", since it often represents the first push towards the idea of a partnership, on which, however, other considerations are founded. Among them there are the lack of skills on one hand, and on the other the desire to achieve full, real and effective inclusion for both the beneficiaries and the company itself. These drivers must be interpreted together, since their coexistence and the links between them give rise to the concrete will to develop a partnership with a non-profit organisation, and help overcome barriers and obstacles.

Indeed, although the drivers are numerous and strong, the framework shows that barriers are also present in the phase preceding the collaboration: among them, prejudices towards the partner and cultural barriers stand out. Prejudices translate into the third sector being seen as "*second class*" by the corporate world, and vice versa in companies perceived by NPOs as only looking for a return in terms of image and reputation. Secondly, cultural barriers include stereotypes and prejudices towards disability and the fear of the organisational complexity of partnerships for labour inclusion.

Finally, it was possible to identify critical success factors, i.e., elements which, if present even before the partnership, favour its implementation and success by helping to overcome obstacles. It is not surprising, and as well indicative of the

consistency of the results, that the critical success factors identified in this phase are partially specular to the barriers. For example, if a barrier is prejudice and stereotypes towards disability, among CSFs there is the sensitivity of employees to the issue; among barriers there is the fear of organisational complexity, which can be mitigated by the company's vision of work inclusion as an opportunity and not only an obligation, which is another element present in CSFs.

In conclusion, analysing this phase is firstly crucial to focus on the convergence between the reasons of the company and of the NPO that eventually lead to the decision to develop a partnership for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, and secondly to understand what other elements they relate to, namely the barriers and the critical success factors.

During the partnership

As one might expect, during the actual partnership the distinction between corporate and NPO elements becomes less clearly defined. For example, the barriers encountered correspond and are mainly related to two elements: the differences between the for-profit and not-for-profit worlds and the difficulties related to beneficiaries. The differences between for-profit and NPOs are summarised by the term "misalignment", which refers, among other things, to the objectives, background, but also to the significant difference in size between the two organisations. "User-related" barriers, on the other hand, include the difficulties concerning the beneficiaries themselves, ranging from personality traits that make inclusion difficult from a relational point of view to the difficulty of finding suitable jobs that are both valuable to the company and to the beneficiary.

While the barriers are the same in the initial phase and in the implementation phase, the partners' approach, the success factors counteracting the obstacles and the management practices implemented are different.

In the initial phase, the critical success factors are the presence of clear and shared objectives, the adoption of a structured approach to planning and monitoring activities, defining tasks and so on, and the design of a quality project. These are structural elements, limiting the divergences between the company and the NPO resulting from misalignment by laying a solid foundation for collaboration and building common ground in a formal and official way. In the execution phase, on the other hand, it is the human and relational factor that plays a central role in overcoming obstacles between NPOs and companies and achieving success. Here, potential misalignment between the two organisations is addressed and overcome

through commitment, mutual trust, establishment and maintenance of good interpersonal relationships and ongoing support.

This difference between a formal approach first and an informal one in a subsequent phase is reflected also in the results regarding management. In the initial phase, management is based on protocols, formal role definitions and rules, the key objectives of which are to establish a professional and clear collaboration. During implementation, on the other hand, informal management is favoured, consisting of frequent and unscheduled contacts, trust and meetings to exchange ideas and perceptions, as they promote speed and flexibility. What emerges is that the first phase is functional to the second: once the formal aspects have been defined and agreed upon, it is possible to leverage on the flexibility and speed necessary for the operational management of the collaboration.

Reading the framework allows for a further step: it enables to recognize how the critical success factors are translated into the choices made within the perimeter of the partnership or, in other words, how CSFs are realized in the configuration of the project, i.e., in the choices regarding activities, location, tasks.

Firstly, the continuous support for the company takes the form of the tutoring and monitoring activities carried out by the NPO and the on-site presence of the supervisor, who intervenes promptly both on operational issues and by facilitating the relations within the team.

The training carried out in the initial phase by the NPO, on the other hand, is the key activity to overcome cultural barriers. In the framework, cultural barriers have been positioned "*Before the partnership*" because they are present in the company before the implementation of the collaboration and can prevent the establishment of a partnership, but when the partnership is developed, they continue to be present and can obstacle the success. Essentially, training activities allow to increase awareness about the issue, to shorten the distance between the knowledge and visions of the company and the NPO and finally to put into practice a crucial success factor, namely the development of a quality project.

In addition to the planning of specific and enriching activities, as training, the quality of the project is achieved by taking the most suitable choices in terms of location and tasks. In this respect, the framework illustrates the different alternatives (e.g., work in the company or work in a dedicated area, non-stressful and repetitive tasks or more diversified and qualified positions). There is not a "best option" in absolute terms, but rather success is realised through knowing and

taking into account the range of possible alternatives, and through the ability to construct a project suited to the situation and consistent with the needs and characteristics of the beneficiaries, and vice versa to select beneficiaries suited to the characteristics of the project.

Finally, during the implementation phase, the evaluation of the partnership is carried out in order to monitor the progress of the partnership. Evaluation was the most complex area to analyse, as it is more fragmented and case-dependent than the others. Despite this, recurring elements emerged regarding both the type and the method of evaluation. In particular, it was possible to identify two types of evaluation: the first oriented towards examining the partnership as a whole and the progress of the relationship with the partner, and the second focused on the progress of the individual beneficiary's integration. With regard to the modalities, the coexistence of formal and informal practices was highlighted: formal moments include meetings on pre-established dates and at project milestones, and see the involvement of management; informal moments, on the other hand, do not have a regular cadence nor a predefined schedule, and are oriented towards confrontation and the exchange of opinions. The two methods coexist because they have different advantages and aims: on the one hand, it is necessary that collaboration foresees well-defined moments with the involvement of management, to judge and monitor the overall partnership from a strategic point of view; on the other hand, it is fundamental to have tools that guarantee the interception of possible criticalities and the definition of necessary actions in a timely and rapid manner and with a high level of flexibility. In both cases, however, the practices described are almost always qualitative.

Downstream of the partnership

The last phase represented in the framework is the downstream phase of the partnership, which allows to highlight its effects. In addition to the "firm" and "NPO", already extensively considered in the previous two phases, two crucial actors are added: beneficiaries and society. Since having a social impact is precisely the main objective of NPOs and one of the drivers that lead them to develop this type of collaboration, it would not be possible to draw conclusions about the success of the partnership without taking this aspect into consideration.

A comprehensive and detailed description of the effects emerged from the analysis has been provided in Paragraph 4.1.5 subdivided in micro, meso and macro level. At this point, it is important to underline that the outcomes were presented using

the dimensions "level of analysis" (micro, meso, macro) and "subject" (NPOs, firms, beneficiaries) to ensure a simple and clear presentation; however, they are interconnected, and each outcome can have effects also on others. An example of this interconnection is that the increased engagement of employees and the development of new skills and networking capacity (micro-outcome on NPOs' employees) have an effect also at meso level, because they allow the whole NPO to work more efficiently, to expand its network of firms and to develop new partnerships.

In the previous phase, the evaluation practices implemented to monitor the progress were introduced; conversely, downstream of the partnership it is crucial to evaluate the actual impact of the partnership. In this regard, however, no standard procedures, models or ad-hoc dashboards of indicators emerged. On the contrary, research has shown that the impacts of collaboration are rarely measured quantitatively. The lack of expertise and experience in data collection and information management, the lack of standards, and the difficult quantifiability and measurability of many aspects are just some of the barriers that hinder impact evaluation.

Even when a quantitative measurement is performed (the indicators illustrated by the organisations in the case studies are reported in the framework), the lack of structured and multi-dimensional dashboards able to capture the overall impact of collaboration is evident. Indeed, there are volume measures (e.g., Number of beneficiaries and Number of renewals) and other indicators (e.g., Type of contract, Type of disability included) that allow the organisation to investigate precise and punctual aspects, without, however, building an overall vision, from a strategic point of view and capable of directing possible improvement actions.

5 Discussion

The aim of the present Chapter is to offer an interpretation of the results previously described in Chapter 4. The first part of the Chapter is dedicated to a comparison with the literature about partnerships between NPOs and companies, which allows to highlight the aspects in common and the elements specifically related to the field of work inclusion of people with disabilities. The focus on the similar aspects and on the “*inclusion-specific*” elements becomes the means to identify and highlight the role of inclusion-specific elements, their impact on the partnership and the relationships between the different aspects, which represent the content of the second part of the Chapter.

5.1. Discussion

The analysis of the empirical data, the description of the findings and the consequent development of the framework, which are the subject of Chapter 4, led to the development of a reasonably complete overview of partnerships between companies and NPOs aimed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market and allowed to provide a comprehensive answer to the research questions.

Firstly, it was possible to explain why and how companies and NPOs develop this kind of partnerships: what are the drivers and, conversely, the barriers and obstacles encountered, what are the factors that determine the success of the collaboration, how the partnership is managed from the operational point of view, how tensions are addressed and resolved and how the evaluation is performed, and finally what are the effects (Section 4.1). In addition, Section 4.2 highlighted the characteristics of the projects, illustrating who the actors involved are and what role they play, what activities are envisaged within the perimeter of the partnership, and how the work of the beneficiaries is organised, i.e., what are the possible locations for the work and what are the commonly chosen tasks.

In conclusion, the presentation of the findings and the elaboration of the framework allowed to systematize the salient elements of partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, providing an answer to the research questions and filling the knowledge gap that emerged after the analysis of the literature and explained in detail in Paragraph 2.1.

At this point, it is possible to use the knowledge already present in the literature related to partnerships between for-profit and non-profit organizations to compare and interpret the results emerged in the specific case of work inclusion of people with disabilities. Indeed, it is crucial to understand what the common elements are, to identify the differences and the aspects specifically related to the work inclusion of persons with disabilities, in order to recognize the links between the elements and the role of each on the partnership.

Drivers

The resource-based view (RBV) was introduced in Paragraph 1.1.1 as a perspective to explain the rationale behind the development of cross-sectoral partnerships and the specific case of alliances between companies and NPOs. The RBV focuses on the importance of the organisation's internal resources to achieve competitive advantage, and is particularly appropriate in this context because at the basis of these partnerships are the willingness and need to access resources otherwise unavailable (Das and Teng 2000). The fact that partnerships are a means of acquiring

critical resources is confirmed in the specific case of the work inclusion of people with disabilities. To use the classification described by Gray and Stites (2013), it is possible to identify for both the company and the NPO legitimacy-oriented reasons to partner (e.g., image and reputation enhancement), competency-oriented (including the need to access knowledge and skills regarding work inclusion), resource-oriented (e.g., access to network or financial resources) and finally society-oriented (which means driven by the interest in addressing a socially relevant challenge).

Table 5.1 lists the drivers emerged from the literature review and those found during the empirical research, maintaining the subdivision between NPOs and companies and allowing for a comparison between the general case (partnerships between NPOs and companies) and the specific case of partnerships for the work inclusion of people with disabilities. It can be observed that the drivers that emerged from the literature analysis were almost entirely confirmed by the empirical research, although with some remarkable differences.

	Drivers	Literature	Research
NPO	Need to acquire physical and monetary resources	X	X
	Improvement of operations, managerial skills, efficiency	X	X
	Improvement of public awareness about the social issue	X	X
	Name recognition and credibility	X	X
	Employment potential (volume and quality)		X
	Project' stability		X
	Full inclusion		X
Firm	Reputation improvement and protection from bad publicity	X	
	Attention to CSR for positive social impact	X	X
	Attention to CSR for reputation	X	X
	Legitimacy with civil society and governments	X	
	Need of greater knowledge of the social issue	X	X

	Delegating the management of elements outside company's expertise		X
	Need to fulfil the legal obligation		X
Both	Win-win relation	X	X
	Co-creation of additional value (synergies)	X	X

Table 5.1: Comparison between drivers emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

The first difference concerns the priority of the drivers, or in other words the contribution of each driver to the final decision to implement the collaboration.

For example, the search for physical and monetary resources, although indicated in the case studies as a driver for NPOs, is not one of the main reasons which lead to partner, as some authors suggest (Hoffman 2009, Hartman and Dhanda 2018). This result is consistent with the type of partnerships in place: Mironska and Zaborek (2019) indicate that since NPOs seek mostly physical and monetary resources, the number of "from time to time" partnerships is increasing, because they are characterised by the exchange of this type of resources. In the case of work inclusion of people with disabilities, on the other hand, the most relevant drivers for NPOs seem to be higher employment potential, stability and full inclusion: in fact, the partnerships under analysis are not "from time to time" but are closer to what Austin (2000) defined as "integrative stage", characterized by a high level of engagement, core competencies provided by each partner, deep trust between the two and strategic value for the organization, in addition to the primary role of contributing to social improvement.

In addition, as far as companies are concerned it is useful to focus on the reputation improvement, which in literature is expressed in two different ways. On one hand, there is the pure search for image improvement and protection from bad publicity (Schiller and Almong-Bar 2013, Simpson et al. 2011, Hartman and Dhanda 2018). On the other hand, companies want to have a positive impact through Corporate Social Responsibility actions, while meeting consumers' expectations and improving their own image: "*Capitalize on the positive reputational benefits of taking on some of the responsibility for social problems*" (Seitanidi, 2008 p. 51). In light of this distinction, it is possible to observe that in partnerships for the work inclusion of

people with disabilities only the second case was found, and that in any case it played a decisive role in the choice of companies to implement these collaborations.

In order to understand which drivers played a fundamental role in the choice, it is necessary to focus on the second difference that emerged between the literature on partnerships between companies and NPOs and the results of this research on work inclusion: that is, the drivers that emerged from the empirical research and were not present in the literature, called emerging drivers or “inclusion-specific” drivers.

Among the emerging drivers, the legal obligation that companies have to fulfil is highlighted. Explained in detail in Paragraph 1.3.2 and then presented as “*driver zero*” in the findings (Paragraph 4.1.1 and 4.3), the legal obligation is a crucial aspect of these collaborations and is a peculiarity specifically linked to the field of work inclusion of people with disabilities, combined with the lack of skills in the company and therefore the need to have this know-how available. Although the search for “*greater knowledge of the social issue*” and “*knowledge of certain market segments*” are among the drivers found in the literature, the lack of skills is considered an emerging driver because the resources sought by the company go significantly beyond what is described in the literature. In fact, the company is driven to develop a partnership with an NPO to manage all aspects outside the company's expertise, ranging from technical, regulatory and administrative issues to the actual integration from a relational and operational point of view, in daily work and in case of extraordinary needs.

The other inclusion-specific drivers are related to NPOs. They include the employment potential offered by the private sector, the need to implement stable projects in order to guarantee security and continuity to the people in charge, and finally the possibility to achieve full labour inclusion, which means not circumscribed to the third sector. These drivers have been deepened in Paragraph 4.1.1, and they are fundamental for NPOs as they are closely linked to their ability to deliver and fulfil their core mission.

It is thus evident that although there is a broad correspondence between the drivers found in the literature and those found in the empirical research, it is the emerging drivers, namely those specifically linked to the field of inclusion (“inclusion-specific”), that play a fundamental role in the development and implementation of partnerships.

Barriers

Using the same method as for the drivers, Table 5.2 presents the list of barriers, obstacles and risks that the two partners may encounter in the development and implementation of partnerships, allowing a comparison between what is described in the literature and what emerged within the scope of this research.

Barriers and risks	Literature	Research
Misalignment (goals, dimension, communication)	X	X
Prejudices and bias toward the partner	X	X
Reputational risk for NPO	X	
Reputational risk for firm		X
Legitimacy for NPO	X	
Power imbalance	X	
Stereotypes and prejudices about disability		X
Corporate culture		X
Fear of organizational complexity		X
External (legislation)		X
User-related (personality, difficulty in identifying activities...)		X

Table 5.2: Comparison between barriers emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

Among the barriers absent in the specific case of work inclusion of people with disabilities are the risk to the legitimacy of the NPO and power imbalance. While there was no evidence about the risk in terms of legitimacy, widely discussed by Herlin (2013), it was acknowledged that there can be power imbalance between the company and the NPO. The reason why it is not included as a risk for the NPO is that the power imbalance is described as a circumstance limited to the initial phase, and later largely balanced by the fact that companies recognise the value and need the role played by the NPO in the collaboration. In conclusion, it does not lead to

misconduct or illegitimate purposes (Eid and Sabella 2014), it does not unbalance the decision-making process (Schiller and Almog-Bar 2013) nor does it hinder the performance and success of the collaboration.

Turning instead to the emerging barriers, just as in the case of the drivers, it appears that they are "inclusion-specific", which means that they are all closely linked to the field of labour inclusion. Stereotypes towards disability, corporate culture, fear of organisational complexity are the strongest barriers and the ones that most put at risk both the birth and the success of the collaboration. In addition to the so-called "cultural barriers", there are difficulties linked to the beneficiaries. Especially in the case of cognitive disabilities, in fact, it is necessary to consider that there are real difficulties linked to severe fragilities, to some personality traits that can make the insertion more delicate from a relational point of view and so forth.

In conclusion, even a quick glance at Table 5.2 shows that the correspondence with the literature is lower than with the drivers and that the differences are twofold, with several barriers absent and others emerging. These have been introduced in the present paragraph in relation to the literature review, but the implications for the partnership will be discussed in detail in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3.

Selection process and strategies

The literature review highlighted two aspects related to the partner selection process: the strategies for partner selection, described by Feilhauer and Hahn (2021), and the assessment process of potential partners, presented by Austin and Seitanidi (2012).

Regarding the latter, in no case study was there evidence of selection based on specific criteria, risk assessment or use of structured processes. This result is in line with the considerations of Austin and Seitanidi (2012), who emphasised the crucial role of the selection process and nonetheless the fact that it is often underestimated by organisations.

In terms of strategy, however, it was found that companies prefer to partner with an already trusted NPO: they adopt the "network-reinforcing" strategy (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021). In contrast, NPOs tend to seek out new firms to partner with, adopting a network-broadening strategy (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021).

These results are in line with the needs of the two organisations. On the one hand, NPOs aim to include an increasing number of beneficiaries, and therefore need to search new partners to expand and support their activities. Moreover, the network

broadening strategy ensures less dependence on existing partners (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021, quoting Baum et al. 2000; Holmberg and Cummings 2009), which can positively affect for instance the risk of power imbalance.

For firms, however, it is often more convenient to exploit the advantages offered by the network-reinforcing strategy: it minimises the resources in terms of money and time needed for collaboration, which are exacerbated by the lack of familiarity between the two organisations ("*constraint driven drivers*", Failher and Hahn 2021), and the risk of opportunistic behaviour ("*risk driven drivers*", Failher and Hahn 2021). In addition, continuing to work with the same organisation helps to maintain mutual trust, alignment of goals, values and visions, and effective communication mechanisms built over time, which are critical success factors that are not always easy to achieve.

Critical success factors

As in the case of the drivers, the correspondence between the critical success factors described in the literature and those that emerged from the analysis is very high and refers to alignment (Austin 2000, Mironska and Zaborek 2019, Austin and Seitanidi 2012), trust (Mironska and Zaborek 2019, Barroso-Mendez et al. 2016), personal relationships (Austin 2000), commitment (Mironska and Zaborek 2019, Sanzo et al. 2015), commitment (Mironska and Zaborek 2019) and so on.

Among the emerging factors, the design of a high-quality project emerges in particular. While it is generally agreed that partnerships are "*Created, nurtured and extended by people*" (Austin 2000, p.82), research has highlighted that it is not possible to rely on the human factor without simultaneously adopting a structured approach and developing a solid, effective and quality project. The description of the framework (Section 4.3) highlighted the way in which critical success factors are translated into the choices made during the collaboration, and in particular emphasised that the quality of the project depends on the choices made regarding the configuration. Developing a quality project means designing activities, choosing inclusion modes and tasks in a conscious, structured and coherent way.

In addition to the new success factors, it is significant to observe how the common elements found in the literature and found in the research are declined in the case of labour inclusion of people with disabilities.

Critical Success Factors	Literature	Research
Alignment (values, mission, vision, objectives...)	X	X
Mutual trust	X	X
Personal relationships and characteristics	X	X
Commitment	X	X
Efficient and frequent communication	X	X
Clear definition of roles and responsibilities	X	X
Clear mutual expectations	X	X
Project quality and structured approach		X
Continuous support		X
Flexibility		X

Table 5.3: Comparison between CSFs emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

In the literature, the concept of "Alignment" has slightly different names and nuances, but all definitions consider the similarity of goals, values and vision between the two partners. In the case of work inclusion of people with disabilities, this is particularly reflected in the common understanding of work inclusion not only as an obligation to be fulfilled, but also as a potential opportunity. Starting from this shared assumption, in fact, facilitates the development of other critical success factors: for example, partners are more likely to engage in collaboration if they consider it valuable for the organisation and not just an incumbency. Similarity of visions and values, therefore, is fundamental for creating a bond between partners and helps to address the barriers and obstacles that inevitably arise in a partnership. Personal characteristics, on the other hand, refer to the sensitivity to the issue of work inclusion and to the involvement and commitment in this sense, especially if through their role and leadership they can involve and influence the rest of the organisation.

Finally, it is also possible to observe how these CSFs reflect and are specular to the barriers. This consideration, already mentioned in the description of the Framework (Section 4.3), is not surprising and indicates the consistency of the results. The most evident example is precisely that of Alignment: if misalignment in terms of goals, values, modes of communication and so on is widely recognised as a barrier

(Rondinelli and London 2003, Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021), the same inverted concept has a positive impact on collaboration, as explained above, and thus contributes to its success. Another case in which the mirroring of barriers and CSF can be observed is related to the sensitivity of employees towards the issue, which contrasts with the obstacles caused by a stereotyped and prejudiced view of disability.

Outcomes

Investigating outcomes is fundamental to complete the study of partnerships between companies and NPOs for work inclusion of disabled people. As stated in the findings (Chapter 4), outcomes are numerous and impact different actors at different levels. Indeed, partnerships certainly have an effect on the organisations involved and their employees, but at the same time it is crucial to focus on the results for the targets of the projects, who are people with disabilities included. Given this complexity and in order to capture all the relevant aspects, the structure adopted in this research reflects the one proposed by Austin and Seitanidi (2012). The two authors identify the effects at three levels (micro, meso and macro), in two *loci of value creation* (within the collaboration and external to it) and for different actors (company, NPO, beneficiaries, society). Moreover, for the NPO and the firm it becomes possible to understand what kind of value is generated among the four types identified by Austin and Seitanidi (2012): association, transferred, interactional and synergistic. Since the two authors provide a comprehensive overview of partnerships between firms and NPOs, which as introduced in Section 1.2.2 are of various kinds in terms of objectives, social issues addressed, agreements, configuration and so on, it was decided not to report outcomes strictly related to out-of-scope topics (e.g., those related to environmental impact improvement) and to focus the comparison on a subset of outcomes potentially compatible with the partnerships under consideration.

First, it is possible to observe outcomes at the meso level for NPOs and companies.

A quick observation of Table 5.4 and Table 5.5 shows that the research led to the identification of two emerging outcomes, one for NPOs and one for companies. Firstly, NPOs thanks to the collaboration with firms can offer a higher-quality services and have the possibility to expand the number of integrated beneficiaries, with a positive effect also in terms of volume of activity. On the other hand, companies fulfil the legal obligation, being compliant with the number of reserved quotas which they must dedicate to people with disabilities. This consideration allows to observe how the emerging outcomes, which means those not present in the literature on partnerships between firms and NPOs, are not only "*inclusion-specific*" but are the realization of the emerging drivers that contributed to the

development of the partnership. Finally, both NPOs and firms receive outcomes which belong to all the four typologies of value: association, transferred, interactional and synergistic.

	Outcomes for NPO at meso level	Literature	Research
Association	Credibility and visibility	X	X
	Increased public awareness of the social issue	X	X
	Increase in support for organizational mission	X	
Transferred	Financial support in cash or in kind	X	X
	Increase of cash donations of money, land, material from partner or others due to visibility	X	
	Additional financial support	X	
	Volunteer capital	X	
Interactional	Opportunities for learning	X	X
	Development of unique capabilities	X	
	Access to networks	X	X
	Technical expertise	X	X
	Increased ability to change behaviour	X	
	Improved relations with profit sector	X	
	Exposure to different organizational culture	X	X
Synergistic	Market intelligence	X	X
	Opportunities for innovation	X	
	Opportunities for improvement of processes	X	X
	Development of new partnerships	X	X
	Increase in performance	X	X
	Sharing leadership	X	
	Increased long-term value potential	X	
	Exert more political power within sector and society	X	
Increased quality and volume of the offered services		X	

Table 5.4: Comparison between outcomes for NPO at meso level emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

	Outcomes for firm at meso level	Literature	Research
Association	Credibility and brand reputation and image	X	X
	Increased sales	X	X
	Legitimacy	X	X
	Increased usage of products/services	X	
	Improved media exposure	X	X
	Public support	X	
	Increased stakeholder loyalty	X	
Transferred	Acquire market intelligence	X	
	Competitiveness	X	X
	Second-generation customers	X	
	Strengthened CFP	X	
	Fulfilment of the legal obligation		X
Interactional	Access to networks	X	X
	Technical expertise	X	X
	Improved community and government relations	X	
	Decreased long- and short-term costs	X	
	Exposure to different organizational culture	X	X
	Exert more political power within non-profit sector	X	
	Increased potential meeting government's and society's priorities	X	
	Improved accountability	X	
Synergistic	Product and process innovation and learning	X	
	Increased risk management skills	X	
	Opportunities for innovation and for improvement of processes	X	X
	Development of unique capabilities	X	X
	Adoption of new management practices	X	

Table 5.5: Comparison between outcomes for firm at meso level emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

At micro level, there are no emerging outcomes for NPOs employees; for firms, instead, the development of greater sensitivity towards the issue was identified, which allows to overcome initial prejudices and fears. This is an important result of the partnership: indeed, prejudices and fears are one of the major barriers present in the initial phases, and it is revealed that they are overcome after the implementation of the partnership (see Paragraph 4.1.2). Moreover, it is interesting to note how the same outcome is declined in different ways for the two partners: for example, "New strengthened managerial skills" for NPOs results in the development of specific language and improvement of networking skills, while for firms it means the ability to be adaptive and flexible.

	Outcomes for NPO at micro level	Literature	Research
Instrumental	New strengthened managerial skills	X	X
	Leadership opportunities	X	
	Technical and sector knowledge	X	X
	Broadened perspective	X	
	Psychological: new friendships	X	

Table 5.6: Comparison between outcomes for NPO at micro level emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

	Outcomes for firm at micro level	Literature	Research
Instrumental	New strengthened managerial skills	X	X
	Leadership opportunities	X	
	Technical and sector knowledge	X	
	Broadened perspective	X	X
Psychological	New friendships	X	
	Psychic satisfaction (self-actualization)	X	
	Greater attention to the topic overcoming initial fears		X

Table 5.7: Comparison between outcomes for firm at micro level emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

Outcomes for Beneficiaries	Literature	Research
Improved well-being	X	X
Improved social inclusion	X	X
Improved independence and responsibility	X	X
Reduced asymmetry between consumers and business	X	
Increased disposable income	X	X
Increased self-esteem		X

Table 5.8: Comparison between outcomes for beneficiaries emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

Outcomes related to the beneficiaries allow to concretely show that work is a crucial tool for social inclusion, with positive effects on the personal sphere of an individual. Therefore, they demonstrate what explained in Paragraph 1.3.2: the fulfilment of the right to work contributes to the realization of a person's human dignity and that the fulfilment of one right fully or partially depends on the fulfilment of others (UNFPA 2005). For instance, being able to work allows to earn a fair salary, which consequently enable to reach a proper standard of living and to fully participate in society.

Finally, at macro level Table 5.9 shows the presence of several outcomes, but two aspects in particular have been highlighted and detailed in Paragraph 4.1.5: integration allows to free up public resources and thus improving the quality of the welfare service, and cross-sectoral partnerships for work inclusion of disabled people contribute to disseminate the culture of inclusion, helping to raise awareness in society and to overcome the stigma and taboo of frailty and disability.

Outcomes for Society and Systemic change	Literature	Research
Reduced social costs	X	X
Increased capacity of society to create social well-being	X	X
Improved social standards	X	
Enabling societies to take charge of their own needs, interacting with government and jointly designing welfare provision	X	

Reduced social costs through interaction effects of social problems	X	
Improves cross-sector relations	X	
Improved well-being	X	
Improved social inclusion	X	X
Improved independence and responsibility	X	X
Dissemination and awareness rise		X

Table 5.9: Comparison between outcomes at macro level emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

Tensions management

The analysis of tension management focused on two aspects: the reasons leading to conflict and the strategies implemented to overcome it.

In line with what has been suggested by Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury (2021), substantial differences were identified regarding the reasons that cause tensions in the initial phase and during the formal course of the collaboration. In the first phase, problems are related for instance to divergent expectations, long and complex internal processes for partnership approval, and thus are substantially attributable to misalignment between the company and the NPO and to the lack of knowledge between them (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021). Tensions during the formal process, on the other hand, are more frequent and are operational in nature, just as Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury (2021) point out for the general case of partnerships between firms and NPOs.

Besides the considerations about the causes of tensions and strategies to resolve them, the first finding to highlight concerns the presence of tensions themselves: indeed, while previous studies suggest that incompatibility of missions, values and organisational characteristics between firms and NPOs exacerbate conflicts (Sanzo et al. 2015), no evidence of serious tensions between partners emerged from the case studies analysed. This considerations is deeply addressed in Paragraph 5.2, where it is explained in relation to and through the other “inclusion-specific” elements emerged from the analysis and the discussion.

Evaluation practices

The evidence found in this research regarding evaluation agrees with Feilhauer and Hahn's (2021) observation that although theory suggests the importance of implementing formal practices to carry out a rigorous evaluation, this consideration is not reflected in the evidence observed in reality. The two authors talk about the

assessment of the overall partnership, whereas in the case of the work inclusion of people with disabilities a differentiation emerged between "assessment of the partnership as a whole" and "assessment of the success/failure of the individual inclusion". The distinction between these two typologies was introduced and explained in Paragraph 4.1.6, but will not be highlighted here, as the reflections are the same for both typologies.

The theory proposed by the two authors is that there are several barriers to formalisation, including the resources needed in terms of money, time and personal effort, and the complexity of defining suitable practices, but that partners are willing to use additional resources to overcome them if the drivers to formalisation are present and sufficiently strong (Feilhauer and Hahn 2021).

In the case of work inclusion of people with disabilities, the researcher's hypothesis is that the drivers for formalisation are not so significantly present as to justify the necessary commitment to overcome the barriers: for example, the company does not have strong internal pressures to justify the investment, because the firm's main objective is to fulfil the legal obligation. Simultaneously, however, it appeared that having a structured approach in project management is important to limit misalignment and possible divergences between partners, building a solid basis for collaboration.

The coexistence of these conditions (barriers for formalization and absence of strong drivers for overcoming them, while necessity to adopt a structured approach), results in the formalisation of only some of the dimensions indicated by Feilhauer and Hahn (2021). If the two authors suggested the formalization of timing, baseline, type of assessment, governance and reporting, the case studies revealed the implementation of formal practices in terms of governance of evaluation. Indeed, during the collection of primary data, it emerged that formal and informal practices are present in all the case studies under analysis. Analysing the modalities in more detail, formal practices consist of meetings and gatherings planned in advance and at regular intervals (formal timing) and involve the involvement of management and are carried out centrally (formal governance). In summary, formalisation is initiated for dimensions characterised by a lower level of complexity, which require less effort and fewer additional resources.

In line with this consideration, there is no evidence of systematic measurements or implementation of predefined KPIs. With regard to the definition of KPIs and the conduct of a data-driven assessment, in fact, both the literature and the present research revealed several problems, which are listed in Table 5.10.

Measurement issues	Literature	Research
Quantification problem	X	X
Attribution problem	X	
Assessment problem	X	
Standardization problem	X	X
Misalignment problem	X	
Lack of skills and expertise		X
Lack of data		X
Seen as non-strategical		X

Table 5.10: Comparison between measurement issues emerged from the literature review and from the analysis

Problems with measurement include difficulties intrinsically linked to the scope of application (e.g., many aspects are difficult to quantify), lack of knowledge and skills on the part of those involved, lack of standards and research. As explained in Paragraph 4.3, dedicated to the description of the Framework, the result is that only few organisations use evaluation supported by quantitative measures. Furthermore, even in these cases, there were no structured panels capable of capturing the overall performance of the partnership with a view to improvement and decision-making, but rather the use of stand-alone indicators capable of measuring specific and circumscribed aspects.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in almost all the areas analysed it is possible to observe a high correspondence between what emerged in the literature and what was found in the analysis, but with some significant differences and with the addition of "inclusion-specific" elements.

Starting from the differences and the inclusion-specific elements especially regarding the barriers, which revealed to be the most divergent topic, the aim of the next two paragraphs is to examine the reasons behind the differences with the literature and to investigate their impact on collaboration as a whole, providing a comprehensive interpretation of the elements that emerged and complete the answer to the research questions.

5.2. Absent barriers: the need for mutual resources and the impact of drivers on partnership success

One of the first elements to emerge from the comparison with the literature on partnerships between firms and NPOs are the barriers and risks widely discussed in previous researches, though not reflected in the analysis conducted in this context.

For example, surprisingly no NPO mentioned reputational risk, thus contradicting the hypothesis that non-profits can be harmed by partnerships with large corporations; e.g., according to Sanzo et al. (2015) the visibility of a wealthy partner could lead to a decrease in donations and scepticism. Indeed, the issue of reputation was mentioned only by corporations, related to the fear that these initiatives could be misinterpreted by consumers who might perceive them as instrumental.

In the same direction, the findings disproved the theories proposed by some authors (including Herlin 2013) and confirmed the interpretation of authors as Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) and Wymer and Samu (2009) regarding legitimacy: according to what was analysed in the case studies, collaboration with companies is not negative for the public approval of NPOs, but rather is an added value, as it allows to increase the credibility of the NPO and improve its reputation, thus leading them to get in touch with potential new partners and finally to increase the number of beneficiaries they can work with.

The result regarding legitimacy should be read together with another barrier present in the literature, namely power imbalance. According to several authors (among them Herlin 2013) power imbalance is a critical aspect for partnerships between NPOs and companies: the power of the latter can lead to the misuse of resources, can reduce the autonomy of the non-profit partner and significantly diminish its power in decision-making processes, leading to an imbalance that can compromise the success of the collaboration. However, the findings of this research agree with another interpretation, promoted by Harman and Dhanda (2018): the two authors argue that the roots of power imbalance must be sought in the bias that attributes greater importance to economic resources than to others; therefore, their study suggests that power imbalance is not a problem for NPOs, as long as their contribution is perceived and recognized as valuable by companies.

This is precisely the case of partnerships between companies and NPOs for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, whose drivers are closely linked to the mutual need of the two organisations involved to access resources possessed by the partner and which would otherwise not be available, an element

recognised as a key antecedent of value creation: "*The more partners mobilise distinctive competencies, the greater the potential for value creation*" (Austin and Seitanidi 2012, p. 730).

In fact, in addition to the drivers also present in the literature, which for NPOs include the need to acquire physical and monetary resources (Hoffman 2009; Hartman and Dhanda 2018), to improve their operations, managerial skills and efficiency (Sanzo et al. 2018), to increase public awareness regarding a specific issue and to enlarge their network (Mirońska and Zaborek 2019, quoting Runte' et al. 2009), while for companies include reputation (Schiller and Almog-Bar 2013; Simpson et al. 2011; Hartman and Dhanda 2018) and attention to CSR, there are other emerging drivers, defined "inclusion-specific". For NPOs they are higher employment potential, project's stability and full inclusion, while for companies they are mainly the need to comply with the legal obligation and the lack of adequate knowledge and competences to fulfil the requirement.

Hence, it becomes possible to highlight the importance of the need for mutual resources and its impact on the partnership: partners need specific resources linked to the field of labour insertion, resources whose value they recognise and which they can access by working together, and these needs translate into "inclusion-specific" drivers in addition to the "general drivers" also found in the literature. The recognition of the value of the resources sought and the consequent presence of these drivers contribute to reduce the power imbalance that could be created in a relationship of this kind, especially taking into account the financial resources possessed by the company, the decision-making role in the implementation of projects and the dimensions that are very often unbalanced in favour of the corporate world. In short, these conditions make it possible to establish a balanced and virtuous relationship, which allows the NPO not to be jeopardized.

The researcher's interpretation is thus in accord with Harman and Dhanda's (2018) theory: since companies recognize the value of the resources brought by NPOs, as suggested by the drivers found, the barriers related to legitimacy and power imbalance are not present.

At this point, another consideration can be added to this conclusion, which is related to the barriers described in literature and also found in the context of this research.

First of all, it is important to highlight which are the barriers recognised in the literature and also identified during the analysis of the empirical data. Among them are certainly the prejudices towards the partner organisation (see for example Arenas et al. 2009, Ahmadsimab and Chowdhury 2021, Hartman and Dhanda 2018, Sanzo et al. 2015), which emerge for both NPOs and companies. NPOs complain

about the difficulty of being taken seriously, of being perceived as organisations made up of professionals capable of generating and bringing value and not only as "good people", but NPOs are also influenced by prejudices towards companies, as they perceive them as driven exclusively by the desire to obtain a return in terms of reputation and image.

Another common point are the differences between the for-profit and not-for-profit worlds, both in terms of mission, objectives and values, as well as in terms of structural and organizational elements, such as size, hierarchy and procedures, and finally in the lack of a common background. They are summarised by the term "misalignment", which is also found in the case of partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities: reference is often made to the fact that the two organisations "speak different languages" and the findings have shown on several occasions that the dimensional element is not marginal (see for example the hierarchy and organisational complexity of the company, as well as the financial imbalance between the two).

The difference with respect to the literature lies in the impact that these barriers have on the partnership: several authors have in fact theorized that misalignment results in a greater potential for conflict (Sanzo et al. 2015) and can lead to misunderstandings, mismatches of power and mistrust (Austin and Seitanidi 2012). In the case of partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities, it is true that misalignment is a present and shared barrier, and it is also true that the greatest number of reasons for tension between the two partners can be traced back to it, yet they do not result in particularly conflictual situations. In fact, the causes of tensions include the slowness of the companies due to the more rigid hierarchy and the complex and not always clear procedures, the difficulty in communicating between two entities that have different forms, objectives and backgrounds, and so on, but in all the case studies analysed, it was found that disagreements exceeding the normal divergences between any two organisations working closely together never arose, and the strategies put into practice to resolve and overcome these divergences were limited to clarifying expectations and operating methods, communicating openly to find common ground and other similar strategies.

In the light of this evidence, therefore, the researcher's hypothesis is that in this case the recognition of the value of resources does not lead to the absence of barriers as in the case of legitimacy and power imbalance, but rather allows for the minimization of the negative effect they may have on collaboration.

For the sake of completeness, it is important to emphasise that the nature of the research and the decisions made during the definition of the research design play

an important role in the findings: the case studies analysed are successful partnerships, and it is therefore not surprising that there was no evidence of conflictual situations which were a significant impediment or which led to the termination of the collaboration. However, this element must be integrated with other considerations: firstly, during data collection, respondents often emphasised the absence not only of blocking conflicts, but also of ordinary and resolvable tensions; secondly, although each case study was focused on a specific project and the answers were related to it, in some cases respondents offered more general reflections, which are the result of their wide experience, and which help to generalise the conclusions drawn; finally, it is essential to take into account and give due value to the specificities of the scope.

According to the researcher, there are also elements that facilitate and reinforce the phenomenon just explained: although all critical success factors by definition play a fundamental role in the success of the partnership, there are some that are particularly linked to the reciprocal need for resources, its declination in the drivers and the impact on the barriers and success of the collaboration. In particular, the hypothesis suggested by this research is that facilitating factors are those present prior to the actual collaboration, while reinforcing factors come into play during the course of the partnership.

Facilitating factors include the sensitivity to the issue and the personal culture of the company's employees (especially if they have relevant positions within the team, because as explained in the findings this allows for cascading into the rest of the organisation) and the vision of work inclusion as a positive element for the whole organisation and not only as an obligation to be respected, while reinforcing factors include good personal relationships, having clear and shared goals and the ability to communicate clearly.

These elements have a direct effect on the success of the partnership in the first place, as they help to dampen misalignment between NPOs and their corporate counterparts in terms of values and perspectives. Moreover, already having a sensitivity towards the work inclusion of people with disabilities and recognising the positive value facilitate the recognition of the value of the resources brought by NPOs, and thus contribute to trigger the virtuous mechanism explained above.

In conclusion, the interpretation offered by this research is that companies are motivated by the need to satisfy the regulatory constraint and lack of expertise in the field, while NPOs are driven by the need for greater potential for inclusion and stability for their projects. Each partner can receive these resources from the other and recognises their value: this dynamic triggers virtuous mechanisms, which lead on the one hand to the absence of certain barriers (reputational risk, legitimacy and

power imbalance) and on the other hand to the minimization of the negative impact of other barriers and risks (misalignment, prejudices) both in the initial phase and during the actual course of the collaboration, allowing for satisfactory results for both partners and beneficiaries.

Thus, based on a comparison with the literature, a link between the emerging drivers and the absent barriers could be identified, as well as the role played by the critical success factors and the impact on the characteristics of the partnerships.

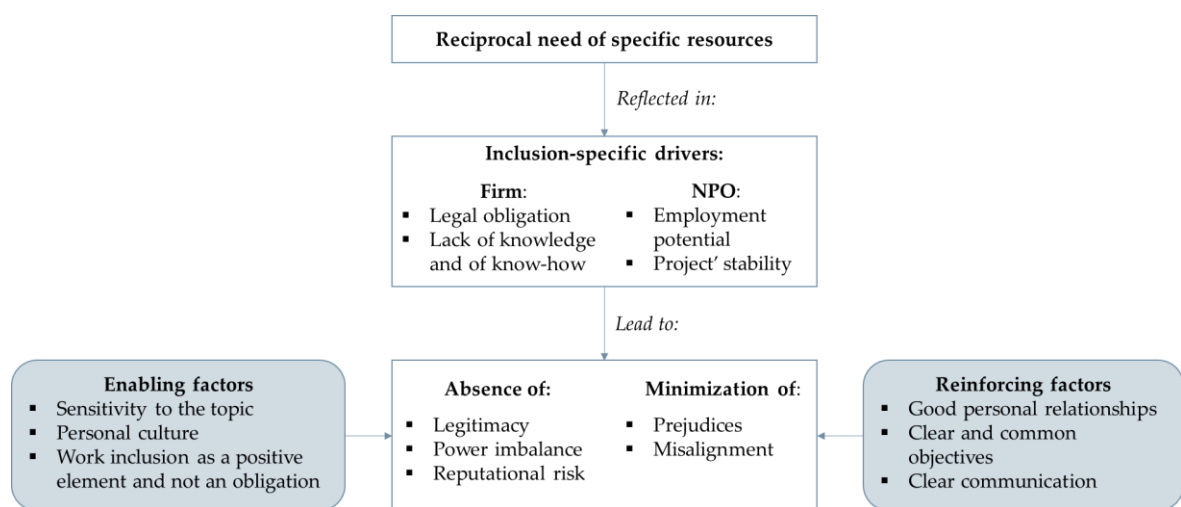


Figure 5.1: Reciprocal need of specific resources' impact on the partnership, visual representation

5.3. Emerging barriers and cultural element in partnerships for work inclusion of people with disabilities

In the previous paragraph the starting point were the barriers widely discussed in the literature, yet not found in the case studies analysed. It was explained that, in the case of work inclusion of people with disabilities, both the company and the NPO have a mutual need for resources owned by the partner and whose value they recognise. This leads to a virtuous mechanism that prevents the emergence of some barriers and limits the potential negative impact of others. In this section, however, the starting point is the reverse. In other words, the emerging barriers are the starting point for reflecting on and investigating the reasons why these obstacles arise, how they decline and their impact on collaboration. It was revealed, indeed,

that those same peculiarities of work inclusion of people with disabilities also lead to the emergence of "inclusion-specific" barriers.

The first barrier takes the form of prejudice and stereotypes about disability: although widespread, they are particularly pervasive and deep-rooted in the case of mental or cognitive disabilities, as repeatedly stressed by the NPOs involved in the case studies and whose projects target people with this type of disability. Companies often believe that potential beneficiaries cannot be "real workers" nor employees capable of bringing value to the organization, and are influenced by stereotyped images of disability: emblematic in this sense are the cases in which NPOs reported being confronted with potential corporate partners who thought of people on the autism spectrum as "*Genius or nutcases*" (C1).

In some cases, the labour inclusion of people with disabilities for firms is part of a broader thinking, in which the social responsibility of the company becomes awareness of living within an ecosystem in which all parts are interdependent and which stems from the desire to recognise the value of all the elements present. Therefore, the work inclusion of people with disabilities can become an element, a piece that is part of a broader sustainability strategy that also includes, for example, the implementation of circular economy principles. However, this is a rare situation: in most cases, addressing the issue of work inclusion for the company means having to review the concept of productivity, changing the pace of work and the way relationships are established within teams, putting the person and his or her characteristics back at the centre of work. In other words, it means to carry out a long and complex cultural change ("*The company usually looks for someone at its own pace and not vice versa, it is a very deep cultural change*", C4), which can be an obstacle to the development of these partnerships or to their effectiveness.

Even when there are well-established Diversity and Inclusion policies within the company, together with the presence of people who, for personal reasons, already have a developed sensitivity towards this issue, it is possible that a further barrier is present: the fear of organisational complexity. Developing and implementing a partnership for work inclusion seems to be incompatible with the daily work of the company, too demanding in terms of resources and not capable, on the other hand, of generating value.

Although these barriers concern different aspects, they are equally linked to ideas, perceptions, habits and assumptions at personal and organisational level: for this reason, they have been defined "Cultural barriers".

Cultural barriers also exacerbate and amplify the extent of those barriers defined as "User-related", which are the actual operational (e.g., identifying suitable tasks

within the company) and relational difficulties due to the characteristics and traits of potential beneficiaries. The result is that these barriers can translate into the inability of companies to comply with the legal obligation (as explained in Paragraph 1.3.3, 29% of the positions reserved for people with disabilities are currently still vacant) or into an attempt to hire only people with physical disabilities and a reluctance to develop projects oriented also to people with other disabilities. Even considering the cases where these barriers are not blocking the company, they complicate the relationship with the NPO and the development of collaboration, as the relationship is polluted by wrong expectations, prejudices and fears. In addition to the potential negative impact of cultural barriers, the fact that they were mentioned in all the case studies is an indication of their pervasiveness.

Despite this, the projects analysed represent examples of successful partnerships, which means that it is possible to overcome or at least limit the impact of cultural barriers. The identification of inclusion-specific barriers together with this consideration therefore led the researcher to broaden the view of the "cultural element" also in other aspects of the partnership. In other words, it made it possible to recognise the activities, actions and choices commonly present in the case studies that have a link with the "cultural element", and subsequently it was possible to grasp and make explicit the relationships between these elements, the effects of which are realised and visible in the outcomes at the micro, meso and macro level.

In summary, cultural barriers are pervasive and deep, and among other things exacerbate user-related difficulties, but there are choices and actions which, taken within the perimeter of the partnership, contribute to reducing them and limiting their impact, leading to the development of successful partnerships.

Among the elements that, if present, contribute to minimising the effect of cultural barriers are certainly some of the critical success factors described in Paragraph 4.1.3. While all critical success factors are obviously important for developing and maintaining effective collaboration, there are some that play a particularly important role in this context.

With regard to the phase preceding the actual collaboration, once again the awareness about the issue and the personal culture of the company's employees come into play. They reduce and mitigate the presence and weight of stereotypes and prejudices, facilitate team involvement and contribute to creating an environment that is well-disposed to and open to change and inclusion. This factor, although important for initiating and facilitating the relationship, must be combined with other elements. As highlighted in the findings (Chapter 4), people within the company change, and therefore the human factor cannot be the main element of collaboration, as it would not provide the necessary stability to the NPO.

Secondly, it was previously explained that the individual characteristics of company staff are not always sufficient to overcome other important barriers, such as the fear of organisational complexity. In summary, in addition to factors at individual level, CSFs at organisational level are also necessary: among them, a widespread view within the company of work inclusion as a potential opportunity for enrichment and not just an obligation and the presence of well-established corporate Diversity and Inclusion policies, accompanied by a dedicated structure within the organisation.

In addition to some CSFs, it is intuitive to recognise that the choices made regarding the configuration of the partnership play a crucial role in addressing and overcoming the cultural barriers: decisions regarding the project activities, the role of the actors involved, the tasks assigned to the beneficiaries and so on; in other words, all the choices made within the perimeter of the project configuration have an impact on the way cultural barriers arise during the partnership.

Among the elements that are part of the "configuration" and thus answer the second research question, the one that distinguish most in relation to cultural barriers is the training provided by the NPO to the company. As explained in Paragraph 4.2.2, it is a fundamental element among the activities envisaged by the partnership and is declined in different ways according to the recipients. Training to colleagues aims at giving indications on how to relate and behave in situations that may commonly occur in a work context, both general guidelines and indications specifically referred to the beneficiaries who will be included in the team. The reason why this type of training is conducted is linked to the presence of prejudices and fears among future colleagues: *"A part of training and awareness-raising on the issue is always necessary, in order to break down the fears that may exist on the part of colleagues, who do not know if they should have the same attitude or if they should adopt different ways of relating, what they can ask and what not and how to do it"* (C1), and therefore training activities are crucial because they provide theoretical knowledge and practical tools to overcome fears, stereotypes and prejudices. In addition to training the team in which the beneficiary is included, there are often activities aimed at the whole company: indeed, in order to act on the corporate culture, it is not enough to involve the team in close contact with work inclusion, but a systemic work towards the organisation as a whole is necessary.

Not in all the case studies analysed were both types of training present, and often there were slight differences in methods or content. However, the analysis has made it possible to develop and focus on a comprehensive overview, which thus allows to clarify and summarise the link between training and cultural barriers: team training provides the tools to overcome prejudices and stereotypes, and the

involvement of the entire organisation contributes to forming and disseminating a more inclusive corporate culture.

With regard to the "actors" of the partnership, it is essential to recognise the important role of the corporate and non-profit tutor. The corporate tutor, formally recognised and identified within the team, in the context of cultural barriers contributes to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, and is an internal point of reference for employees in the event of doubts or difficulties. The not-for-profit tutor, on the other hand, does not only support the beneficiary in carrying out the work, as one might think, but also facilitates relations with the whole team and intervenes in case of operational and relational needs. The presence of the tutor in the company makes it possible to follow up on the training activities described above, giving the opportunity to work with a view to continuous improvement and helping to overcome fears and prejudices.

However, the relationship between the presence of the tutor and cultural barriers is not only limited to this, but is also linked to the barrier related to organisational complexity, which has so far been dealt with only marginally. The fact that there is a dedicated person who facilitates the relationship, who can continuously transfer the necessary skills and intervene promptly in case of need, is a tool to concretize the critical success factor called "continuous support" and to establish and maintain a relationship of mutual trust, which is fundamental to fully express and realise the benefits. Continuous support (operational and relational, on a day-to-day basis and in extraordinary cases) in turn helps companies to understand that, although commitment, energy and resources in terms of time, personnel and so on are certainly necessary, the effort required to achieve full inclusion is not unsustainable and is not incompatible with the work of the company, but can indeed bring value. In conclusion, therefore, the presence of the non-profit organisation in itself helps to overcome the fear of organisational complexity, because the company is not alone in addressing the issue and can count on a trained and willing partner, and the physical and daily presence of a tutor in the company is one of the ways in which this manifests itself.

The assumption underlying this consideration is that the actions and choices described so far succeed in overcoming "inclusion-specific" cultural barriers and limiting their negative impact on the success of collaboration. The positive effects are realised in the effects of the partnership, and are indeed evident from the analysis of the outcomes at the micro, meso and macro levels.

At the micro level, a personal growth of the company's employees was highlighted: the training activities, the work with the non-profit tutor and the daily collaboration actually lead to the development of a greater attention towards the topic, to the

overcoming of prejudices and stereotypes. Thus, greater awareness replaces unrealistic expectations and initial fears, and the benefits also translate into greater flexibility and adaptability from a professional point of view.

In addition, at meso level one of the benefits is the diffusion of a more inclusive culture within the company: putting the employee at the centre, paying attention to his or her needs and to relational aspects are indeed fundamental elements for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities, but they are elements that in general contribute to the formation of a serene working environment for all employees. In addition to this, one of the effects is that the company becomes aware that partnerships and projects of this kind are feasible, and therefore organisational complexity is not a disabling barrier. Finally, training activities for the team and the entire company and the dissemination of this type of partnership can contribute to the dissemination and spread of the culture of inclusion.

In summary, the analysis of the empirical material collected during the present research led to the identification of a series of "inclusion-specific" barriers. They are mainly related to what has been called the "cultural element" and include prejudice and stereotypes towards disability, the need for a change in corporate culture and fear of organisational complexity. Recognize these barriers allowed to investigate how the cultural element declines in all aspects of the collaboration and what effect it has on the partnership. In addition, it brought to light all the elements, common to almost all the case studies, that contribute to overcoming these barriers and implementing successful collaboration. In addition to a number of critical success factors (sensitivity to the issue, ongoing support, mutual trust, etc.), it is the choices made regarding the configuration of the partnership that emerge. For example, training of employees helps to break down stereotypes, prejudices and fears, providing knowledge and tools useful for the management of successful inclusion; the presence of the tutor facilitates relations, allows good practices to be consolidated, to intervene promptly in case of difficulties and to demonstrate that the complexity of an inclusion project is not an insurmountable obstacle. Finally, the role and importance of these elements can be seen in the outcomes of the collaboration, at the micro (e.g., employees learn), meso (e.g., corporate culture) and macro (e.g., dissemination of the culture of inclusion) levels.

In conclusion, the starting point of this Paragraph were the emerging and inclusion-specific barriers. Finding that they are all cultural in nature allowed to investigate the "cultural element" in all aspects of the partnership, and finally to highlight how choices in configuration can play a role in mitigating or overcoming cultural barriers.

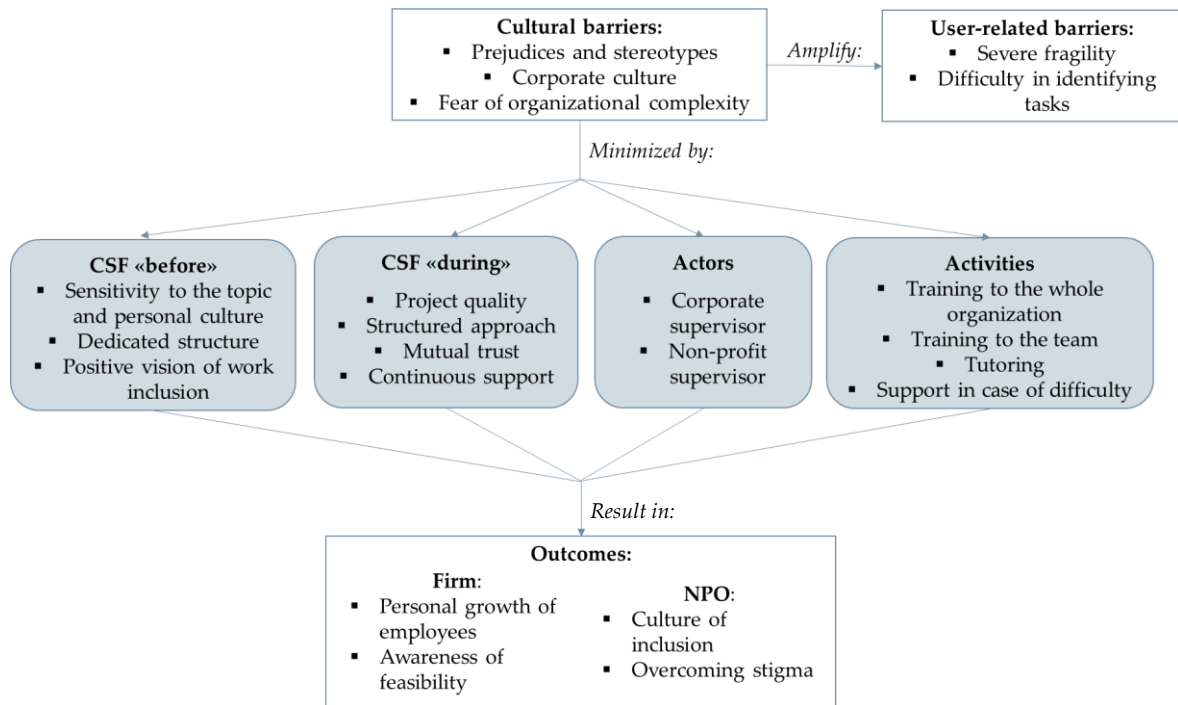


Figure 5.2: The cultural element in the partnerships, visual representation

6 Conclusion and future developments

This final Chapter is aimed to sum up the overall study conducted in this work. In particular, Paragraph 6.1 is dedicated to highlight the main contributions of the research, both theoretical and practical. Finally, Paragraph 6.2 discusses the study limitations, whose recognition is the opportunity to suggest and trigger further development and improvement.

6.1 Theoretical and practical implications

Cross-sectoral partnerships are widely recognized as a useful tool to combine different skills and knowledge in a synergistic way to address complex problems, and there is a considerable amount of literature that investigates the case of partnerships between NPOs and firms. The analysis of the literature itself, therefore, represents the first theoretical contribution of the study, as it allowed for a broad and systematic assessment of the existing knowledge on the topic of partnerships between companies and NPOs.

At the same time, the issue of work inclusion of people with disabilities, in addition to being recognised as relevant at national and international level, has peculiar features that make it particularly suitable for the implementation of these partnerships. Despite these promising premises, the analysis of the literature revealed a knowledge gap regarding partnerships between companies and NPOs for the work inclusion of people with disabilities. The main theoretical contribution of this research, therefore, is to contribute to filling the gap that has existed so far, by gathering and systematizing extensive knowledge on the subject, which is of particular value as it uses the real and practical experience of organizations that currently have these types of partnerships in place.

First of all, the framework presented in Section 3.3 collects and presents in a comprehensive way the elements that emerged from the research and stands as a tool capable of providing an exhaustive representation of partnerships between companies and NPOs aimed at the work inclusion of people with disabilities. In fact, it allows to investigate all the most relevant areas: drivers, barriers, critical success factors, outcomes, managerial practices. Moreover, it allows us to observe how they are declined in the different phases of the partnership and for each of the actors involved, finally arriving at a general representation and understanding of the phenomenon.

Secondly, this study made it possible to identify similarities with the general case of partnerships between companies and NPOs and to focus on the peculiarities of the field of work inclusion of persons with disabilities, in light of which it was possible to interpret the results. If the first theoretical contribution is of a descriptive nature, then the second is linked to the possibility of investigating the impact of the peculiarities of the field of work inclusion on the functioning of the partnership, grasping the links and relationships between the different aspects.

In addition to the theoretical implications related to the ability to bridge the gap in the literature, it is possible to highlight the practical contribution of the research. In spite of the relevance of the topic, which is present in the most current national and

international agendas, and the presence of successful cases, there are still many companies in Italy that do not comply with the legal obligation, or that perceive work inclusion exclusively as a task that takes resources away from the company without bringing any value. This study collects a number of successful experiences, contributing to highlight the feasibility and the positive impact of these collaborations on the partners.

Finally, the research has identified what the critical success factors are and how they are concretely translated into the choices made within the partnership perimeter. By illustrating the activities that are carried out, the role of each actor and the alternatives present in terms of location and tasks assigned to the beneficiaries, it was possible to develop and construct a comprehensive overview of shared and effective practices. They thus become a fundamental tool for directing possible future projects, and for assessing the ones in place with a view to continuous improvement.

6.2 Limitations and future development

Although the previous paragraph has highlighted the relevance and contribution of the study from both a theoretical and practical perspective, the research is characterized by some limitations, the recognition of which often becomes an opportunity to suggest and trigger possible future developments.

The limitations are mainly related to the methodology. As explained in Chapter 3, interviews were considered the most suitable method to achieve the research objectives. They allowed to gain a comprehensive understanding of a complex phenomenon, which requires to analyze multi-faceted opinions and to get meaningful insights. While the subjective nature of the interviews makes it possible to capture nuances and perceptions and thus to perform a detailed and in-depth analysis, it is also necessary to recognize its disadvantages.

Firstly, respondents may, even unconsciously, be inclined to give a positive view of collaboration, and may not objectively judge negative aspects or possible points of improvement. Furthermore, it is possible that the answers are influenced by some biases, including selective memory (remembering or not remembering events that happened in the past), telescoping (recalling events occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time) or exaggeration (the act of representing outcomes or embellishing events as more significant than is actually suggested from other data). Although the use of secondary sources may help to minimize the problem, it cannot overcome this limitation due to the lack of certain information in secondary sources: for instance, social reports and webinars are useful to clarify the configuration and

activities of the partnership, but not to investigate possible tensions and strategies implemented to overcome them. Another crucial element in this regard is the choice to adopt multiple case studies; these are also a partial solution, as they may help to identify possible discrepancies between different case studies but not within the same case.

Future developments, therefore, should go in the direction of interviewing a larger number of people within the same organization. This element would be relevant especially in the for-profit world, since interviewing more people would not only allow to overcome the limit related to subjectivity and bias, but also to analyze different points of view, perceptions and experiences, in order to widen the perspective of the study and deepen some aspects. Companies, in fact, are typically more complex systems: interviewing employees belonging to different organizational units and with different roles would allow, for example, to have visibility on the strategic role of the partnership, to deepen the role of HR and also the operational and daily experience of the team directly involved. The first possible future development, therefore, is represented by the opportunity to deepen the for-profit perspective by interviewing a greater number of people within the company.

Finally, another possible future development concerns the issue of impact evaluation. During the course of the research, it was pointed out that companies and NPOs currently use practices to assess and monitor the performance, but these practices, whether formal or informal, are usually qualitative. Even when indicators are used, they are not aligned with the organization' strategy and are not used to facilitate decision-making for continuous improvement, but rather give isolated and specific indications. While research has thus revealed that impact evaluation through the use of indicators and structured panels of KPIs is a field that is not yet mature, on several occasions NPOs have stressed that it is an area of strong interest and that systematic and structured measurement of impacts to monitor, control and evaluate projects is the direction in which they are moving. Some problems are intrinsically linked to the type of activity, considering for instance the difficulties in terms of quantification and measurability of some outcomes, but at the same time a lack of research, studies and standards on the subject were highlighted. Given the relevance of the topic, the interest of organizations and the lack of knowledge on the subject, the impact assessment of projects aimed at the work inclusion of people with disabilities born from partnerships between companies and NPOs appears to be a field to be investigated and deepened in possible future research, both from a strategic (identifying which indicators are relevant, building a panel aligned with the strategy and useful to all actors, understanding how it can be used to improve collaboration) and operational point of view (tools, knowledge and skills to ensure the availability of data and enable its collection).

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A Appendix A

Text of the interview with non-profit

Hereafter is the translation from Italian of the interview carried out with non-profit organisations during the collection of empirical data.

Configuration

1. Can you briefly describe the key aspects of the partnership, e.g., who are the actors involved, how does it work and what are the objectives?

Drivers

2. What do you think are the reasons behind the decision to form a partnership with a for-profit company (1) and how was the partner organisation selected (2)?

Barriers, challenges and risks

3. In your opinion, what were and what are the main barriers and challenges encountered during all phases of the partnership, from development to actual implementation?
4. Do you think that the partnership with a for-profit company may represent a risk for the legitimacy (i.e., public approval of an organisation and its activities) of the non-profit organisation, or do you think it represents an added value in this sense? Why?
5. Do you perceive a difference in power (one party more influential or stronger than the other) between for-profit and not-for-profit in collaboration? If yes, what is the reason for this and what effect does it have?

Critical success factors

6. In your opinion, what are the factors and elements that have determined and determine the success of this partnership?

Outcomes

7. In your opinion, what are the effects of the partnership on your organisation, e.g., increased visibility, financial support, gaining technical expertise, etc.?

8. Moving on to the "micro" level, i.e., at the level of the individual, in your opinion, what have been the effects of the partnership on the employees of the organisation, e.g., new knowledge, improvement of skills, etc.?
9. So far, we have talked about the effects of the partnership within the organisation, what do you think are the effects of the partnership on the people with disabilities involved in the project?
10. In addition to the benefits for the individuals with disabilities involved, do you think that a partnership of this kind also has positive effects on society? I mean for example the reduction of social costs or the increase of the capacity to create social well-being.
11. Have actions been planned to monitor activities and evaluate the effects/impacts of the partnership?
12. If yes, how were they carried out? Measuring e.g., number of beneficiaries, investment, etc.
13. If not, why? For example, lack of interest in measurement, lack of data, difficulty in quantifying outcomes and so on.

Management

14. Does the partnership foresee moments of "joint" evaluation of the collaboration, i.e., carried out together by the two partners? Are they defined in a structured way or do they occur in an unstructured/informal way between partners?
15. If evaluations are carried out in a structured way, what practices/tools are used?
16. (If evaluations are carried out in a structured way) Have the tools/targets/methods used been defined together with the partner company, or have they been proposed unilaterally by one of the two actors?
17. Are there dedicated internal moments and predefined methods for evaluating the good functioning of the partnership which do not involve the partner company? Are they formally defined or do they occur informally among employees?
18. With regard to the actual running of the partnership, do your organisation and the partner company communicate and work more using formal mechanisms (e.g., well-defined rules and procedures) or informal mechanisms (trust, personal relationship)?
19. Were there tensions and conflicts in the initial stage of the partnership? What were they?
20. What strategies were put in place to overcome tensions and conflicts?
21. Were there tensions and conflicts during the formal partnership? What were they?
22. What strategies have been put in place to overcome tensions and conflicts?

B Appendix B

Text of the interview with firms

Hereafter is the translation from Italian of the interview carried out with firms during the collection of empirical data.

Configuration

1. Can you briefly describe the key aspects of the partnership, e.g., who are the actors involved, how does it work and what are the objectives?

Drivers

2. What do you think are the reasons behind the decision to form a partnership with a non-profit organisation (1) and how was the partner organisation selected (2)?

Barriers, challenges and risks

3. In your opinion, what were and what are the major barriers and challenges encountered during all phases of the partnership, from development to actual implementation?
4. Do you perceive a difference in power (one party more influential or stronger than the other) between for-profit and not-for-profit in the partnership? If so, what do you think is the reason for this and what effect does it have?

Critical success factors

5. In your opinion, what are the factors and elements that have determined and determine the success of this partnership?

Outcomes

6. In your opinion, what are the effects of the partnership on your organisation, e.g., increased visibility, financial support, gaining technical expertise, etc.?
7. Moving on to the "micro" level, i.e., at the level of the individual, in your opinion, what have been the effects of the partnership on the employees of the organisation, e.g., new knowledge, improvement of skills, etc.?

8. So far, we have talked about the effects of the partnership within the organisation, what do you think are the effects of the partnership on the people with disabilities involved in the project?
9. In addition to the benefits for the individuals with disabilities involved, do you think that a partnership of this kind also has positive effects on society? I mean for example the reduction of social costs or the increase of the capacity to create social well-being.
10. Have actions been planned to monitor activities and evaluate the effects/impacts of the partnership?
11. If yes, how were they carried out? Measuring e.g., number of beneficiaries, investment, etc.
12. If not, why? For example, lack of interest in measurement, lack of data, difficulty in quantifying outcomes and so on.

Management

13. Does the partnership foresee moments of "joint" evaluation of the collaboration, i.e., carried out together by the two partners? Are they defined in a structured way or do they occur in an unstructured/informal way between partners?
14. If evaluations are carried out in a structured way, what are the practices/tools used?
15. (If evaluations are carried out in a structured way) Have the tools/targets/methods used been defined together with the partner company, or have they been proposed unilaterally by one of the two actors?
16. Are there dedicated internal moments and predefined methods for evaluating the good functioning of the partnership which do not involve the partner company? Are they formally defined or do they occur informally among employees?
17. With regard to the actual running of the partnership, do your organisation and the partner company communicate and work more using formal mechanisms (e.g., well-defined rules and procedures) or informal mechanisms (trust, personal relationship)?
18. Were there tensions and conflicts in the initial stage of the partnership? What were they?
19. What strategies were put in place to overcome tensions and conflicts?
20. Were there tensions and conflicts during the formal partnership? What were they?
21. What strategies have been put in place to overcome tensions and conflicts?

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