

Collaborating on the Edge of Failure: Frame Alignment Across Multiple Interaction Arenas in Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest challenges of multi-stakeholder partnerships lies in forging a shared understanding and obtaining and sustaining commitment among parties representing different interests and goals. While previous studies have emphasised the importance of developing shared frames for enabling collaboration and collective action through frame alignment, scant attention has been paid to how stakeholder representatives can attain commitment from their constituents “back home” to the frames negotiated on their behalf. Our longitudinal process study explores how participants in the German Partnership for Sustainable Textiles successfully confronted the challenge of aligning frames across multiple interaction arenas, highlighting how failing to tackle this “two-table-problem” can risk partnership collapse. Our process model captures how back-and-forth interactions enabled the stretching of shared frames across interaction arenas, thereby propelling the partnership from near-collapse to deepened commitments. While stretching frames heightens the risk of frame break, our analysis shows how such iterative ongoing efforts are essential for deepening commitments and advancing collaboration. We thus contribute to framing theory by highlighting how frame alignment can be achieved across multiple interaction arenas by “collaborating on the edge of failure”. We further contribute to scholarship on multi-party collaboration by unpacking the multi-table negotiation dynamics that help explain collaborative outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs¹) are forms of inter-organisational collaboration that enable companies to engage voluntarily with competitors and stakeholders in collectively addressing challenges too complex and wide-ranging for any single entity to tackle alone (Doh, Tashman, & Benischke, 2019; Gray & Purdy, 2018). MSPs are inherently difficult to constitute and sustain, however, on account of the often conflicting agendas of the parties involved (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Indeed, companies often only participate in MSPs and engage in collective action as a result of external pressures, including pressures arising in the aftermath of reputation-harming events such as the 2013 Rana Plaza catastrophe in Bangladesh (Reinecke & Donaghey,

¹ MSPs are defined as “private governance mechanisms involving corporations, civil society organizations, and sometimes other actors, such as governments, academia, or unions” (Mena & Palazzo, 2012: 528). Other labels used to describe inter-organisational collaboration include “cross-sector partnerships” (XSPs), “multi-stakeholder initiatives” (MSIs), and “public-private partnerships” (PPPs) (see Koschmann et al. (2012)).

2015; Schuessler, Lohmeyer, & Ashwin, 2023). Key barriers to successful collaboration identified in previous studies (Margerum & Robinson, 2016) include collaborative inertia (Agranoff, 2012), ambiguity of aims (Turcotte & Pasquero, 2001; Zuzul, 2019), and power disparities among participating organisations (Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2022; Purdy, 2012). These factors frequently lead companies to water down their initial commitments, to engage only symbolically with partnerships, or even to disengage from them completely once public pressure has waned.

In view of these barriers and pitfalls, a pressing task for researchers and practitioners is to identify ways in which diverse parties can negotiate and maintain a shared understanding of which joint commitments are feasible. Scholars taking up this task have found interactional framing theory especially useful for gaining insights into “how parties negotiate meaning in interactions” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 156; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2015; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021). By co-constructing collective interpretations through repeated interactions, it is argued, parties can attain the common ground needed for effective collaboration (Alvarez & Sachs, 2021; Ferraro & Beunza, 2018). Put simply, this is because interactions over time can foster “frame alignment” by affording opportunities for diverse parties to converge sufficiently to achieve “at least a minimal level of agreement about what action to take” (Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013: 1032; Donnellon, Gray, & Bougon, 1986).

While scholarship has proffered valuable explanations of how frame alignment can be attained (Helms, Oliver, & Webb, 2012; Rao & Kenney, 2008), these insights have mostly been related to alignment as the basis for agreeing on the creation of MSPs. Even when successfully established, however, MSPs all too often fail to generate substantive governance and collective action (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Barnett & King, 2008), because commitments tend to become

watered down and underlying conflicts among members are prone to reignite over time (Wijen, 2014; Zuzul, 2019).

One explanation for the difficulty of maintaining shared frames and commitment that has often been overlooked relates to the sheer complexity of inter-organisational collaboration (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2015). This complexity arises in part because negotiators not only need to develop shared frames amongst each other but must also gain acceptance for any negotiated frame from their constituents “back home” (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Referred to by scholars as the “two-table problem”, borrowing a metaphor used in the negotiation and diplomacy literature, this challenge entails aligning frames across multiple different interaction arenas by engaging in “level-two negotiations” (Colosi, 1983, 1985; Putnam, 1988; Sebenius, 2013). Achieving frame alignment across multiple interaction arenas is again inherently challenging, however, since moving from one table or level to the next can lead to frame misalignment, reignited framing contests, and possibly frame breakage.

The intrinsic difficulty of aligning frames across multiple interaction arenas is readily apprehensible if we accept that frames are not fixed cognitive representations but interactional co-constructions (Dewulf et al., 2009; Lewicki, Gray, & Elliott, 2003) that are thus contingent on the social situations in which framing takes place (Reinecke & Ansari, 2021). From this it clearly follows that a frame that emerges in one interaction arena cannot simply be ‘transported’ into another. To date, however, the question of how a shared frame can be expanded or ‘stretched’ beyond the interactions from which it emerges has received little attention (Gray et al., 2015).

To study interactional frame alignment across multiple interaction arenas, we draw on a six-year-long study of the German Partnership for Sustainable Textiles (‘the Textiles Partnership’), an MSP initiated by the German government in response to the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster. Having

originally selected this case as an example of the near-failure of an MSP in spite of considerable reputational and governmental pressure for it to succeed, we were surprised when the companies involved later agreed to commitments they had initially rejected, especially as this turnabout transpired after public pressure had significantly decreased. In revealing how this realignment was achieved through stretching frames sufficiently to pull parties towards agreement on the highest common denominator, our analysis highlights the extent to which preserving and making progress in partnerships entails collaborating ‘on the edge of failure’. This is because the process of stretching frames inevitably involves the risk of frame break if at-home constituents reject the compromises made on their behalf. We further elaborate how this risk ensues from the relational dynamics between negotiators and their constituents; for while we show how cumulative laminations of relational, issue and process framing can enable frame alignment among stakeholder representatives, the accretion of these meanings through interactions further complicates the transferral of frames to constituents. Our process model captures these framing dynamics, highlighting how effective navigation across multiple interaction arenas can deepen and renew commitments among collaborating parties.

We contribute to framing theory by shedding light on the dynamics involved in navigating frame alignment across multiple interaction arenas. By unpacking the role of relational, issue and process framing that laminate new shared meanings onto frames in frame alignment processes, we draw attention to the extent to which frames are grounded in the relationships of the interactants who “do” the framing (Dewulf et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2015; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021). We thus provide a far more dynamic model and account of how shared frames are continuously (re-)negotiated and stretched across overlapping interaction arenas.

By exploring the “two-table problem” in MSPs, our study also provides an explanation of

how MSPs can transform into more robust institutions of collaborative governance (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015). Unlike studies that have emphasised the role of external incentives and political pressure in explaining why companies cede to societal demands (Bartley & Child, 2014), we foreground the role of negotiation dynamics in sustaining such collaboration.

THEORETICAL MOTIVATION

Interest in multi-party collaboration for collective action has proliferated in organisation theory of late, specifically in the context of grand challenges (George, Fewer, Lazzarini, McGahan, & Puranam, 2023). While this interest springs from the promise of such collaboration to address problems too complex for any organisation to tackle alone (Gray & Purdy, 2018), there is broad consensus that collaborating amongst multiple parties is a complex challenge in itself (George et al., 2023). Numerous studies have shown how failure to align parties on joint goals can lead to conflicts that can ultimately derail collaboration (Zuzul, 2019), including research on inter-organisational collaboration (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005; Ring & van de Ven, 1994), multilateral networks (Human & Provan, 2000), and self-regulatory industry coalitions (Barnett & King, 2008). This challenge is exacerbated in MSPs (George et al., 2023), where different interest groups must “integrate their diverse perspectives and goals, which are frequently misaligned or competing” (Gray & Purdy, 2018: 68).

Scholars exploring how collaboration and collective action can be established in the first place among multiple stakeholders have focused especially on the communicative processes whereby parties can attain a common understanding (Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). The application of framing theory in particular has yielded useful insights into how diverse actors seeking to work together can reach settlement on potentially contentious issues by negotiating a shared frame (Helms et al., 2012; Lee, Ramus, & Vaccaro, 2018). Defined by Goffman (1974: 21) as “schemata of interpretation”, frames “promote a

particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993: 52). Again, however, establishing shared frames is an inherently challenging task, not least because different interest groups tend to “strategically try to win over others” (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014: 197), engaging in “framing contests” (Guérard, Bode, & Gustafsson, 2013; Kaplan, 2008) in which they vie for their respective constructions of meaning to prevail (Lee et al., 2018). Only by aligning their respective frames, it is argued, can parties move beyond such contests (Ansari et al., 2013; Helms et al., 2012; Rao & Kenney, 2008). As Goffman (1974: 127) proposed, this is because frame alignment renders the issue at stake “inter-subjectively meaningful and understandable” to all parties involved, thereby enabling a shared frame to be “constructed and agreed upon”. Such alignment can be achieved either by interacting parties incorporating elements of each other’s frames (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Donnellon & Gray, 1990) or by one or more parties transforming their own frames (Lee et al., 2018), as a result of “frame shifts” (Ansari et al., 2013; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). In social movement theory the concept of “frame alignment” serves for explaining how social movement organisations can strategically frame their activities to create linkages in “interpretive orientations” that render diverse individual interests, values and beliefs “congruent and complementary” (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, Worden, Rochford, & Benford, 1986: 464).

Most early studies of frame alignment examined this phenomenon at field level (Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008; Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue, & Hinings, 2017) with a focus on documenting “framing strategies” that facilitate consensus around field frames (Granqvist & Laurila, 2011; Meyer & Hoellerer, 2010). For example, Helms et al. (2012: 1124) showed how parties applied framing strategies in multi-stakeholder negotiations of the global CSR standard ISO 26000, adopting various negotiation frames as discursive tools to shape the views and

actions of others. In a study of how a shared “climate change logic” evolved among diverse actors over decades of interaction, Ansari et al. (2013) traced a series of field level frame shifts whereby different interpretations of the meaning of climate change converged sufficiently to enable agreement on joint action, further showing how securing commitment on low-priority issues through “issue linkage” succeeded in breaking deadlock and paving the way for parties to cooperate on high-priority issues. In another field level study, Lee et al. (2018) highlighted the role of “strategic frame brokerage” in reaching frame alignment, showing how a Sicilian anti-racket organisation strategically reconciled the competing meaning systems of anti-racketing activists and industry actors. Through such strategic brokerage, frames were transformed by “keying” and “laminating” (Goffman, 1974: 45) additional meanings onto activities to encompass the concerns of both sides. In this process, any frames that could not be transformed were partially retained or selectively referred to maintain ideological consistency with the movement while avoiding framing clashes with industry actors (Lee et al., 2018).

Frame Alignment from an Interactional Perspective

Organisational scholars dissatisfied with the tendency in previous studies to “focus more on the content of frames than on their use in social interactions” (Leibel, Hallett, & Bechky, 2018: 165) have since turned to an interactional perspective on framing (Gray et al., 2015; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021). Conceptualising framing as the “dynamic enactment and shaping of meaning in ongoing interactions”, these scholars focus on “how parties negotiate meaning in interactions” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 156). This perspective is especially useful for explaining how competing frames can be aligned in multi-party collaborations, showing how parties can co-construct collective interpretations through repeated interactions to negotiate “at least a minimal level of agreement about what action to take” (Ansari et al., 2013: 1032; Donnellon et al., 1986). Studies applying this perspective draw attention to the people who “do the work of framing” (Leibel et

al., 2018: 165). For example, Dewulf et al. (2009) highlight how parties frame not only the issue at stake but also their ongoing interactions, who they are and how they relate to one another. From this perspective, Ferraro and Beunza (2018) studied how a faith-based investor coalition first needed to establish a common understanding of their interactions with two major U.S. car manufacturers as ‘dialogue’ rather than confrontation before being able to establish a shared language and vocabulary. Ferraro and Beunza (2018) refer to this latter process as “creating common ground”, whereby interacting parties build up a “sum of mutual, common, or joint knowledge, beliefs, and [communicative] suppositions” (Clark, 1996: 93; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). In building common ground, interactants also co-create a common worldview (Alvarez & Sachs, 2021) that can lead them to greater shared commitment to joint action.

Other scholars have drawn attention to the role of emotions in interactional framing. For example Gray et al. (2015: 122) have proposed that the emotional energy “generated in an interaction often heightens identification with the framing of participants in that interaction”. In their study of collective action frames in the Occupy movement, Reinecke and Ansari (2021) found that emotion-laden interactions were central to intensifying activists’ attachment to a new collective action frame.

Numerous studies have shown that frame alignment is hard to maintain even when parties do manage to align divergent frames, showing that alignment can easily fall apart if framing contests reignite (Turcotte & Pasquero, 2001; Zuzul, 2019). This can lead to merely symbolic or otherwise inadequate action that can undermine the capacity of collaborating parties to achieve joint objectives (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Ansari et al., 2013). In a study of two large-scale “smart city” projects, Zuzul (2019) documented the failure to maintain a shared understanding among diverse experts as to what smart cities are and how they should be developed, showing

how this led to intractable conflicts and the eventual collapse of collaboration despite significant resource commitment and initial enthusiasm. While highlighting the fragility of frames, however, the focus of these studies has not extended to how frames can be maintained and realigned.

Scholars of interactional framing certainly recognise that meaning is always provisional and that frames thus continually emerge and evolve over time (Litrico & David, 2017), subject always to unanticipated shifts, updates and replacements. Indeed this is implicit in their conceptualisation of the construction of meaning as a dynamic and evolving process that is “continuously being constituted, contested, reproduced, transformed, and/or replaced” (Benford & Snow, 2000: 628). Nevertheless, we note that studies in this stream have tended to focus on how frames are stabilised or solidified (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016) and how commitment to a particular frame escalates at the expense of alternative framings (Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021). As a result, much more is known about how interactional frames are established than about the ongoing process of maintaining and (re-)aligning them.

The Challenge of Frame Alignment in the Context of Multi-Party Collaboration

A key complication that contributes to reigniting framing contests is that multi-party negotiations unfold across multiple interaction arenas, with negotiating parties needing not only to reach agreement with each other but also to “ratify their agreement with back-home constituents” (Gray & Purdy, 2018: 91) and defend them towards their inner group (i.e., constituents back home) (Rao & Kenney, 2008). A concomitant of this “two-table problem” (Gray & Purdy, 2018) is that shared frames can break in “level-two negotiations” (Sebenius, 2013) if constituents reject frames developed at the main negotiation table. That this dynamic has been under-explored in the literature to date constitutes a significant gap in our understanding of frame alignment in the context of multi-party collaboration. In particular, it remains unclear how “potential partners may

frame issues at different levels” or in different interaction arenas to “prevent eleventh hour rejection of potential partnership agreements” (Gray & Purdy, 2018: 220; 172).

The two-table problem and the threat it poses to partnerships calls for serious attention to the question of how interactionally negotiated frames can be extended beyond the local contexts from which they emerge. Gray et al. (2015) have proposed that frames generated in microlevel interactions can in theory move across levels and escalate at the field level through a process of “frame amplification” whereby frames are first expanded through their “adoption by a broader group of people” until a particular frame gains traction through repetition “and/or emotional intensification” (Gray et al., 2015: 120). Precisely how this process unfolds in practice still remains unclear, however, and scholars concede that frame amplification is far from straightforward given that interactional frames are contingent on the social situations in which they emerge through interactions among specific actors (Lewicki et al., 2003).

Aligning frames across multiple interaction arenas involves at least two interrelated challenges. First, any notion of frames as “free-floating packages of meaning to be deployed at will and transplanted from one context into another” (Reinecke & Ansari, 2021: 381; Steinberg, 1999; Tannen, 1985) must clearly be jettisoned if we understand frames as interactional co-constructions that emerge from the “dynamic enactment and shaping of meaning in ongoing interactions” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 162). From an interactional perspective, it is clear that frames co-constructed in one interaction arena are unlikely to be perfectly replicated in another and that negotiators are likely to struggle upholding frames across arenas. Expanding frames across arenas thus “may trigger a frame break and generate conflict between [interaction] networks, which can then amplify further” (Gray et al., 2015: 120).

Second, one reason why the nuances of multi-arena framing have been overlooked in field level studies may be that, rather than focusing on the interactions of individual negotiators as the interacting participants in framing processes, such studies have – with only a few exceptions (e.g., Ferraro & Beunza, 2018) – focused on collectives of actors such as firms, social movements, NGOs, and nation-states, treating these as aggregated groups or generic “social actors” (Lee et al., 2018; Rao & Kenney, 2008; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). Whilst reflecting a common simplification in language usage, treating entities such as the UN and the EU as if these collective entities were doing the framing in multi-party negotiations obscures the complex challenge faced by individual negotiators acting on behalf of constituent organisations of needing to negotiate meanings both *within* and *between* collective actor groups. A focus on individual negotiating representatives rather than generic social “actors” is necessary because the concept of an actor is already in itself an aggregate construct and yet it is not aggregate actor groups but specific *interactants* who negotiate frames on behalf of their constituencies.

Focusing on the people who actually “do” the framing in multi-party collaboration (Leibel et al., 2018: 164) brings to light the relational dynamics among stakeholder representatives themselves and between them and their constituents. Scholars applying this focus in studies of inter-organisational collaboration have highlighted the role of the personal bonds developed by individuals through repeated interactions in facilitating cooperation (Berends & Sydow, 2019; Ring & de Ven, 2019). For example, Hardy et al. (2005) have emphasised the importance of personal ties between negotiators in achieving effective collaboration between diverging groups and developing a collective identity. Other scholars have explored the role of “negotiating group representatives” as “boundary spanning persons”, highlighting the pressure these interactants face from their constituents (Aaldering & De Dreu, 2012; Jackson & King, 1983). While such

studies have revealed that the relationships between representatives and their constituents are crucial for upholding negotiated outcomes, however, what remains unanswered is how multiple interaction arenas influence framing dynamics and how those who “do” the framing can navigate complex multi-arena settings. To understand frame alignment across interaction arenas, therefore, we address the research question: *“How do multiple interaction arenas affect frame alignment, and how can frame alignment be navigated across multiple interaction arenas?”*

METHODS

Applying a process perspective and an inductive, open-ended and longitudinal research design (Langley, 1999), we studied the role of stakeholder negotiations in steering the German Textiles Partnership away from the brink of collapse towards deepened commitments.

This paper forms part of a larger research agenda initiated in 2013 to investigate national and transnational governance responses to the Rana Plaza catastrophe. Through extensive fieldwork in Bangladesh and internationally, Reinecke and Donaghey studied the implementation of various governance initiatives to address the issues exposed by the catastrophe, notably the Bangladesh Accord for Fire and Building Safety (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015, 2021, 2022; Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018). Whereas the Accord proved successful in establishing multi-party collaboration, we initially selected the Textiles Partnership as a contrasting case of failure affording insights into the factors explaining the success or demise of collaborative efforts. From this starting point, Grimm (2019) conducted a pilot study to explore what at first appeared to be a lack of substantive institutional formation that led to the near-collapse of the partnership, focusing on the incentives that led companies to join partnerships. To our surprise, this preliminary research uncovered an unexpected strengthening of commitments in the collaboration. These early findings also alerted us to the complex challenges involved in sustaining agreements voluntarily reached by diverse parties.

Accordingly, we resolved to further follow the Textiles Partnership with a new research focus on the negotiation of multi-party agreements and how they can be sustained.

As we continued to track the development of the Textiles Partnership, we significantly expanded our data collection and further refined our research design to explore negotiation dynamics and the dynamics of frame alignment in greater depth. Our additional data and analysis revealed the significant extent to which multi-stakeholder negotiation processes are shaped by the relationships between stakeholder representatives and their constituents. In particular, we identified a central challenge to such negotiation processes in the “two-table problem” faced by stakeholder representatives who need to negotiate shared frames not only through interactions at one ‘table’ but also ‘back home’ with their constituents. The Textiles Partnership thus constitutes a revealing case for yielding insights into frame alignment across multiple negotiating arenas.

Research Setting

As the world’s second-largest importer of textiles, Germany established the Textiles Partnership in early 2014 as a national response to the 2013 Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh (Schuessler, Frenkel, & Wright, 2019). Initiated by the then Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Gerd Mueller, the Textiles Partnership was intended to demonstrate the willingness of Germany’s textiles industry to take responsibility for improving the conditions of workers in their global textiles supply chains. Bringing together five different stakeholder groups with “equal rights in the discussions and decision-making processes” (Doc_B_62), the partnership sought to seek to develop collective solutions through collaborative governance, defined as “a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative” (Ansell & Gash, 2007: 544). As of 2021, the Textiles Partnership had 124 members in total, including 15 trade associations and 70 companies, 20 NGOs, seven standards organisations, two trade unions, the German government, and nine

consulting members. Stakeholders are represented in the Steering Committee (short ‘SC’) as the partnership’s central decision-making body “responsible for its strategic management and ongoing development”, including “amendments to the Plan of Action” (Doc_B_62).

Our study focuses on the perspectives of the 12 members of the SC, as regular partnership members were initially bystanders in the negotiation process. These individuals were nominated or elected by their stakeholder groups, including companies (represented by our informants Wilhelm and Florian), trade associations (represented by Thorsten and Klaus), NGOs (represented by Silvia, Simone, and Fabian), the German government (represented by Patricia, Jonas, and Alexander), trade unions (represented by Erich), and standards organisations (represented by Sabrina). Figure 1 depicts the SC negotiation table with the crucial protagonists in our case grouped as ‘objectors’, ‘neutral’, or ‘collaborators’. (All names are pseudonymised.²)

Insert Figure 1 about here

As outlined below and visualised in Figure 2, the Textile Partnership’s development process can be subdivided into six negotiation phases based on critical negotiation outcomes. Each phase was characterised by interlinking “topic-framing cycles” that tested the “red lines” previously agreed upon by the stakeholder groups represented in the partnership’s SC.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Phase I saw the near-collapse of the partnership in 2014 as a consequence of the stakeholder representatives having failed to address the two-table problem. Although these representatives managed to negotiate a shared frame among themselves over the course of recurrent roundtable meetings held from April to October 2014, propelled at least in part by political pressures and

² References to the names of respondents indicate their group and negotiation table, e.g., “Silvia (NGO-SC)” refers to the respondent Silvia, who is a member of the NGO group and a representative in the steering committee.

bolstered by the personal involvement of the high-profile minister Gerd Mueller, the industry representatives subsequently failed to recruit their constituents to the highly ambitious commitments enshrined in Action Plan 1.0., including fixed goals and timelines.³ Against the insistence of NGOs on these fixed goals being “non-negotiable” and legally binding for all participants, the industry group declared that uniform and legally binding goals crossed their “red lines”, insisting they would only commit to more flexible and “company-specific” goals. Just one day before the official inauguration of the Textiles Partnership, the majority of companies publicly announced their refusal to join the agreement.

Phase II, from late 2014 to 2015, began with Gerd Mueller stepping down as the public face of the partnership after the refusal of the industry group to ratify Action Plan 1.0. Despite this major setback, the partnership’s organising committee reconvened negotiations from December 2014. In these revived negotiations the industry group succeeded in upholding their red lines on roadmaps needing to contain company-specific goals. While this encouraged numerous companies, together representing some fifty percent of Germany’s textiles industry, to join the partnership, the NGO representatives now struggled to recruit their constituents to the revised agreement, called ‘Action Plan 2.0’, which crossed their initial red line that goals must be uniform and legally binding. In another major blow to the partnership, Greenpeace decided to leave the Textiles Partnership, dismissing Action Plan 2.0 as a “light version” that “gave in to pressure from the textiles lobby” (IND16). Thus, also Phase II failed to establish an action plan that all involved parties could agree with.

³ For example, Action Plan 1.0 stipulated that the involved organisations would increase their use of cotton produced according to the Textiles Partnership’s standards by 20% by 2016, 50% by 2020, and 100% by 2024 (Doc_B_9).

Phases III, IV and V,⁴ from 2015 to 2019, saw three decisive shifts in the positions of the interactants over the course of prolonged negotiations, with both groups backing down from several of their initial red lines. First, in October 2016 the industry group agreed to the reintroduction of roadmaps with yearly fixed time and quantity goals that they had hitherto rejected while the NGO group agreed to these goals being company-specific rather than uniform. Second, in November 2018 both groups agreed to commit to making annual roadmaps public in line with the NGOs' insistence on this measure for ensuring transparency. In doing so, both groups thus stepped back from their red lines; while the industry group dropped its demand that roadmaps remain confidential and accessible only to partnership members, the NGO group compromised on agreeing for the roadmaps to be made available to the public only after a "trial year". Third, in November 2019, the industry group agreed to a stricter review process entailing corporate due diligence, thereby giving up their previous demands that roadmaps be reviewed only by the partnership committee and that there should be no punishment for organisations with unambitious roadmaps. These concessions were again partly matched by the NGO group, who now dropped their demands for third-party verification. These mutual concessions came as a positive surprise to many observers, especially since government attention and public pressure in the wake of the Rana Plaza catastrophe had waned significantly over the years.

Phase VI, from 2019 to 2021, was marked by renewed framing contests that eventually led 26 companies and two NGOs to leave the partnership. In this phase, which included an interruption of face-to-face negotiations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NGO side brought forward new demands, with their red lines now including the stricter implementation of rules and

⁴ We have split the negotiation process here into three different phases because different aspects were negotiated within each time-bracket and topic-framing cycle. We describe these phases in the same single sub-section, however, as the framing dynamics in these phases were similar.

goals to address the worsening situation of supply chain workers. Meanwhile, the industry side urged for ‘softening’ the agreement on account of the financial burdens of the pandemic as companies struggled with backorders and lockdown requirements. While the question of what to do next remained unresolved and less advancements were made during the pandemic, later on new concessions were made on both ends of the negotiation table (Doc_B_64).

Data Sources

To capture how interactional dynamics unfolded in the Textiles Partnership, we adopted a longitudinal research design (Langley, 1999), conducting multi-phase data collection from November 2015 to November 2021. Applying a process perspective (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010), we “traced backward” the Textiles Partnership’s evolution since its establishment in early 2014 and “followed forward” its development from late 2015 onwards. Table 1 provides an overview of all data sources we collected throughout this period.

Insert Table 1 about here

Formal & informal interviews. Our primary data source comprises in-depth interviews with members of the Textiles Partnership, with a focus on the 12 stakeholder representatives in the SC. Over a period of six years, we conducted 92 interviews: 81 semi-structured formal interviews and 11 informal interviews. We spoke with a total of 48 individuals up to five times each. Most of these interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 18 and 102 minutes. Our respondents included representatives of NGOs (n=22), the federal government (n=11), trade associations (n=9), standards organisations (n=5) and trade unions (n=3), as well as representatives from the German textile industry in positions ranging from project management to C-suite executives in MNCs (n=24) and SMEs (n=9). We also spoke to advisory members, including respondents from academia (n=7) and the media (n=2).

Our selection of interviewees was guided by our aim of capturing multi-party and multi-arena interactions when following negotiation rounds over time. We thus interviewed most SC members several times over the course of our study (n=47). We then identified other key players from each stakeholder group and interviewed these regular members at stakeholder level (n=32).

In drawing on interviews to capture our respondents' recollections of interaction experiences, our approach is similar to that taken by Balogun and Johnson (2004) and Soderstrom and Weber (2020) in seeking "traces of interactions". Identifying interaction traces in our interview data helped us reconstruct key events such as SC meetings and excursions, as well as to understand how singular interactions connected over time. To capture our interviewees' "knowledge of events" and "tap into [their] beliefs, perceptions and experiences" (Langley & Meziani, 2020: 372), we focused our semi-structured interview guide on the types of interactions that took place, the individuals involved, the content that was being negotiated, and the general dynamics of these interactions. Importantly, we were able to cross-check different accounts of the same events and interactions from the perspectives of multiple respondents (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), particularly since the 12 steering committee members remained the same individuals throughout the period of our study. As we built up growing rapport and trust with respondents over time (Dundon & Ryan, 2010), they increasingly shared more detailed insights, including their personal perceptions of internal dynamics, political tensions and identity issues. Since a core theme that emerged early on was the challenge faced by SC representatives of navigating different negotiation arenas or "tables", we adapted our interviews questions to focus specifically on these dynamics.

We interviewed respondents directly or as soon as possible after SC meetings and other events, inviting them to revisit their experiences of events and interactions in detail by

privileging “how” over “what/why” questions in line with Langley and Meziani’s (2020: 378) interpretive interviewing techniques for “capturing the meaning of lived experience”. We “avoided naming the topic”, for example, by wording our questions based on the interviewee’s own terms, e.g., asking about “homecoming” and their “perceptions” rather than referring to ‘the two-table problem’ or ‘frames’. Focusing on respondents’ experiences of the social situation rather than the content of the negotiations yield insights into unexpected aspects of our case, including the role of interpersonal relations developed between the interactants over time.

Observations. Although SC meetings were strictly limited to signatories, we were invited to present our work at two key stakeholder group meetings. This bolstered our position as trustworthy observers and afforded a valuable opportunity to observe group dynamics first-hand, with our notes from these meetings further informing our revisions of the semi-structured questionnaire to deepen our understanding of the two-table problem. We also observed selected public events, including a full-day workshop entitled “Rana Plaza – never again!” in November 2015 in Dortmund. Besides affording a better understanding of conflicts and tensions between stakeholders, observing these meetings provided us with useful prompts in follow-up interviews.

Documents & archival records. To complement our primary data, we collected publicly available documents and archival records related to the partnership. Published between August 2010 and November 2021, these documents included press releases, media reports, newsletters, website information, comments, agendas, and presentations, while the archival records included sustainability and annual reports, brochures, handbooks, guidelines, mission statements, and research reports, as well as internal position papers prepared ahead of SC meetings. All these written data were ordered chronologically and divided according to stakeholder groups, amounting to a total of 3,120 pages. In addition to using these written data sources to construct

our event chronology and as background information for interviews, we also used them to cross-check interview accounts, including accounts of negotiated outcomes.

Data Analysis

We applied a combination of inductive process analysis strategies (Langley, 1999) to unpack the evolution of the Textiles Partnership and capture the dynamics behind the shift from near-collapse to a strengthening of the parties' commitments. After documenting the overall process, we mapped the interactants and interaction arenas before outlining topic-framing cycles and tracing frame alignment within and across interaction arenas, thus building our theoretical process model "outside-in".

Step 1: Constructing a process chronology & visual map. To gain an overview of the Textiles Partnership's evolution, we ordered our transcribed data and documents in an event chronology in line with the narrative strategy proposed by Langley (1999). Based on an initial round of open coding, we first identified key phases and bracketed them in relation to milestones in negotiation outcomes. In seeking to make sense of the shift in our respondents' interpretations of commitments, we initially assumed that external factors were the main reason for their having agreed to fixed time- and quantity-goals similar to those they had rejected before. However, our process analysis soon alerted us to the key role played in this change by the ongoing communicative process between the specific individuals participating in the negotiations, as was evident in many of our informants' responses, e.g., "our perspective has changed through ongoing debate, through working together and by getting to know one another" (IND29-SC), and "It was a process of *finding one another* at first ... Everyone has their own *perception* of how things should be" (IND12, emphasis added). Drawing on interactional framing theory (Dewulf et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2015), we noticed that these interpretive "perceptions" were shaped by specific interactions that our respondents described as "finding one another".

To gain insights into the framing dynamics that facilitated the changes we observed in our respondents' interpretations of what they could or could not do about the issues at stake, we extended our process chronology to visual mapping (Langley, 1999). This helped us identify core topics of contention. Our mapping followed the process through which “parties interactively construct the meaning of issues in the conflict situation” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 166). We identified six interconnected “topic-framing cycles” over six phases (see Figure 2 above).

Step 2: Mapping interaction arenas & interactants. In trying to understand why ever-new framing contests kept on emerging and why aligned frames were at risk of breaking, we noticed that topic-framing cycles were not influenced solely by negotiations between SC members. Instead, our process chronology revealed frequent references by respondents to what they termed “homecoming”, i.e., the times when SC representatives returned to their stakeholder groups and presented the frames they had negotiated to these constituents. They also spoke repeatedly of “red lines”, referring to the boundaries that stakeholder representatives were not meant to overstep when negotiating on their constituents' behalf.

Having identified the need for SC members to navigate back and forth between the SC and their respective group interaction arenas as a core dynamic, we related this challenge to the “two-table problem” in the negotiations literature (Sebenius, 2013). Informed by SC members that “the real exchange of blows takes place between companies and NGOs” (NGO18-SC), we turned our attention to the “homecoming” of NGO and industry representatives, focusing our visual mapping on the challenges involved in navigating frame alignment across multiple arenas. This mapping confirmed that a shared frame co-constructed in one interaction arena could subsequently be destabilised in another, further revealing that such destabilisation invariably depended on the interactions that took place *within* each arena.

Step 3: Tracing frame alignment within and across interaction arenas. In a third step we turned to the literature on framing contests and settlements (Helms et al., 2012; Rao & Kenney, 2008) and the various frame alignment processes whereby interactants develop mutually resonant frames (Snow et al., 1986). However, we soon realised that extant scholarship has mostly treated negotiated meanings as relatively stable (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016), with most studies focused on how frames are amplified or escalated at field level (Gray et al., 2015; Cornelissen et al., 2014; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021). Accordingly, we returned to our data to decipher how negotiated meanings were affected when stakeholder representatives navigated frame alignment across interaction arenas. Following Dewulf et al.'s (2009: 163) recommendation to “focus on specific points or episodes in conflict interaction”, we coded for our respondents’ recollections of key interactions, taking the “interaction traces” (Soderstrom & Weber, 2020) between representatives as our “unit of data” (Zilber & Meyer, 2022).

We further followed Dewulf et al.'s (2009: 165) recommendation to unpack “what is it that gets framed”. In doing so we noted that parties not only negotiated the issue at stake but also engaged in framing their identities and relationships and mutual interactions in the partnership. This was evident across our interview data in our informants’ reflections on e.g., “What is my counterpart like?” and “How are we working here?”. By iterating between our data and the literature, we discovered that these accounts corresponded to what Dewulf et al. (2009: 166) define as “relational-, issue- and process framing”. To capture this, we identified first-order codes such as “getting to know one another” and “approaching each other on a personal level” as indications of relational framing, identifying any changes described in relationships as indications of shifts in relational framing (e.g., from referring to discussions with “enemies” to “talking to a person like me”). We then reengaged with our data to gain deeper insights into how

relational, issue and process framing shape frame alignment *within* interaction arenas (see Figure 3 later on). In doing so we were able to identify the details of how relational framing comes about, including via modes of inquiring (e.g., “What are you doing?”), re-evaluating (e.g., “they don’t mean it that way”), and identifying (e.g., “this person is also a person just like me”).

To theorise on the processual dimension of our longitudinal data and gain a sense of patterns in the processes captured in these data, we coded for relational, issue and process framing in each topic-framing cycle. This yielded insights into the framing processes that occurred during both “outgoing” and “homecoming” interactions. What struck us as particularly important was how any misalignment of frames was followed by navigation between interaction arenas and reoccurring frame (re-)alignment (see Figure 4 later on). By developing a more specific set of codes for the various moves involved in within- and across-table frame alignment, we identified three emergent “patterns in the process” (Langley, 1999) that recurred in the topic-framing cycles with regards to the back-and-forth navigation between interaction arenas. We found that these “cross-arena framing processes” were key for “stretching” frames not only *within* one interaction arena but also *across* the boundaries of this arena to other arenas (see Figure 5 later on). We labelled these as processes of “reciprocal, integrative and bilateral frame stretching”.

Step 4: Building theory. In the final step of our data analysis, we developed our theoretical process model by interrelating insights gained from our event chronology and visual map (step 1) with our interaction mapping (step 2) and our tracing of frame alignment (step 3). In this way we were able to abstract the details of the overall process and to identify the framing dynamics and interrelationships between topic-framing cycles. Constructing our process model (see Figure 6 later on) thus enabled us to understand the *how* and *why* of the ongoing frame alignment process that facilitated the maintenance of a shared frame.

We use “composite vignettes” as a way of vividly portraying “a critical event or moment in the field ... to illuminate a theoretical concept ... alongside more interpretative explanatory text” (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Lê, 2014: 280). These vignettes portray critical moments of interaction, while our accompanying analysis shows how we theorised the processual dimension of our longitudinal data. In composing our vignettes, we merged our informants’ recollections of specific interaction episodes from multiple interviews and event observations into single narratives to highlight dynamics illustrative of those we identified throughout our data.

FINDINGS

Our findings document how the Textiles Partnership was maintained after near-collapse and how the parties eventually agreed on a shared frame, committing to goals they had previously rejected and that went far “beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989: 5). In tracing the negotiation process over time, we elucidate how this turnaround unfolded in four parts. First, we explain how the partnership’s near-collapse was due to the difficulty of aligning interactional frames *across* multiple interaction arenas, evidencing how SC members failed to recruit their constituents to the shared frame negotiated on their behalf. Second, we explain *why* and *how* different interaction arenas affect frame alignment, highlighting how frame alignment entails laminations not only of issue framing but also of relational and process framing. Third, we document how frame break can ensue from a failure to build up these laminations among constituents. Fourth, we show how frame alignment can be navigated across interaction arenas to maintain shared frames by ‘collaborating on the edge of failure’.

Multiple Interaction Arenas Pose a Challenge to Interactional Frame Alignment

In October 2014, the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Gerd Mueller, proudly unveiled Action Plan 1.0 of the German Textiles Partnership in Berlin: “For the first time,” Mueller announced, “it was possible to reach a content-based consensus among key

actors about their common goals” (Doc_A_3). This announcement proved premature, however, as most German textiles companies refused to sign up to the action plan, including Adidas, C&A, the Otto Group, and Tchibo, with the exception of the sustainability champions Hess Natur and Vaude. This failed inauguration was a major blow to the German government and Mueller. Having spent the previous six months in a series of roundtable negotiations with representatives of the German textiles industry, trade unions and civil society, the “state secretaries and the minister were shocked” (IND2-SC) when the textile companies now claimed that the action plan contained overly ambitious commitments, including “unrealistic” fixed quantity goals for sustainable sourcing and annual progress reviews with third-party verification.

Vignette 1 highlights the lead-up to the near-collapse of the partnership, capturing how industry representative Thorsten failed to recruit his constituents to join the partnership and his attempts to warn the government about this impending failure.

Vignette 1

In late September 2014, industry representative Thorsten is meeting with senior managers from the ten largest German textiles companies in his office in Berlin’s Mitte district. Prior to the meeting, Thorsten sent out the final draft of Action Plan 1.0, which the companies had yet to sign to join the Textiles Partnership.

Against expectations, all the managers present, including the managers of Adidas, Otto, and H&M, now unanimously announce that the binding fixed goals and timelines are major obstacles to ratification. One manager starts by declaring “This is a no-go!”, followed by another who states “We will not sign this!”. A third manager explains their common objection by citing the opinion of their legal department: “The liability issue remains unresolved. And that’s a disaster. We just can’t do this.” By the end of the meeting it is clear that the main players in the industry group will not commit to join the partnership.

As soon as the meeting ends, Thorsten worriedly phones Franz, who serves on behalf of the German government as assistant to minister Mueller and moderator in the partnership negotiations. Thorsten knows that he must meet Franz as soon as possible: “We need to talk about how to deal with this! Any chance you could come by?”

Franz comes by Thorsten’s office the following evening. In their one-on-one conversation, Thorsten relays the industry group’s objections: “We have to talk about this now! If we stick to the fixed time and quantity goals in the action plan, I can guarantee we [the industry group] will not sign the partnership agreement.” Outraged by this objection, Franz asks “Why?” Thorsten replies that “There’s this one question – the liability question. I guarantee you, we [the industry representatives] are not going to get this through [in the industry group].”

Franz is not willing to budge. He thinks Thorsten is bluffing in order to water down the agreement. Thorsten suggests extending the negotiations to develop a revised version: “If we adjust the liability issue, if we add two or three more points for clarification in the document, then I think we will be able to make companies sign the agreement.” But Franz insists on going ahead with the action plan as is. He does not understand why Thorsten is bringing up this issue only now after having discussed the action plan together for months.

In a major blow to the government, Thorsten and Klaus (both SC-industry) release a collective press statement announcing that the industry group will not sign the partnership agreement: “It is necessary to state realistic and,

more importantly, feasible goals that are acceptable not only to specific companies but also to the majority of textile-trading companies.” (Doc_G_68)

Vignette 1 reveals that it was above all the misalignment between the SC and stakeholder group frames that led to frame break and the near-collapse of the Textiles Partnership. Notably, this crisis led companies in the otherwise extremely heterogenous German textiles industry to “line up in agreement with each other” and collectively draw hard boundaries as a precondition for any continuing negotiations: “We, the industry, had set several ‘red lines’ which we didn’t ever want to cross.” (IND16)

Laminations of Frame Alignment: Relational, Issue and Process Framing

Despite the near-collapse of the partnership in October 2014 and the watered-down Action Plan 2.0 agreed to in April 2015, the parties were able to strengthen Action Plan 2.0 significantly through negotiations from mid-2016 onwards. Over the course of numerous lengthy SC meetings, the representatives managed to agree on re-integrating many of the commitments formerly rejected, with both the industry and NGO groups repeatedly crossing their previously declared red lines. Our findings unpack how this was achieved through a process of repeated iterations between frame alignment in the SC and stakeholder group arenas. In the sections below, we trace the three types of framing laminations that underpinned interactional frame alignment *within* the SC interaction arena. Later on, we highlight how interactional frame alignment was navigated *across* interaction arenas.

Relational framing. Initially, representatives of the NGO and industry group perceived themselves as sitting around a table with “enemies” (NGO17-SC). Over the course of prolonged negotiations, however, and after experiencing frame break early in the process, they came to “get closer, get to know each other”. This led to a shift in *attributional orientation*, with interactants no longer seeing each other as “enemies” to whom they assigned blame but as allies with whom

they shared responsibility: “We now have the spirit to collaborate. We are all here in different roles, with different interests in the same thing, but what we now all have in common is that we want to improve the textiles supply chain.” (GOV2-SC). Central to this development was a shift in relational framing that occurred in beyond-the-table negotiations, including informal meetings over meals or drinks. Industry representative Florian told us how he came to reconstruct the meaning of “self” and “other” in these “backstage” interaction contexts, especially through informal meetings with NGO representative Silvia:

We had an evening in Bielefeld. And that was nice ... when I chatted privately with Silvia about ‘What are you doing?’, ‘Where were you on holiday?’. Then you get a completely different bonding level with each other, which is perhaps more stable, because you know ‘Ah, this person is also just a person like me’, right? ‘The two of us represent completely different interests at this table, but she is also a person like you and me, who also shares her viewpoints.’ ... and when you tell each other a few personal things ... that’s what you do in the evening when you talk to each other in a relaxed atmosphere, I think you get to a different level of relationship. (IND35-SC)

According to Florian, getting to know his counterparts significantly helped to improve formal negotiations:

We in the SC organised events where we had ‘time outs’ for two days somewhere, where we met outside [the negotiation table] with an overnight stay to have an evening with a glass of wine. Here we developed and discussed strategic things once again and on a different level ... this is a social process of getting to know each other better, of learning to appreciate each other. Pleasant relationships developed in these settings ... And that certainly contributed to it [finding consensus] ... when you can meet informally and perhaps exchange a few personal words. That simply helps ... There were different temperaments. So that’s what you get to know. ‘What is the temperament of one or the other?’, ‘How do I actually judge them when they rant like that?’ You start to understand ‘Okay, they don’t mean it that way. They just have a funny way of expressing themselves.’ And that’s also quite a relief when you get to know each other and it becomes a bit easier ... [whereas] before you might have found these outbursts off-putting, which at times hindered the progress of negotiations. (IND40-SC)

Florian’s description of his interactions with counterparts yields several important insights, including how his judgement changed through his interactions with Silvia and how he constructed a new meaning of their relationship. Florian notes how agreement might previously have been hindered by his and others’ reactions to people “ranting” at the negotiation table but that getting to know counterpart had enabled him to develop an understanding and tolerance of the different ways people articulated themselves and their “temperaments”. This helped him re-

evaluate and “appreciate” them as individuals “like you and me”. Instead of being “put off” by “outbursts” and allowing this distaste to colour his judgment, he now saw beyond the form to the content of their contributions, attributing “rants” to the fact that people “just have a funny way to express themselves”. Through repeated interactions in formal and informal settings, Florian and Silvia’s relationship gradually became socially embedded in informal interpersonal ties.

In assigning new meaning to their counterparts, SC members also assigned new meaning to their relationships with these individuals, no longer encountering each other solely in their formal roles as representatives of opposing interest groups but as individuals with whom they had a personal relationship. This helped them move beyond their antagonistic perceptions of each other as “enemies” to see each other at least as “frenemies” with whom they could share a meal, ultimately enabling the development of a collective “we” identity.

Lamination of relational framing onto issue framing. Relational framing proved crucial in shaping how the stakeholder representatives subsequently constructed their understandings of the issues at stake. This was explicitly acknowledged by industry representative Florian as follows:

On this other relationship level it becomes, I would say, more stable, yes? And on this more stable level it is also more resilient when you have problems where you know: ‘Aha, she now has a different opinion in terms of content. I have a different one too. Okay, so we have to discuss this, since nevertheless I respect her and nevertheless I think she’s somehow super nice as a person.’ (IND35-SC)

These new relational framing dynamics in turn led to a change in the nature and frequency of framing contests between group representatives as their attributional orientation shifted from mutual dismissal and blame to a shared willingness to focus on the underlying content-related reasons for their disagreements, recognising that others “have a different opinion in terms of content” (IND35-SC).

Issue framing. The second frame lamination we observed was that of (re-)framing the issue at stake. This came about as ongoing interactions led to a shift from a subjective to an

intersubjective understanding. Reflecting on the early phases of the partnership, our informants commonly identified a lack of mutual understanding as having been a key barrier to progress. Although the SC members all spoke the same national language in negotiations, they later recalled how they had not been “speaking the same language ... like having two different, two foreign languages coming together” (UNI1-SC). As the moderator observed of this period:

Their words are different to a degree that even certain words [in the same national language] have a different meaning for each group. That means they use words at times that cause a reflex in the other group so that people in the other group aren't able to really listen any longer to what else is being said. (GOV8-SC)

At this stage, industry representatives perceived their NGO counterparts as ignorant of commercial realities and supply chain complexities and thus lost in a “theoretical nirvana” or “make-a-wish-world” (IND39-SC). For their part, the NGO representatives claimed that the “multinational corporations didn't even make an effort” (NGO4-SC) to understand the plight of workers in their supply chains.

Through repeated interactions, however, SC members gained a better understanding of the specific challenges each other faced. As Silvia explained: “We, the industry and us [the NGOs], have of course gotten to know each other better ... you get to know one another and you also start to see the problems on the other side of the table” (NGO9-SC). The more the interactants immersed themselves in the complexity of the issues at stake, the more they grew to appreciate the difficulties faced by the other group, as evident from Thorsten's account:

Silvia and the others [NGO representatives] learned a lot about the logic of business firms in this process – how businesses work and what they can and cannot do. We [industry representatives] on the other side also learned a lot from them, we developed quite a lot of understanding for how they work and what they do. (IND19-SC)

Vignette 2 outlines an interaction between SC members Silvia and industry representative Wilhelm, highlighting how they aligned their framing on the issue of adjusting Action Plan 2.0 (“roadmap transparency” in topic-framing cycle 4).

Vignette 2

In August 2017 the first company-specific roadmaps are being compiled and made accessible in a secure databank for all partnership members. Industry representative Wilhelm calls NGO representative Silvia to discuss whether the compromise made on company-specific instead of uniform roadmaps is sufficient. Wilhelm says “I’ve read through a lot of these roadmaps and in my honest opinion we have stronger and weaker ones. We also have big differences in the level of ambition.” Silvia replies “From what I’ve seen, this isn’t enough. I’m worried the companies won’t move.” Wilhelm counters “But it’s not only the industry side that’s delivered insufficient roadmaps. Some of the NGO roadmaps are essentially an impertinence as well!” However, he acknowledges that “Still, it’s true roadmaps on the industry side are just as bad. I won’t name names, but some are really weak – full of spelling mistakes and, yes, very vaguely worded.”

Having reviewed the roadmaps at an internal workshop prior to this phone call, Silvia knows that many regular members in her group are dissatisfied with the outcome. She tells Wilhelm “They [the roadmaps] don’t seem to be what we thought they would be.” Wilhelm agrees that they have to “recognise the weaknesses” but also defends those organisations that have handed in inadequate roadmaps. “The specifications we made were too vague,” he says, referring to the reporting tool formulated by the SC members. “The questions weren’t always good ... There was room for a lot of interpretation.”

Wilhelm knows from a recent workshop with his own stakeholder group that many companies who filled in the roadmaps went about it somewhat lackadaisically, devising their own interpretations of what the reporting tool was all about. However, he now explains to Silvia that it was only after his closer engagement with companies on how to fill in the reporting tool that many of them said “Ah! Now I finally have clarity. Now I know what you want ... Because in the past, this was somehow very nebulous.” Even companies that were regarded as frontrunners told Wilhelm that “this whole topic has been made overly complex ... the degree of academisation of this roadmap activity has nothing at all to do with things on the ground ... [The reporting tool] cannot be implemented at all.”

Wilhelm seeks to reassure Silvia that “you will see in 2018 the roadmaps will already be much more specific than they are now.” Silvia says that she is willing to “wait and see whether they [companies] work with the roadmaps or not.” Wilhelm proposes to engage more with the regular members of his own group to ensure “the partnership is continuously moving forward.”

The call ends with Wilhelm and Silvia being on the same page regarding the reasons for why roadmaps are not as promising as they’d hoped. They agree that Silvia will explain to her group why the roadmaps were lacking in ambition, while Wilhelm will communicate the need for much stronger roadmaps to his group.

Vignette 2 yields several important insights. Firstly, Silvia and Wilhelm’s engagement in dialogue meant they were willing to provide each other with a sense of the reasoning within their respective groups. Although Silvia started off bluntly (“this isn’t enough”), Wilhelm was aware by now that she was a seasoned and “hard-hitting” negotiator (“not known for her pure gentleness” (IND21-SC)) and thus quickly went on from defending his group (“it’s not only the industry side”) to conceding that “it’s true” the industry could do more.

Secondly, the vignette highlights how both representatives gained intersubjective understanding of the issue. Building on their relational framing, Wilhelm was willing to share what he himself had learned at the workshop with his group, and Silvia later admitted that Wilhelm’s explanations of why the roadmaps were not as ambitious as she had hoped had helped

her “to see the problems on the other side of the table” (NGO9-SC). This extended her interpretative scope, as new meanings were added to how she had previously interpreted the reason for insufficient roadmaps (from “companies are not moving” to “companies do not understand”). Such lamination of new meaning and transition from a subjective to an intersubjective understanding led to a further alignment of the shared frame within the SC.

Lamination of issue framing onto process framing. Relational and issue framing not only helped shift framing contests from person-related disagreements to content-related debates and from a subjective to an intersubjective understanding of the issues at stake but also prompted SC representatives to reframe the meaning and purpose of their ongoing interactions. This further facilitated the shift from an antagonistic to a collaborative interaction process in which the groups now moved forward together to reach shared goals rather than continuing to pursue their own respective agendas. As a result, the industry side shifted its position towards blurring its previously uncrossable red lines:

Through ongoing debate and by getting to know one another and understanding their [the NGOs] point of view, through working together, our [the industry's] perspective has changed from ‘we can’t’ towards ‘well maybe we can’. (IND29-SC)

Process framing. The third frame lamination we observed was tied to how interactants (re-)framed the meaning of their ongoing interactions. Conflict and “shouting matches” (NGO17-SC) had initially characterised interactions in the SC, with NGO representatives accusing industry representatives of being unwilling to make any substantive commitments (“They’re completely against it [investing in improved conditions] – they are very obstructive and do not want it under any circumstances” (NGO3-SC)) and with industry representatives accusing NGOs of pursuing a ‘naming and shaming’ agenda. Repeated interactions over the course of ongoing negotiations fostered a willingness to compromise, however, with interactions increasingly framed as collaborative rather than antagonistic. According to industry representative Wilhelm

(IND10-SC): “What made the partnership continue nevertheless, was the strong will to make it happen – on both sides. In other words, to be ready to compromise, to really seek compromise.”

Reflecting on past conflicts, Wilhelm admitted that the greatest compromises had always been reached when negotiations were “close to failing”:

I also remember this SC meeting ... at the end of the day we weren't able to reach compromise. And there were many discussions after the meeting. The whole thing was really close to failing. And yet the following meeting was the one that brought us the furthest – that achieved the most progress, because it was clear that no one wanted to drive the thing against the wall ... And that led to the fact that the next meeting brought so much progress, because each side knew ‘We now have to clear our position to a certain extent and approach the other side so that this can work’. (IND10-SC)

As this account suggests, it was above all the interactants' mutual recognition that their collaboration was “really close to failing” which increased their willingness to compromise: “You can't just keep to your position in such a partnership and say ‘No, I won't do it!’. Then it's a failure.” (IND26-SC). The threat of imminent collapse made the interactants realise they had to “clear their positions” and cross their red lines to keep the partnership alive. This shift to a more compromising position was described by Florian's assistant Susanne (who joined SC meetings on a regular basis):

I don't want to make it sound as if it was so easy to move forward ... Because of course I'd say the bar set by the NGOs for time and quantity targets of roadmaps was much higher ... Getting to the point where we met in the middle and said ‘Yes, good. I'll say that we can go along with the formulation of the time and quantity targets’ was a long process ... And let me put it this way, the NGOs had to get off their, shall I say, high horse. Just like the industry had to. (IND26-SC)

The parties' collective recognition of the need to compromise by crossing their red lines changed the nature of framing contests in the SC, with all groups now seeking primarily to ensure the partnership's survival rather than solely pursuing their respective interests.

Over the course of interrelated topic-framing cycles, further laminations of meaning were added to the shared frame (see Figure 3). These laminations of relational, issue and process framing facilitated further frame alignment and gradually increased the willingness of representatives to cross the red lines they had set internally within their groups.

 Insert Figure 3 about here

Misalignment of Laminated Interaction Frames Across Multiple Interaction Arenas

As a key finding from our data analysis, we discovered that the frame alignment attained within the SC arena was by no means automatically ‘translated’ to the constituent groups on whose behalf this frame had been negotiated. Instead, SC representatives struggled to uphold the shared frame when “coming home” to their own groups. Vignette 3 highlights how the challenge of maintaining frame alignment across arenas again brought the partnership to the brink of collapse. This vignette describes an interaction within the NGO group in Phase IV when representative Silvia was confronted with criticism for agreeing to roadmaps not being accessible to the public in a first “trial year” – something her group had internally agreed to be a “non-negotiable”.

Vignette 3

The NGO group’s annual meeting takes place from 27 to 28 January 2018⁵ in a remote country hostel on the outskirts of Jena, Germany. A group of 40–50 motivated and enthusiastic NGO members and activists have gathered to discuss the activities and campaigns for the upcoming year. Silvia is attending as one of the group’s three SC representatives in the Textiles Partnership.

Many of those here today have seen the company-specific roadmaps so far submitted by the textile companies and found them either lacking in ambition or implausible. NGO members share their frustration. They see the lack of progress as evidence of companies’ unwillingness to improve: “We’ve seen now that there are companies that have put together implausible roadmaps. For now, they got the chance to amend their roadmaps. But now we’ve reached the point where we need to ask ‘Is this process still trustworthy?’” Another member insists that “if it becomes clear that it [the engagement of companies] doesn’t go beyond what is currently mainstream in the textiles industry, then participating in the partnership is of no use for us. And then the NGO group has to leave.”

This issue is one of the sticking points of today’s meeting: the question of whether to leave the partnership or not. My⁶ own presentation on the progress made in the partnership is first on the agenda. I highlight the positive advancement of the partnership, as well as the NGOs role in it. I present some direct quotes from industry representatives, including “I’ve talked a lot bilaterally with Silvia”, “discussions on an equal footing with Silvia” and “Silvia is someone who is willing to make compromises.”

Immediately a loud and disorganised debate erupts among the crowd. One of the more confrontational group members, Lars, says in outrage “This presentation perfectly illustrates why we should immediately leave the partnership.” He is referring to the perceived role of NGOs, insisting “Our goal is not to become allies of the industry.” Another objector declares “We have lost our purpose by being so closely engaged in the day-to-day business of the partnership. Structural changes are not in sight. We invest a lot of time – time that’s now not

⁵ Representatives have faced the challenge of coming home already earlier in the process, in 2014, as Vignette 1 highlights. However, we have chosen to outline here data that we collected later in the process, in 2018, as we only then gained access to meetings and got to observe the homecoming challenge first-hand. Whilst before, we had only heard of this challenge from our respondents in their retrospective sense-making efforts, this meeting allowed us to make notes of how the interaction unfolded in real-time.

⁶ “I” here refers to the first author, who conducted extensive fieldwork for the study and presented intermediate results at the described NGO group’s annual meeting in January 2018.

available for campaigns. We legitimise the partnership. What is our original task? First of all, it's campaigning – exposing company scandals like labour rights violations.”

Despite being described by her constituents as having previously been “confrontational for years”, Silvia holds back throughout most of this discussion. She gives the impression of being rather irritated. Later, she reflects that “we [all representatives in the SC] got to know each other much better. That makes the difference [to how the objectors within the NGO group see things]. Or at least that's how I explain it to myself ... I think the industry has perhaps seen us a little differently before. They always see us as the ones who make a fuss.” Silvia makes clear that “that's what we continue to do [make a fuss]. That's what we want to maintain.” She reflects that “if they [the industry] think they can buy me in, then of course I don't think that's great”. Silvia is taken aback “When I think back to it now, I think ‘Man! We were a bit more radical back in the days.’ I have the feeling that we've also become somehow (laughs) tamer.” However, she also concedes that dialogue in the SC has enabled representatives to solve important conflicts and create a stronger partnership.

By a narrow margin, the meeting ends with a decision in favour of the NGO group staying in the partnership for the time being, depending on whether the group's new demands are met for making the roadmaps more transparent.

This vignette yields three key insights. First, it highlights how Silvia could not simply “transport” the new meanings she had co-constructed with other representatives in the SC to her constituents “back home” but rather was immediately confronted with the misalignment of this SC frame with the frame of her constituents. Since these regular NGO group members were not part of SC interactions and had not built up the same frame laminations as their representative, Silvia's compromises in the SC arena were not “inter-subjectively meaningful and understandable” (Goffman, 1974: 127), in particular her agreement to company-specific roadmaps and a “trial year” of not publishing. Unlike Silvia, these members' relational framing had not shifted, hence they still saw themselves as enemies or certainly “not allies of the [textile] industry”. In terms of issue framing, regular NGO members felt that companies submitting weak roadmaps were being treated “too gentle”, whereas Silvia had developed an understanding of some of the genuine challenges faced by companies. In terms of process framing, meanwhile, these members questioned whether the “process [was] still trustworthy” or if it made more sense to leave, whereas Silvia had come to feel, along with her counterparts in the SC arena, a commitment to the partnership's survival.

Second, this vignette highlights how Silvia engaged in renewed relational, issue and process framing through the vociferous efforts of her NGO constituents to realign her frame with theirs.

In terms of relational framing, interactions with her own group led Silvia to reflect on how she was now seen by them as “tamed” and “as not making a fuss anymore”, prompting her to question the meaning of “self”. While she saw herself in SC interactions as “someone who talks to everyone” (NGO9-SC), these interactions “back home” reminded Silvia that she had been more radical before and made her determined to “make more of a fuss” again. Similarly, interactions in this arena added and induced her to attach new meanings to how she saw the issue at stake. While she had previously accepted Wilhelm’s explanations for why roadmaps were lacking in ambition (see Vignette 2), renewed interactions with her own group made her question whether the industry was “trying to buy her in”. In terms of process framing, Silvia was reminded of the importance of continuing to confront rather than act “as allies of the industry”.

Third, this vignette highlights how Silvia was influenced by her exposure to different frame laminations through different interaction arenas. By Silvia’s own account – as she ‘explains to herself’ in this vignette – what “makes the difference” between her present and previous attitudes towards the industry is that, unlike her constituents, she has gotten to know industry representatives in the SC. Being able to view an issue from the perspective of a broader repertoire of framings can help negotiators navigate multiple interaction arenas. However, on returning to the SC negotiations Silvia ultimately decided against overstepping her group’s red lines too far by not “waving through” unambitious roadmaps. Instead, following the meeting with her own group she demanded greater transparency for roadmaps even though this risked breaking the shared frame negotiated in the SC.

As highlighted in this vignette and Vignette 1 (and as shown in Figure 4), moving *across* interaction arenas risks breaking the shared frame established *within* an interaction arena. In Phases I and II this ‘frame stretching’ led to frame break, first in the industry group and then in

the NGO group, risking the near-collapse of the partnership. Indeed, our data reveal the partnership was close to failure on multiple occasions, as evidenced by the number of individual companies who refused to overstep their red lines along the way and eventually left the partnership (see ‘exits’ in Figure 2). While frame misalignment continued to emerge in each topic-framing cycle, however, over time the SC representatives improved their skills in navigating frame alignment across interaction arenas.

 Insert Figure 4 about here

Navigating Frame Alignment Across Multiple Interaction Arenas on the Edge of Failure

Exposure to the risk of frame break during “homecoming” moments also alerted SC representatives to the fact that it was not enough only to achieve compromise among themselves but that they also needed to ‘recruit’ their constituents to the frames negotiated in the SC arena. As the moderator of the Textiles Partnership observed of both group representatives’ experiences: “Silvia and Thorsten got hit on the head by their own troop, because for those who were not involved in the process the concessions that one side or the other made were partly too far-reaching” (GOV8-SC). In short, as one industry representative concluded, the representatives learnt that “you need to be able to take your own people with you” (IND19-SC). Moreover, they also grew conscious of the ever-present risk of “the other side’s” constituents breaking away:

At several points in time there was a great danger that the demands were not ambitious enough and that the NGOs would say ‘Now we’re leaving!’ or that the commitments would become too concrete and then companies would leave by the score. It was always a tough struggle [on both sides], but we were determined to make this work. (IND10-SC)

We identified three key processes of cross-arena framing by which stakeholder representatives navigated frame alignment across interaction arenas and managed to steer their groups beyond their respective red lines from Phase III onwards. The common basis for all these processes was the realisation of the SC representatives that their constituents were not passive

“frame takers” willing to adopt whatever shared frame was achieved within the SC but active “frame makers” who needed to be included in frame alignment processes. For this reason, each of the cross-arena framing processes of ‘stretching’ we describe below – reciprocal, integrative and bilateral – created an interlocking of frame laminations across interaction arenas (see Table 2 for illustrative examples). The frame shared by SC representatives was thus no longer tied to a single interaction arena but stretched across arenas (see Figure 5). Although this did not eliminate frame misalignment altogether, it helped avoid frame break and collaboration failure.

 Insert Figure 5 and Table 2 about here

Reciprocal frame stretching. The first cross-arena framing process we observed was that of stretching the frame within the SC arena as representatives recognised the need to ease each other’s “homecoming” by helping each other recruit their constituents to the shared frame they had co-constructed in the SC. In this process, representatives made reciprocal concessions that expanded the frame they shared in ways that encompassed the concerns of the constituents in their counterparts’ arenas. Such reciprocal frame stretching was enabled by laminations of previous relational, issue and process framing that had emerged through recurrent interactions.

First, reciprocal frame stretching was enabled by cumulative laminations of relational framing through which the parties had previously reconstructed their attributional orientation so that they now saw each other as trustworthy partners. These laminations increased parties’ confidence that they could rely on the reciprocal support of their counterparts to make equal concessions and defend compromises vis-à-vis constituents. When negotiating the thorny question of roadmap transparency, for example, industry representative Thorsten described how he was able to negotiate reciprocal concessions with NGO representative Silvia by building on

their existing personal relationship, meaning he was able to “rely on her” to reciprocate and uphold a mutually agreed compromise that crossed his group’s red lines:

In these personal four-eye meetings with [Silvia], whom I now also address on a first-name basis, that’s just something personal. We like each other ... And there you can make agreements and say ‘Listen! Let’s do it this way.’. And then you have to be able to rely on the other person to do exactly the same and defend it in your own group. And that’s what made it successful, that you could say to each other ‘Listen! There and there, that’s our concession.’ So I’m ready in the negotiation to go beyond my current hard point. ‘I offer you now, in private: I would still go along with [that]. But beyond that there’s no way.’ (IND38-SC)

Second, reciprocal frame stretching built on previous laminations of issue framing and intersubjective understanding among representatives. In topic-framing cycle 4 on roadmap transparency, both sides recognised that while transparency was “a stomach and soul issue” (IND25-SC) for the NGO group it was also a “topic of resistance” (NGO8-SC) for the industry group. Silvia thus agreed to “pursue the topic not too strongly”. In turn, the industry representatives agreed to make it clear to their group that a compromise had to be reached.

Third, by building on laminations of process framing that had fostered the interactants’ ability and willingness to compromise, representatives now recognised that reciprocal concessions were crucial for representatives from both sides to present the other side’s concession as a “win” back home. Having understood they would need to take risks to progress the partnership, group representatives eventually crossed their own groups’ red lines to facilitate each other’s homecoming. By accepting a concession from the other side, moreover, “a personal liability arises” (IND24-SC), and this compelled SC members to defend these compromises when coming home to their constituents: “Then we must stand by it and say ‘It just doesn’t help, we couldn’t get our way’.” (IND25-SC).

Integrative frame stretching. The second cross-arena framing process we observed is what we term “integrative frame stretching” whereby the SC frame was stretched to the interaction arena of constituents. In integrative frame stretching, interaction arenas became interconnected as regular members were integrated in the negotiation process through the creation of multiple

intermediate interaction arenas that included constituents from different stakeholder groups. Specifically, from Phase III onwards the partnership's organising committee initiated several expert working groups in which regular partnership members could participate. These working groups were each tasked with negotiating agreement around a particularly contentious topic such as the debate around a living wage and the contentious review process for making roadmaps more transparent and accountable. These groups were structured in a way that primed participants towards relational, issue and process framing.

First, in terms of relational framing, allowing only experts with a deeper understanding of the topic to join meetings helped overcome previous obstacles to progress because these interactants could now relate to one another as legitimate experts. Previously, industry group members had often accused NGOs of "laziness" or "simple incompetence", with one respondent from the industry group complaining, for instance, that "NGOs really do not know what they are talking about most of the time" (IND18). As had happened in the case of within-arena framing, however, the shift in attributional orientation associated with the establishment of expert groups changed the framing contest from being person-related to being content-related, which thus now applied also across interaction arenas.

Second, the creation of expert working groups further facilitated alignment on issue framing amongst participants because issue-based expertise was made a prerequisite for participation. Whereas seats in working groups had initially been allocated randomly, it quickly became clear that relevant expertise was necessary to focus discussions on problem-solving activities:

We made great progress by moving away from open working groups where everyone was able to hop in and out and you basically had to start all over again. So we set up this idea of expert groups and you had to prove beforehand why you thought you had expert knowledge in this field. So that was very effective. So not just anyone with idealistic ideas from the civil society could sit there but ideally someone who also deals with the core issue in their NGO work, right? So that led to the fact that, for example, [NGO X] was kicked out because they didn't have the expertise for fibre compositions and technology processes and all that. And the space was freed up for someone who used to be with [NGO Y] and is now with a standard-setting organisation and could bring in a completely different expertise from that point of view. (IND37)

Third, in terms of process framing the more focused and technical orientation of expert working groups framed interactions as processes of pragmatic problem-solving. Working in smaller groups focused the interactants on identifying achievable steps that eventually helped them move across their red lines:

Cooperation happens in the expert group ... When you've identified certain common lines in one area [laughs], you dare to approach the companies. And in the expert groups this may work more easily because, let's say, people think more constructively about these issues. (NGO12-SC)

Moreover, expert groups not only facilitated the participation of regular members in the partnership but enabled them to integrate experts from their own organisations to stretch frames even further across several interaction arenas. This was crucial to build up laminations of process framing beyond the steering committee and stakeholder group to include the organisational arena. One respondent who had experienced difficulties in aligning working group proposals with their own organisation explained that "we send experts from our company to these committees now" to ensure that agreements can no longer be rejected based on non-feasibility:

In the beginning I was in all the working groups ... I came home with something that I thought was totally purposeful and made sense ... but the responsible departments that had to implement it later said 'No, we can't or don't want to do it'. And then we said 'OK, then it would be more effective if staff from the departments that are supposed to implement it later took part in the discussions in the working groups.' For example, in the chemicals group these were our chemists or in the fibre working groups our quality managers ... Because the work is in vain if decisions from the working group cannot be implemented in the organisation afterwards, i.e., if you must go back to the working group to say 'What we've discussed here cannot be implemented by my organisation'. (IND37)

Expert working groups as intermediate interaction arenas had a dual effect. Not only did they facilitate agreement among participants on specific topics but also made it much more difficult for both the SC members and stakeholder groups to reject solutions that had been negotiated, since unless critics had the requisite expertise to participate in working groups, their objections could easily be discounted. Through these groups the SC frame was thus stretched towards the solutions negotiated in intermediate interaction arenas.

Bilateral frame stretching. The third cross-arena framing process we observed was “bilateral frame stretching”. Here, the frame of regular members was stretched to the extent that it overlapped with the frame shared within the SC. Again, this involved integrating regular stakeholder group members as active “frame makers” by connecting interaction arenas through what our respondents referred to as “scanning”. Such scanning involved “beyond the table” negotiations in which representatives reached out to their own constituents but also “sound[ed] out the other side” (IND38-SC).

First, in terms of relational framing, scanning was undertaken by SC members and aimed at making regular members of their own and counterparts’ group re-evaluate themselves and identify as front-runners. For example, one company that was known to be more progressive recalled being repeatedly approached by NGO representative Silvia in her efforts to recruit them:

Of course, the [NGOs] tried to convince me, and others perhaps also. There were informal conversations on the side, and Silvia said ‘Look, you could go further, why are you holding back? Can’t you do more?’. And then she sprinkled a bit of sugar and was quite nice and acted a bit friendly and suggested ‘Come on, step a bit more on the gas’. And then I always thought ‘Yes, man, actually you need to step on the gas a bit more’ ... so you start thinking again, you take on a different perspective, you think about it again. (IND34)

These interactions with Silvia thus made the manager reconsider his identity and his company’s purpose and position within the industry group. Ultimately, bilateral scanning leveraged divisions between sustainability ‘leaders’ and ‘laggards’ within the industry group. These divisions had been overcome in Phase I when the industry’s opposition had served as a unifying force in rejecting Action Plan 1.0. Cross-arena scanning from Phase III onwards thus aimed at breaking up groups and recruiting individual members as allies to cross their red lines.

Second, in terms of issue framing, bilateral frame stretching was aimed at working out where meaning was already aligned (“we work in a similar way” (IND36)) and identifying misalignments (“how can we dissuade them?” (IND36)). Through informal bilateral conversations, interactants developed an understanding of possible compromise lines: “There

have been telephone calls ... to talk bilaterally to question topics again: ‘Why is the red line here, where would a possible consensus be?’” (IND36). Aligning positions across interaction arenas in advance was crucial to support negotiations in the SC: “We try to work out a line of compromise in meetings with our key members before an SC meeting but also in the follow-up.” (IND22-SC). Again this was achieved by breaking up groups:

If you address things in advance in smaller groups, if you already make phone calls before the meetings, partly to talk to people individually before the meetings, to carry offers from one side to the other and say that if the others would suggest ‘We make the roadmap look like this’ then what would you say to that? Would that be a no-go for you? Where is the red line for you?’ As a rule, before we went into the big meetings, you could say I tried to negotiate everything beforehand. (GOV8-SC)

By going back and forth between interaction arenas, representatives could “check the temperature” in their own stakeholder group:

Everyone tries to scan their own group or the different fractions in their group. And if you have someone on each side who can judge their own people well enough or knows ‘Well, I won’t get away with that – whatever I do they’ll tear my head off!’, then you have to discuss something like that again in a small circle and try to bring about a solution. (IND38-SC)

Scanning members helped representatives avoid clashes and escalations of conflict that would have broken out if they took decisions that went too far beyond the group’s red lines.

Third, bilateral frame stretching through cross-table scanning shifted the interactants’ process framing towards identifying allies among the constituents both of their own groups and of the other parties. Bilateral talks helped representatives break up groups to identify those who were willing to overstep their group’s red lines and could help persuade their peers:

One then got allies and said: ‘Hey, we work in a similar way, let’s see how we can get this to work? How can we dissuade the others from their refusal attitude or red line? How can we work on moving forward?’ (IND36)

Through various “beyond-the-table” interactions, representatives thus sought to sound out how far their own constituents were prepared to compromise on the issues at stake and thus how far their initial group frames could be stretched. Such cross-table scanning proved vital for averting renewed framing contests and the risk of frame break by easing the homecoming. Breaking up groups into potential allies and collaborators versus objectors also led the frames

shared within arenas to become more “elastic”. While this led to more progress, it also ran the risk of more confrontational members deciding to leave (as occurred in Phases II, IV, and VI).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Whereas a strategic frame alignment perspective focuses on how the content of frames is negotiated by incorporating elements of different frames or transforming frames, we adopt an interactional perspective which understands frame alignment as the outcome of interactions. In doing so, we raise and address several critical but unexplored questions regarding how interactional frames can be extended beyond the local interactional contexts from which they emerge. We highlight how multiple interaction arenas influence the process of frame alignment and explain why and when misalignment occurs. Focusing on the people who “do” the framing helps to understand how the challenge of framing across multiple interaction arenas can be navigated. We identify three cross-arena framing processes that are crucial for interactants to access frame laminations of relational, issue and process framing of different interaction arenas that can help them interlock misaligned interactional frames and avoid frame break and failure. We find that collaborating on the edge of failure through such processes, while not eliminating misalignment, can propel negotiations forward between groups with competing interests as the threat of collapse makes interactants realise they must transcend their frame boundaries to keep inter-organisational collaboration alive. We derive a theoretical process model that unveils the dynamics of interactional frame alignment across multiple interaction arenas.

A Process Model of Navigating Frame Alignment Across Multiple Interaction Arenas

In Figure 6 we depict the theoretical process model we abstracted from our case, schematising the process of frame alignment across multiple interaction arenas. Our model responds to our research question in two parts.

Insert Figure 6 about here

The left part of our model addresses the first part of our research question: “*How do multiple interaction arenas affect frame alignment?*” Illustrating the two interaction arenas and processes of frame alignment, Figure 6 depicts how frame laminations gradually lead to the emergence of a shared frame *within* an interaction arena. However, these laminations are not available across interaction arenas, leading to misalignment *between* arenas and potential frame break. Our model highlights that frame alignment is not only about constructing shared meaning of the issue at stake but that interactants also engage in assigning new meanings to their relationships and ongoing interactions (Dewulf et al., 2009), with each new meaning laminated on the other.

Through *relational framing*, “parties interactively construct the meaning of self, other and relationships” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 166). As our in-depth process study discloses, the industry and NGO representatives in our case reframed how they saw each other and their relationships with counterparts through “beyond-the-table” interactions. Such “backstage” settings (Goffman, 1978) can be crucial for interactants to re-evaluate and connect with one another (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Shifting from an antagonistic “us versus them” relationship towards a collective identity (Gamson, 1992) is also likely to lead to a shift in “attributional orientation” away from mutual accusations of blame or attributions of responsibility to certain causes or actors (Snow & Benford, 1988: 474). When blame is no longer attributed to the other side, the nature of the framing contest can move from being person-related to being content-related.

Such relational framing laminates onto *issue framing*, i.e., “how parties interactively construct the meaning of issues” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 166). Shifting relational framing away from blame towards identifying what the actual problem is (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Rochford, 1983) increases the willingness of parties to see the problem from the other’s perspective. Through this “extension of interpretive scope” (Benford & Snow, 2000), interactants

can move from a subjective to an intersubjective understanding of the issue at stake (Goffman, 1974). In our case the interactants' relational framing of each other as trustworthy interlocutors prevented the NGO and industry representatives from attributing insufficient progress on core issues to each other's lack of willingness. Instead, they were now more open to jointly exploring the reasons for insufficient progress.

Issue framing and the shift from subjective to intersubjective understanding further laminates on *process framing*, i.e., the way interactants construct "the meaning of the ongoing interaction process between them" (Dewulf et al., 2009: 166). By framing their interaction as collaborative, the participants in our case became more willing to compromise and move forward with each other rather than solely pursuing their own goals (Donohue & Roberto, 1993). Frame alignment is thus "constituted of an innumerable number of elements, amalgamated during the ongoing process of interaction" (Gonos, 1977: 860), including cumulative laminations of relational, issue and process framing. As such, frame alignment can be compared to a process of sedimentation whereby shared frames emerge from an accumulation of laminations.

Ultimately, however, frame alignment always remains inherently fragile. This is because relational, issue and process laminations are not readily accessible across different interaction arenas, meaning frames cannot simply be "transported" and that efforts by interactants to introduce frames into another interaction arena may lead to "slippage and misfirings" (Gray et al., 2015: 119). Failing to take account of the need for frames to be aligned across interaction networks can thus renew framing contests and jeopardise frame alignment.

This brings us to the second part of our research question: "*how can frame alignment be navigated across multiple interaction arenas?*" We derive three interrelated cross-arena framing processes that connect multiple interaction arenas to create interlocking frame alignment. These

are depicted in the right-hand side of our process model (Figure 6), which provides a zoomed-in view of how interactants navigate *across* multiple interaction arenas.

Through the process of “reciprocal frame stretching”, interactants stretch their shared interactional frame within an interaction arena. In our case, after experiencing frame break in Phases I and II the representatives began to discursively integrate not only their own constituents but also the constituents of their counterparts in the negotiation process from Phase III onwards. By offering each other reciprocal concessions, the representatives “mutually facilitated” (Sebenius, 2013) each other’s crossing of red lines. This proved crucial for helping each other avoid frame break in their respective “homecomings” by enabling the representatives to present concessions made by their counterparts as a “win” to their constituents.

Our model highlights how a shared frame created in one interaction context can be stretched to overlap with another frame through both integrative and bilateral frame stretching. In our case, the frame shared in the SC was stretched through the integration of regular members into the negotiation process. By participating in expert working groups, these constituents then came to be recognised as active “frame makers” who now also “did” the framing. The representatives also scanned their own and their counterparts’ groups for potential compromise lines, stretching their constituents’ frames to enable overlap with the SC frame. Through scanning, representatives tried to identify where frames already overlapped and where meanings still needed to be matched. Matching meanings (Kellogg, 2014) and explicating a shared frame to include interactants from other interaction arenas is crucial for enabling meanings to be amplified beyond the interaction context from which they emerge (Gray et al., 2015; Snow, 2013; Snow, Vliegthart, & Ketelaars, 2019).

Through “reciprocal”, “integrative” and “bilateral” frame stretching, interactional frames become more “elastic”. In our case, such stretching means that interactants no longer needed to move away from their initial frames entirely when engaging in a new interaction context. Instead, interactional frames became “interwoven and embedded within one another” (Diehl & McFarland, 2010: 1716) across multiple interaction arenas. Although frame stretching ran the risk of frame break and the collapse of collaborative partnership, this process was necessary to push negotiating parties forward towards agreement on the highest common denominator. Indeed, when negotiating parties collectively realised that they were collaborating “on the edge of failure” this recognition of risk helped them move away from rejecting compromises towards agreeing on ambitious commitments in order to maintain the collaboration.

Theoretical implications for framing theory. Our model contributes to framing theory by highlighting the *iterative* nature of interlocked framing processes across multiple interaction arenas. This contribution highlights an underexplored consequence of conceptualising frames as interactional co-constructions rather than “free-floating packages of meaning” (Reinecke & Ansari, 2021: 381). While framing scholarship has increasingly focused on the micro-processes of framing and the negotiation of meaning through ongoing interaction (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Dewulf et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2015; Klein & Amis, 2021; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021), studies in this stream have thus far favoured theoretical explanations of how frames solidify as agreement emerges (Helms et al., 2012), how frames become dominant (Klein & Amis, 2021), escalate (Cornelissen et al., 2014; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021), and eventually become institutionalised (Gray et al., 2015). However, a closer look at multi-arena framing dynamics reveals that frame alignment is an *ongoing process* in which frames are challenged, rejected or revised as they are extended into a new interaction context. Our model shows that while frames

cannot *move* beyond the interactions in which they emerge, they can be *stretched* and made more “elastic” to incorporate a broader repertoire of laminated meanings (Gray et al., 2015).

In conceptualising frame alignment as an ongoing endeavour, we emphasise the agency of audiences in ways that go beyond the notion of frame “resonance” (Giorgi, 2017; Snow et al., 1986), showing that frames do not simply resonate with a targeted audience (Snow & Benford, 1988) on account of their inherent properties or fit but gain resonance through interactional dynamics in social situations. Our findings in this respect both align with and extend Dewulf et al.’s (2009) suggestion that it is not only issues that get framed but also identities, relationships, and the interaction process itself, revealing how resultant frames are laminated upon one another and shape framing trajectories. Specifically, our model shows that interactants do not passively adopt or “synchronise” frames (Cornelissen et al., 2014; Zilber, 2002) but are themselves “frame makers”. This leads to constantly evolving laminations of interactional frame alignment. Our processual account calls for and facilitates a shift away from outcome-oriented studies of framing towards research aimed at understanding the emergent, processual, and recursive character of interactional frame alignment.

Our notion of multi-arena framing dynamics also has important implications for understanding framing as a source of meaning at the field level (Ansari et al., 2013). In particular, by unveiling the iterative and interlocked process of framing across interaction arenas, we respond to recent calls to examine framing as a way to “provide a fully dynamic, layered account of meaning making in fields” (Leibel et al., 2018: 165). Studies of framing contests to date have focused on such contests between specific groups, such as social movements versus corporations (Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015). However, conceptualising fields as constituted by a myriad of overlapping interaction arenas entails a shift in focus onto iterative and ongoing frame

alignment processes *across* arenas. Whereas prior studies have focused on the construction of “field settlements” as a precursor to the institutionalisation of more widely shared meaning systems such as new cultural codes (Weber et al., 2008) or organisational forms (Rao & Kenney, 2008), our study shows that fields rarely converge around a fully unified consensus through frame shifts at the field level (Ansari et al., 2013; Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). According to our model, frame alignment rarely results in the definitive resolution of issues between rival groups but instead is a work-in-progress that requires ongoing and back-and-forth alignment between *and* across arenas. This answers to Cornelissen and Werner’s (2014) call for researchers to move beyond the dichotomy of cooperation versus competition in framing struggles by emphasising the complexity of iterative multi-arena framing in which collaborative and competitive framing processes co-exist.

Our study also has implications for understanding the process of frame dissemination. Specifically, we add nuance to conceptualisations of “frame amplification”, i.e., “the process by which frames generated in microlevel interactions move to the meso and macro levels” (Gray et al., 2015: 120). Such amplification, as theorised by Gray et al. (2015: 120), relies on the diffusion of frames via the “transfer of meaning through broadening or overlapping networks of interactants”. However, we find that efforts at such transferral can result in conflict if others in overlapping networks contest the frame. Our findings thus highlight the importance of focusing on the iterative dynamics of framing, since framing processes in overlapping networks can be mutually reinforcing or undermining, serving either to accelerate frame amplification or to destabilise shared frames. Our research provides the basis for a much more dynamic and multi-pronged approach to the study of framing processes that can help explain how and why

interactional frames are successfully amplified in some cases but merely “fizzle out” in others. Iterative framing contests can thus shape field dynamics in unexpected ways.

We further add to framing theory by drawing attention to the undertheorized relational dynamics that are crucial for constructing shared frames. Our study thereby answers to calls from framing scholars to seek insights into the relational dynamics between those who “do” the framing (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021). By studying frame alignment processes across interaction arenas, we highlight the consequences of frames being relationally-bound to interactants in specific interaction arenas (Lewicki et al., 2003). In contrast to how frames have been conceptualised in the social movement literature, i.e., as cognitive constructs that are upheld through words (Snow et al., 1986) and which can be emotionally charged through e.g., photographs (Klein & Amis, 2021), our case demonstrates that frames are grounded in relationships between those interacting. This explains why a new frame that emerges from relational framing in one arena may be prone to break in another arena due to the lack of relational frame laminations in the latter. This insight encourages scholars to not only study the properties and content of frames but also the relationships in which frames are grounded.

Building on these insights, future research could zoom in even more closely on the emotional and identity challenges faced by the individuals tasked with the complex role of navigating between different interaction arenas. Such challenges to social identity are inevitable when navigating multiple interaction arenas, we argue, since “parties work out definitions of their identities and relationships by negotiating them in social interaction” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 171), which explains why interactants can have “multiple, fragmented, processual and situational, rather than coherent, fixed and stable” identities (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001: 63). Scholars could thus study how representatives overcome the difficulties they face when they

experience a shift of frame at a personal level yet still feel compelled in their roles as appointed representatives to stay “true” to their initial group’s frame. How do such individuals cope with possible identity conflicts when interacting across multiple interaction arenas over time? If it is accepted that not only frames can be emotionally charged but also interactions themselves (Collins, 2004; Reinecke & Ansari, 2021), then another important question for future research concerns the emotional dynamics between those who co-construct a frame.

Theoretical implications for inter-organisational collaboration and MSPs. Our study also contributes to the literature on MSPs and inter-organisational collaboration more generally. Previous research has focused on the substantive question of why multi-party collaboration succeeds or fails (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Barnett & King, 2008; Zuzul, 2019). Such research has repeatedly shown how collaboration often only induces symbolic commitment (Wijen, 2014). However, our case presents a rare example of multi-party collaboration that progressed despite coming close to collapse in its early stages. In the Textiles Partnership, corporate participants eventually agreed to ambitious commitments with timelines and goals for sustainable sourcing they had initially rejected as unfeasible for them to implement. In contrast to studies that have largely focused on the role of societal and political pressures as key drivers for companies to make concessions to societal demands and engage in MSPs (Bartley & Child, 2014), our study suggests that such external pressures alone are not sufficient to sustain commitment. In our case, public pressure in the wake of the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster had largely subsided by the time the initially rejected commitments were re-introduced. By highlighting an especially challenging but under-explored complication in negotiating agreement in multi-party settings, i.e., the “two-table problem” (Colosi, 1983; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Sebenius, 2013), our analysis foregrounds what happens inside collaborative processes as we unpack the two-table

problem and identify the processes whereby different negotiation tables can be navigated. A key insight of our study is that successful collaboration is likely to happen “on the edge of failure” because representatives must push each other to cross their respective group’s red lines to reach the highest rather than the lowest common denominator as a basis for substantial collaboration. And while this propels collaboration forward and deepens commitments, it also risks conflict and failure, as evidenced by several “exit waves” of companies who refused to undertake the more ambitious commitments their representatives had negotiated on their behalf.

Our close investigation into the “two-table problem” reveals how the complexities of collaborative relationships have been concealed by the tendency of research on settlements between stakeholder groups to treat these groups as if they were homogenous actors (Bartley, 2007; Helms et al., 2012). To understand processes of conflict and settlement in collaboration, we argue, researchers need to “drop down” to a lower level of analysis that not only considers the relationships between stakeholders at one level but further examines these dynamics as they play out between representatives and their constituent groups. While we agree that successful collaboration “depends upon clear communication between representatives and their organizations” (Margerum, 2008: 495-496), our in-depth study unpacks the cross-arena framing processes through which negotiators continuously realign locally negotiated frames *across* negotiation tables. In exploring the role of multi-arena framing dynamics among participants with divergent goals and interests, our study sheds light on important but hitherto under-studied aspects of multi-party negotiations and other inter-organisational forms of collaboration.

Our analysis of the “two-table problem” also highlights the need for conceptualising collaboration as a *dynamic* multilevel system (Bryson et al., 2015). This contrasts with scholarship that has tended to focus on the creation of MSPs as an outcome in itself (Helms et

al., 2012; Koschmann et al., 2012). Addressing the paucity of empirical research on the iterative processes whereby frames are renewed and realigned over time and across negotiation tables, our six-year study of the Textiles Partnership unpacks the “nonlinear and emergent nature of collaboration”, showing how “collaboration evolves as parties interact over time” (Thomson & Perry, 2006: 22). Specifically, our account of interconnected topic-framing cycles evidences and elucidates the dynamic nature of “interaction goals” (Wilson & Putnam, 1990) and the ways in which parties continuously redefine issues as they navigate multiple negotiation tables. This demonstrates that MSPs are never ‘complete’ just because initial goals have been agreed upon but instead require an ongoing “balancing act” to keep parties aligned. As such, our process model points to the importance of ongoing and within-MSP negotiations that can renew and even increase commitments *after* the initial establishment of collaboration.

Finally, our process model has implications for the governance of voluntary collaboration more broadly, contributing both to the wider scholarship on inter-organisational collaboration (Hardy et al., 2005; Human & Provan, 2000; Ring & van de Ven, 1994; Zuzul, 2019) and to voluntary governance arrangements (Barnett & King, 2008; Levy & Prakash, 2003; Ostrom, 1990; Prakash & Potoski, 2007). With our model we provide insights into how commitment to collective goals can be negotiated and sustained amongst a large number of autonomous organisations. Although frame alignment is likely more difficult among groups with competing interests, maintaining commitment to joint goals has been shown to be difficult even in shared interest coalitions such as multi-firm networks, including industry coalitions, membership associations, and other inter-organisational relations (Barnett & King, 2008; Human & Provan, 2000). In all these constellations, representatives from different groups negotiate on behalf of their groups with external parties and are therefore likely to encounter the two-table problem.

Such negotiations can rapidly unravel if negotiated frames are subsequently revoked by participants. Unlike situations such as trade union bargaining in which representatives have clear mandates, representatives in partnerships are typically only loosely mandated by their constituents to negotiate on their behalf. This inevitably places them in a precarious position, since they can lose their legitimacy, risking the collapse of the collaboration. Future research could focus on how different degrees of authorisation vested in representatives and different levels of accountability affect the strategies adopted for managing framing across multiple interaction arenas and associated outcomes (Jackson & King, 1983).

Boundary Conditions

Our study has several important boundary conditions. First, due to the confidential nature of negotiations in the Textiles Partnership we were not able to directly observe interactions during SC meetings. While scholars have proposed that interpretive interviewing is capable of capturing the construction of meaning (Langley & Meziani, 2020), interviews are nevertheless subject to potential hindsight bias. They are also likely to miss out on interactional dynamics observed through ethnographic methods. Future research could thus apply more “close-up” observational methods or conversation analysis to identify additional interactional dynamics that shape cross-arena frame alignment processes.

Second, in this study we have focused only on two main interaction arenas, i.e., partnership and stakeholder group arenas. Future research could expand our insights to the intra-organisational arena wherein framing contests often erupt between departments with different sub-cultures, identities, and routines (Howard-Grenville, 2006; Kaplan, 2008; Kellogg, 2014). Our study has hinted at a third negotiation table in participants’ home organisations, specifically in the context of conflicts between CSR and procurement. CSR managers often function as “internal activists” who need to “sell” CSR issues by framing them internally (Wickert & De

Bakker, 2018). Future research could build on this existing knowledge and usefully focus on how negotiators can build up engagement tactics to help win over “at-home” groups.

The third boundary condition concerns the role of government as a convener in the Textiles Partnership. Even though the role of the government became much less prominent as public attention subsided, it still played an important role in bringing parties to the negotiating table. Although much stricter private agreements have been achieved that were not initiated by any public agency, as in the case of the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015), the role of governments nonetheless remains an important question in collaborative governance (Kourula, Moon, Salles-Djelic, & Wickert, 2019). Future research could usefully compare negotiation dynamics in MSPs with and without government sponsorship, as well as the influence of external influences more broadly, such as media attention, activists’ campaigning, local legislation, and international supervision.

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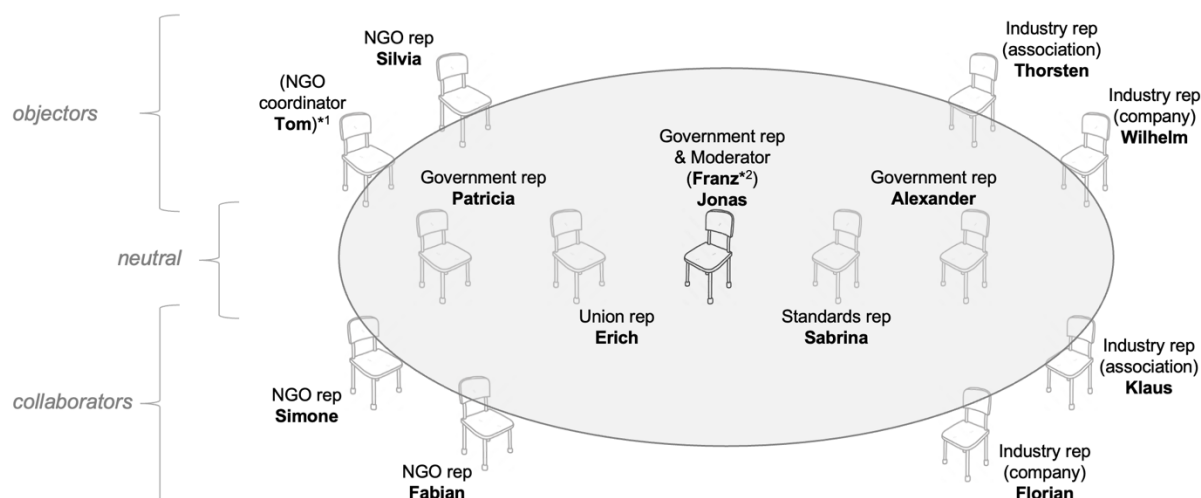
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Figure 1: The Steering Committee Negotiation Table in the Textiles Partnership



*1 Tom had no voting right in the SC, but was able to participate in SC meetings as NGO coordinator.
 *2 Franz was replaced by Jonas after the failed inauguration act in early 2015.

Figure 2: Process Chronology of the Textiles Partnership

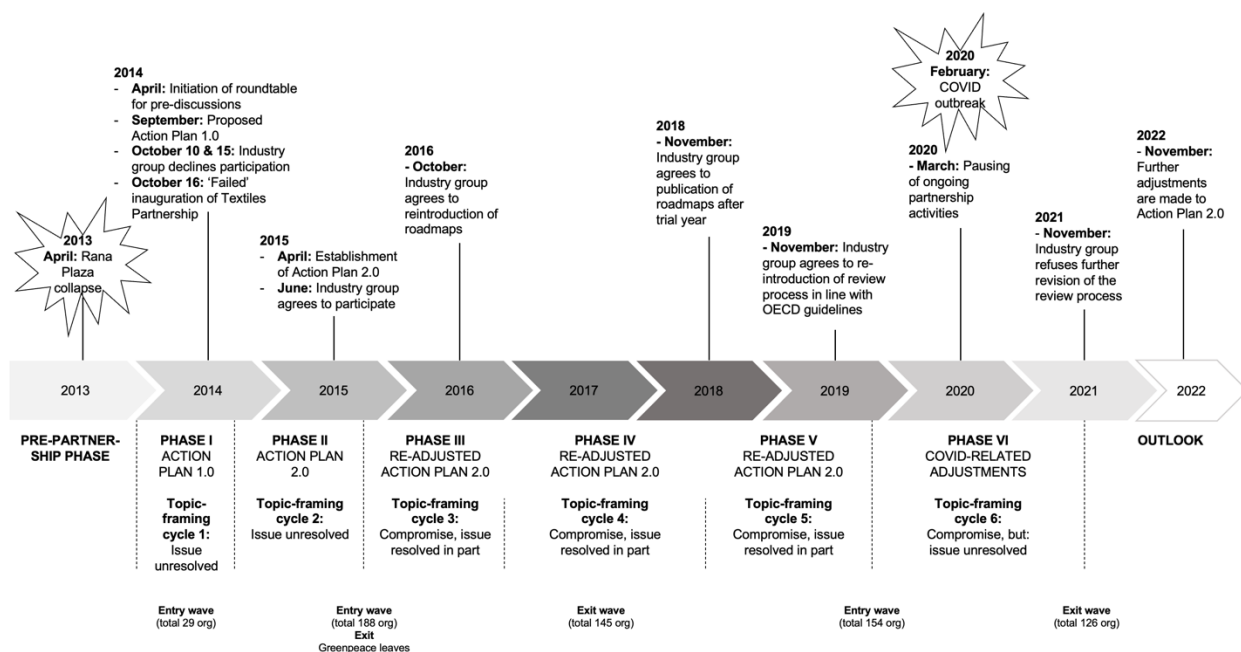


Figure 3: Laminations of Interactional Frame Alignment Within Interaction Arena

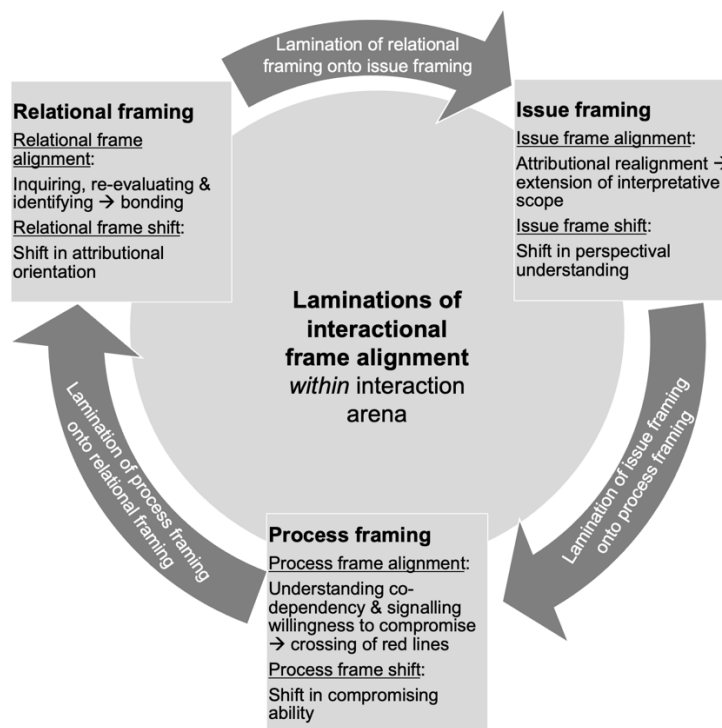


Figure 4: Misalignment of Laminated Frames Across Multiple Interaction Arenas

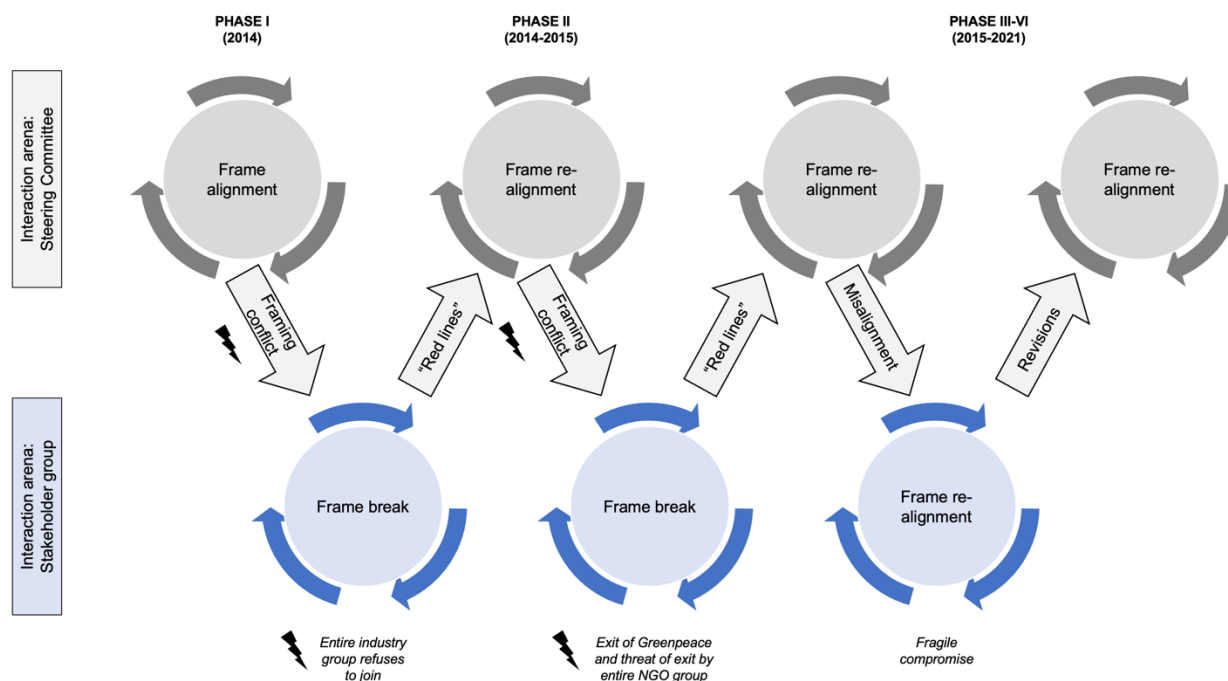


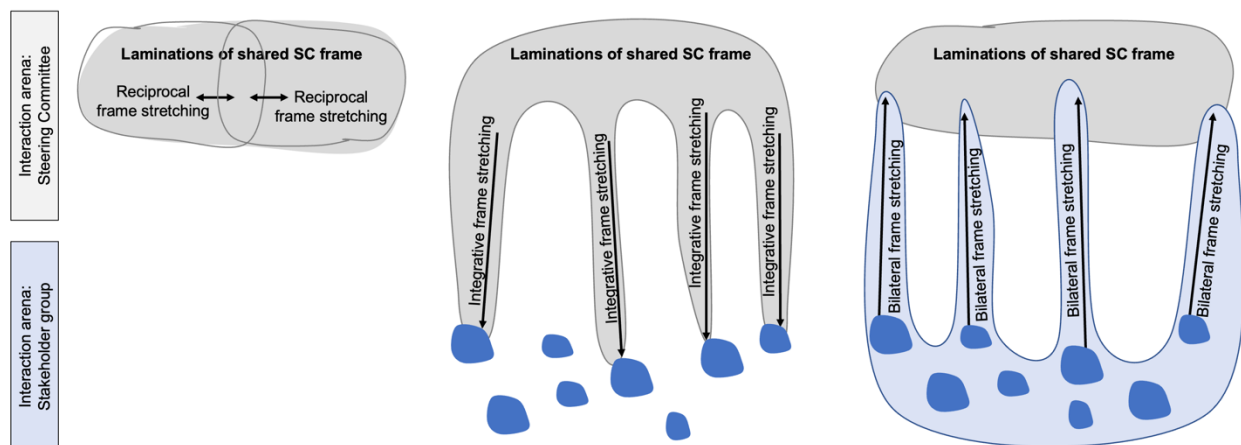
Figure 5: Reciprocal, Integrative and Bilateral Cross-Arena Framing Processes

Figure 6: A Process Model of Interlocking Multiple Interaction Arenas

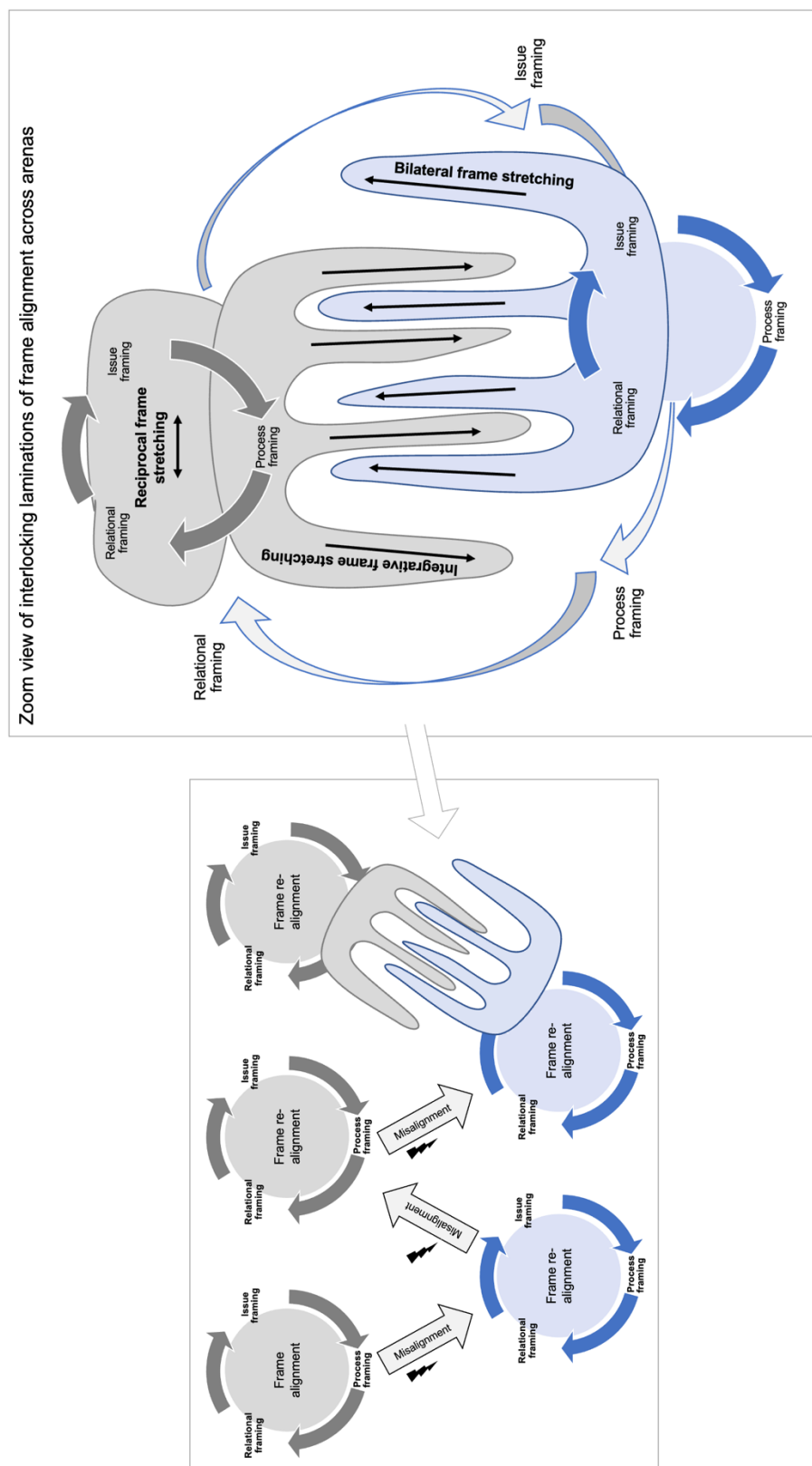


Table 1: Multi-Phase Data Collection Process

COLLECTION PERIOD	2014 (and before)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (and after)	n.n.	Sum
Formal Interviews										
Steering Committee										
Industry reps		0	2	4	5	1	0	6		18
NGO reps		0	2	2	3	4	1	4		16
Standards rep		0	0	1	0	1	0	1		3
Union rep		0	0	1	0	0	1	1		3
Government reps		0	0	2	1	1	2	1		7
Regular members										
Industry members		0	3	9	3	4	0	4		23
NGO members		0	0	3	0	2	0	0		5
Standards members		0	0	2	0	0	0	0		2
Government members		0	1	1	0	0	0	0		2
Non-members										
Media		0	1	1	0	0	0	0		2
Total number		0	9	26	12	13	4	17		81
Total hours		00:00:00	02:37:05	19:49:39	05:06:29	05:22:46	02:38:05	14:52:04		50:26:08
Informal Interviews*										
Total number		0	2	3	4	0	0	2		11
*including members of NGOs, government, academia and industry										
Observations										
Total hours		08:00:00	00:00:00	08:00:00	17:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00		33:00:00

Documents & Archives										
Industry	25	505	280	237	248	230	316	2	110	1953
NGOs	1	3	29	8	43	447	0	7	24	562
Standards	14	0	63	3	0	0	0	0	7	87
Unions	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	7
Government	49	37	125	82	35	38	8	57	80	511
Total number (in pages)	90	546	499	333	326	715	324	66	221	3120

Table 2: Data Table with Empirical Examples of Cross-Arena Framing Processes

	Reciprocal frame stretching through reciprocal concessions	Integrative frame stretching through integrating experts	Bilateral frame stretching through cross-table scanning
Relational framing “how parties interactively construct the meaning of self, other and relationships” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 166)	Relating to each other as trustworthy partners “[Peoples] personalities were very important because ‘the tone makes the music’. A lot depends on trust. I really have to believe my counterpart. I have – to a certain extent – also to trust that what he says about himself will actually happen and can be implemented ... And trust has grown over time.” (GOV3-SC)	Relating to each other as legitimate experts “Partnership members can participate in working groups if they have the necessary expertise.” (IND26-SC) “Respect has to be earned. And basically it has to be earned in working groups where we have gotten to know each other more.” (UNI2-SC)	Relating to each other as progressive frontrunners “Of course, the [NGOs] tried to convince me, and others perhaps also. There were informal conversations on the side, and Silvia said ‘Look, you could go further, why are you holding back? Can’t you do more?’. And then she sprinkled a bit of sugar and was quite nice and acted a bit friendly and suggested ‘Come on, step a bit more on the gas’. And then I always thought ‘Yes, man, actually you need to step on the gas a bit more’ ... so you start thinking again, you take on a different perspective, you think about it again.” (IND34) “[P]ersonal relationships were built up through this work in the Textiles Partnership – relationships that never existed before. By engaging with one another face-to-face, by trying to have a conversation, whether over coffee during the break or something else, by coming into contact with people and also clarifying things with each other over coffee or at a meeting and suddenly realising ‘Well, they have a point after all!’ It was important that our relationships with one another grew.” (IND36)

Issue framing “how parties interactively construct the meaning of issues” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 166)	Creating shared understanding of why issues require concessions “What has ultimately caused this [to collaborate through crossing red lines was] working with each other. An increase in trust also between the different groups of actors and ultimately also the evolving understanding that this partnership can actually achieve things and that we have to make concessions if we don’t want the partnership to fail.” (IND22-SC)	Creating a shared understanding of issues based on expertise “[In expert groups] topics were dealt with much more intensively. We put all information on the table, to surface and talk openly about what obstacles there are [for each group], what reasons there are [that hinder progress] ... It became clear that it wasn’t about just defeating one another per se. Instead, we really started to work on establishing consensus-oriented solutions together, so we said ‘Okay, this is the big picture. This might not be possible yet, but what could we do as a first step?’ And I think this was key to moving from our red lines ... There are still red lines we can’t move away from, but in areas where we started to speak with others, and through speaking with each other, we moved closer together and started to implement concrete actions.” (IND36)	Creating an understanding of lines of compromise on issues “We [steering committee members] check out beforehand ‘Where are the red lines, where do we have consensus, where do we have no consensus?’.” (GOV7-SC)
Process framing “how parties interactively construct the meaning of the ongoing interaction process between them” (Dewulf et al., 2009: 166)	Framing interaction as taking risks together “[We realised] we have to try together, to see how we can possibly bring this topic closer to its goal ... It’s difficult to really calculate [what participating in such an agreement will cost you]. We realised that the risk is actually that you either fail alone or you fail with everyone else (laughs).” (IND15-SC)	Framing interaction as problem-solving activity “Cooperation happens in the expert group ... When you’ve identified certain common lines in one area (laughs), you dare to approach the companies. And in the expert groups this may work more easily because, let’s say, people think more constructively about these issues.” (NGO12-SC) “In these working groups, solutions are prepared based on consensus among working group participants. These	Framing interaction as finding allies in bilateral negotiations “There have also been telephone calls in which people have simply talked on the phone, bilaterally, or three people have spoken on the phone ... to talk rather than in the big group, to question topics again – ‘Why are you on this side, why is the red line here, where would a possible consensus be?’ So then various possibilities arose. This wasn’t organised by the Textiles Partnership’s organising committee, but I think it came out of the group ... we looked at what the fears

		solutions are then submitted to the steering committee. So actually these proposals [for solutions] are adopted twice, so to speak. Once by the members who've worked on them together, and then again by the steering committee where all the stakeholder groups are mirrored and meant to just approve it." (IND26-SC)	were [others had] and where the possibilities were to move forward ... Also then we got allies and said 'Hey, we think alike, let's see how we can get this to work? How can we dissuade the others from their, yes, refusal attitude or red line? How can we work on moving forward on the issues?'. " (IND36)
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Biographical Sketch

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